



May 2022

The North Carolina

Narrative Project Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Anyone involved in politics, civic engagement, and advocacy work in North Carolina over the past decade knows firsthand that our state is ground zero in the battle over the future of our country. The past decade has seen high-profile fights over a wide range of issues, from voting access and gerrymandering to LGBTQ+ rights and public-school funding. Key statewide elections are often decided by a few thousand votes or fewer out of millions cast. While ticket-splitting is becoming a rarity across the country, in 2020, North Carolina voters chose Donald Trump and Thom Tillis at the same time as Roy Cooper and Josh Stein.



Looking forward, Republicans likely cannot win the Presidency or the U.S. Senate without winning here. National and state conservatives are investing millions of dollars each year in North Carolina to build and maintain a network of independent, right-wing organizations and candidates who promote undemocratic policies and hateful rhetoric.

Since its founding, Progress NC Action has worked with progressive organizations, candidates, and elected officials to counter right-wing narratives and present an alternative vision of North Carolina as a true multi-racial democracy – one full of opportunity, that builds broad prosperity, and is free from oppression and violence. This mission includes investing in continuous messaging research that meets our short-term electoral goals, while also working to shift public opinion towards progressive, pro-democracy policies and social solidarity over the long term.

Unfortunately, where voters acquire information – more precisely, information they believe – has also evolved to a place where many conservatives and progressives do not have a shared reality. Thanks to partisan news sources, coupled with recent conservative pushes to ban books and whitewash history, increasingly hostile rhetoric is percolating in the mainstream.

This presents not only a new level of messaging challenges, but also a fundamental threat to democracy and the principles of “one person, one vote” that few of us foresaw just a few years ago. Many candidates for important offices feel free to give voice to dangerous lies, knowing their falsehoods will be repeated and internalized. As a consequence of all this, we are at risk of a majority of residents coming to believe they have no say in how they are governed or holding mixed and sometimes contradictory views of core American values.

To address these challenges, over the past year Progress NC Action made an unprecedented investment in messaging research – a deep dive into the values, aspirations, and fears of North Carolinians that we are using to develop strategy for 2022 and beyond. Utilizing various methods, from ethnographic interviews to focus groups to telephone surveys, we talked to thousands of North Carolina voters and reached every major demographic group and geographic area in the state. Our goal is to support North Carolina’s progressive organizations, political candidates, and leaders in creating an effective framework to engage voters (and potential voters) on a multitude of issues, win debates, and neutralize

right-wing attacks and misinformation. Ultimately, we know that a durable winning coalition in North Carolina will have to cross race and place, and we hope this research is applicable to many different groups, regardless of any organization’s focus or membership makeup.

A few clear themes have emerged as we studied North Carolinians’ personal and public values, attitudes, and priorities:

- First, there is deep tension and frustration in the state as voters claw their way out of a pandemic and into the pit that is rising living costs.
- Secondly, and hopefully, voters fundamentally agree with progressive values ranging from shared prosperity to sense of community to unity. There is also a great deal of pride in North Carolina and a sense that we can do better.
- Unfortunately, there remains a disconnect between voters’ frustrations with the status quo and worries for the future, and the belief that Democrats can deliver the needed solutions.
- There is a strong desire, however, for pragmatic leadership that defuses our current hyper partisanship and divisions without conceding on core values we still share.

This handbook is your messaging roadmap to navigating this challenging terrain.

While we don’t know what the next few years will bring, we are certain that North Carolina is in a stronger position to face these challenges because of our collective efforts as we work to realize our state motto, *Esse quam videri*, a Latin phrase meaning “To be, rather than to seem.”



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ABOUT US

Progress NC Action (PNCA) serves as a center for innovative research, data-driven messaging, and communication strategies for local partners, organizations, and coalitions to ensure that elected officials and public institutions are held accountable, transparent, and responsive to North Carolinians.

Advisory Committee

We are thankful to the following organizations for their invaluable support, advice, and partnership as we undertook this project:

Advance Carolina

America Votes North Carolina

Down Home North Carolina

LEAD NC

New North Carolina Project

New Rural Project

North Carolina AFL-CIO

North Carolina Association of Educators

Poder North Carolina Action

Research Teams

We employed some of the country's top firms to conduct qualitative and quantitative research, including:

Future Majority & Worthy Strategy Group, led by Gretchen Barton. Gretchen's work focuses on the psychological underpinning of behavioral changes and she has led research for major organizations such as the NFL, NextGen, New Moral Majority, and Way to Win.

GBAO Strategies is a strategic consulting and public opinion research firm. Their diverse team of researchers have developed surveys and questionnaires for top-tier federal and state political campaigns and a compendium of progressive organizations and advocacy groups.

Topos Partnership is a research firm with substantial academic expertise in cognitive and social science research focused on shifting how people think about issues and government. They have done projects for a diverse group of non-profit organizations, including the AARP, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Ford Foundation, and many others.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The recommendations of the North Carolina Narrative Project were elucidated from many layers of original research conducted between September 2021 and March 2022, as well as a review of existing research and recommendations laid out by other organizations. These elements of research include:

Qualitative Research

Metaphor Elicitation Study

An online ethnographic study was conducted in September 2021, using metaphor elicitation, as well as a variety of sensory exercises, to give participants the time and the space to share what matters most to them in an unfiltered manner.

Participants: N=30, divided between:

- First-time Voters in 2020
 - Voted for Biden
 - Mix of white people and people of color
 - Mix of ideology, from liberal to lean conservative
- White Suburban Voters
 - Independents willing to vote for Democrats
 - Mix of Biden and Trump voters
- Younger men of color
 - Black/Latino men under 40
 - Voted for Biden
 - Ideology ranging from liberal to moderate

Qualboards

A three-day online message board discussion with Black voters was conducted in September 2021.

- Participants: N=30:
- Under 50 years old
- Mix gender
- Mixed levels of educational attainment
- Even mix of participants from rural, suburban, and urban areas
- Mostly Democrats with a few Independents and Republicans

Online Focus Groups

Four online focus groups were conducted, two among white audiences in September 2021 and two among Latino audiences in October 2021.

Participants: N=5 “New Arrivals” who moved to NC within the last 10 years

- White
- Mixed gender
- College graduates
- 30-50 years old

Participants: N=5 suburban women

- White
- Mixed age
- Independents or 2020 ticket splitters
- Some college and college graduates

Participants: N=6 Latinas

- Mostly Independents
- Mix of college and non-college
- Mixed countries of origin

Participants: N=6 Latinos

- Mostly Independents
- Mix of college and non-college
- Mixed countries of origin

Ethnographic Study

Ethnographic researchers who specialize in identifying how people make sense of their world were employed to go out and talk to people where they live and work in December 2021. Participants were approached on the street in Asheboro, Salisbury, Lexington, and Winston-Salem, with special attention paid to rural inhabitants, those with blue-collar jobs, education at or around the high school level, and incomes well below \$50K a year.

Participants: N=36

- Mix gender
- Mix of ages
- Half white, half people of color
- 75% non-college
- Half of participants had a household income <\$50k
- Mix of partisan affiliation, though skewed Republican

Quantitative Research

Statewide Surveys

An n=1,000 registered voter survey was conducted by telephone in December 2021.

An n=800 likely voter survey with an n=100 oversample of high potential Democratic voters and an n=100 oversample of middle partisans was conducted by telephone and text-to-web in March 2022.

Grow Progress Rapid Message Tests

Rapid Message Tests compare participant reactions to several different messages by utilizing a randomized, controlled experiment.

Two online surveys (n=2,741 and n=2,767) of North Carolina adults were conducted using Grow Progress in February 2022.

Digital and Field Testing

After the qualitative and quantitative research was completed, the NC Narrative Project partnered with the organizations in the Advisory Committee to gain and incorporate live feedback on messaging recommendations based on their use in ongoing field programs. Recommendations were further refined via digital image testing on Grow Progress.

Other Sources

Progress NC Action is grateful for additional critical research conducted by other organizations and progressive allies. A few that were instrumental in influencing the recommendations for this Handbook include:

The Winning Jobs Narrative

Race Class Narrative

Midterm Message Project

A Note

The North Carolina Narrative is a living document that will continue to be fine-tuned even after publication. Our messaging recommendations are only as useful as they can be applied in the field. To visit a more dynamic version of this handbook, please visit:

<https://progressncaction.org/narrative-project/>

NORTH CAROLINIANS – IN THEIR OWN WORDS

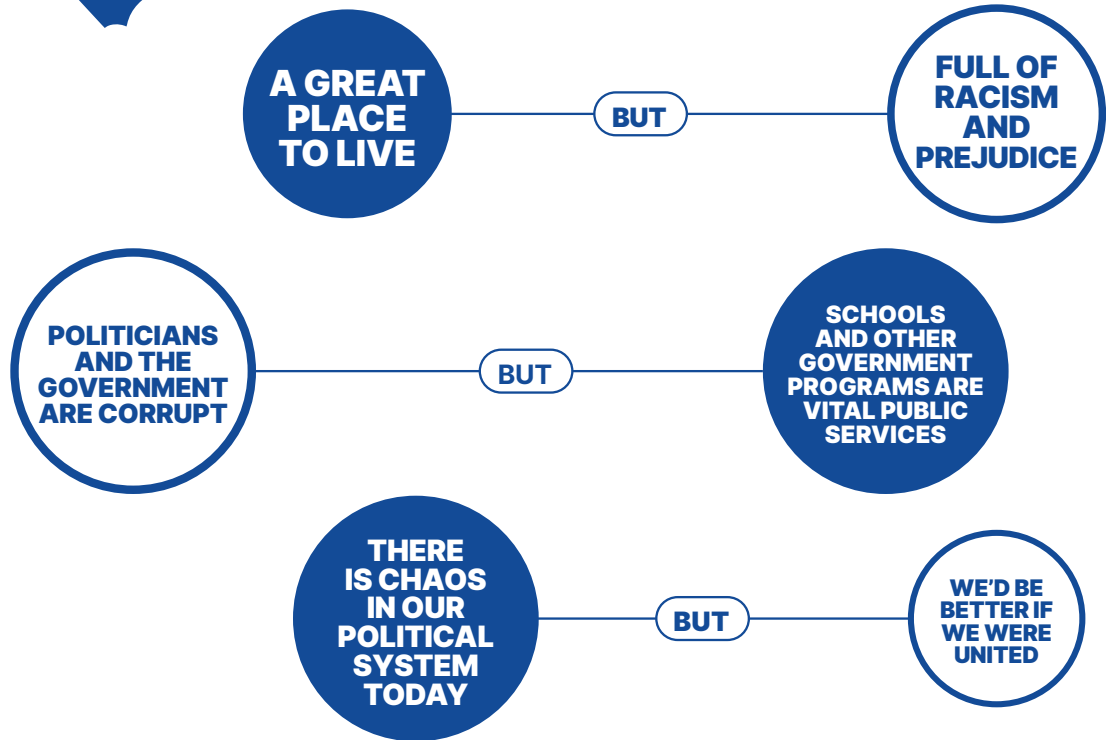
In this section, we summarize our research by trying to answer the question, “Who are North Carolinians?” Taking from both qualitative and quantitative research, we piece together the values, attitudes, and fears that are shared by the people of North Carolina. This section is NOT messaging guidance, but rather, a starting point from which we can build our messaging recommendations.

Beyond simple issue positions and partisan preferences, the North Carolina Narrative Project sought to determine the values, opinions, attitudes, aspirations, and fears – many subconscious – that united the people of our state or that differentiated our people from others around the country. What psychological traits distinguish a North Carolinian from a South Carolinian, Virginian, Californian, or New Englander?

It turns out that defining North Carolinians is not a simple task. The truth is that a single definition of what makes a North Carolinian unique doesn't exist. Rather, **North Carolina is best described by its diversity of people and their attitudes.** North Carolinians, like all Americans, remain divided by race, gender, class, urbanicity, and education.

As politics and political attitudes have become nationalized over recent years and hyper-partisan polarization continues to dominate the political scene, that type of uniqueness by state has become harder to see. In addition, many North Carolinians are new to the state, weakening the overall perception of a distinct North Carolina story. To complicate our challenge even more, the North Carolina Narrative Project found a state divided on core values key to our democratic self-governance. These aren't just partisan divisions – though partisanship plays a big role in defining these values – but fundamental disagreements over the rights of individuals and the role of government in our society.

We studied all different types of North Carolinians with different backgrounds and from different locations, and in the end, found very few universal opinions shared by all types of North Carolinians. Trying to describe the kaleidoscope of attitudes unearthed during this research project would fill dozens of pages. Instead, the following few examples are threads of agreement that cropped up across the research from all types of people. As you will see, those attitudes are often at odds with each other. **These dichotomies define North Carolina as an ideological and political battleground.**



1. North Carolina is a nice place to live, but paired with an undercurrent of racism and prejudice

Across all our research, including among white, Black, and Brown North Carolinians from different regions and backgrounds, there was a consensus that people liked living in North Carolina. The expressions of positivity towards the Tar Heel State were described in many ways, including references to neighborliness and southern hospitality, descriptions of the moderate climate, appreciation of recreational opportunities in the mountains or beaches, access to jobs, and an affordable cost of living.

Many cited North Carolina's cost of living as a positive, either in comparison with other regions of the country (i.e., "up North" or California), or as a lament since the previously affordable cost of living is now rising. There were also expressions of local pride in college sports teams and shared food culture.

"We have four distinct seasons so we are able to enjoy all types of weather so I love the season changes and the beauty here. NC has mountains and beaches along with some amazing landmarks." – Rural Black Woman

"Like the greenery in comparison to Phoenix...the nature that exists in North Carolina and that there are lots of outdoor recreational activities, even in cities." – New Arrival

"The thing that shocked me is people being so nice. Strangers, neighbors waving. We don't get that up north." – Latina Voter

While many of these positive feelings could be helpful in crafting a state narrative, unfortunately, for many voters, the connection between these uniting opinions and politics and public life is not obvious or top of mind.

Further, the warm feelings towards North Carolina were often paired with concern for ugly racial divisiveness or some seedy underbelly that lies below the surface.

“This image reflects the sort of cognitive dissonance I feel towards North Carolina. Half of me finds it peaceful and lovely and the other half of me despises its history and hateful people that you can find all over the state.” – First-time 2020 Voter

“And they’re still prejudiced in the back a little bit. You go to the backcountry, they still talk ‘the coloreds’ and stuff. They were prejudiced towards them. But it’s not so much in the cities anymore. It’s all the backcountry.” – Older White Man

The racial division in the state is felt, or at least noticed, by everyone, regardless of race. Nobody claimed that racism didn’t exist in North Carolina. Not surprisingly, however, people of color felt that the racial division was a real threat to themselves and their families.

2. Family and community

The importance of family was a consistent theme throughout the qualitative research. Many people mentioned moving to North Carolina to raise a family or staying in North Carolina to be near family. People were seeking family-friendly locations and institutions – often mentioning places of worship – as being important parts of the community. In difficult times when people need to come together, such as after a hurricane or in a pandemic, that family-feeling extends to the community.

The stories of people who live in North Carolina were humble and centered on family and the community. We didn’t hear other American stories like moving to Hollywood to become a movie star, starting the next big Silicon Valley tech company, or dreams of making it rich in the Big Apple. Rather, people love North Carolina because it feels like a home.

The focus on family was also evident when discussing fears (for example, police brutality, racial and political division, and the pandemic) as North Carolinians were often worried about the impact on their kids and family.

3. Responsibility, hard work, and self-reliance

Another unifying theme in our line of research was a belief in the self, that each individual has the responsibility to work hard and that should be enough to provide a good life and to raise a family. In the research we heard different versions of the American Dream where a good career leads to financial stability. Sometimes

the government was seen as a potential ally, but never the main hero. Rather, people have a desire to be self-reliant, and to have the freedom to thrive – independent of government, societal, or corporate oppression.

“You can’t sit there and cry because you don’t have something, because trust me, nothing was ever handed to me. I’ve always worked for everything. And sometimes you got to start at the bottom of the totem pole and work your way up.” – Older White Woman

“See, my thing, I left New York because I couldn’t find work. I had to rob, do whatever, sell drugs, whatever because I couldn’t find work. And I came down here. I had no choice but to live alone, but you could find work . . . You could find work all over, out here. So somebody say they can’t find a job or they can’t get one, that’s a lie.” – Middle aged Black Man

“I came here undocumented as a child, so I did it for myself by thankfully having a lot of people who believed in me and pushed me and never let me give up... I’m only focused on getting through school, beating that stigma of you’re just going to end up pregnant or [oh you’re] Hispanic, not going to make it through. And it’s like, no, I’m going to do it for myself.” – Younger Latina Non-Voter

“My experience is people just want a fair shake and their tax money to help them when they need it.” – Younger Man of Color

4. Mistrust of politicians and support for practical government programs

Perhaps the most unifying attitude among all North Carolinians is skepticism about politicians and the government. While progressives often point to government action as a means to ensure fair treatment, **most North Carolinians’ attitudes toward government are shaped by how they think about politicians.** There is deep-rooted mistrust of government that comes from suspicion of politicians and the corrupting influence of corporations and big campaign donors. This skepticism crosses lines of race. In fact, we heard some of the strongest statements from people of color.

"Realistically, I believe that government currently serves itself, it protects its own interests and the interest of those that fund it."

– White Suburban Woman

"I think the government is for themselves. And they serve only [their] own personal needs."

– Younger Man of Color

"Sadly... I feel the government serves the rich and elite and those big ticket donors because [they] seem to benefit from everything the most." - White Suburban Woman

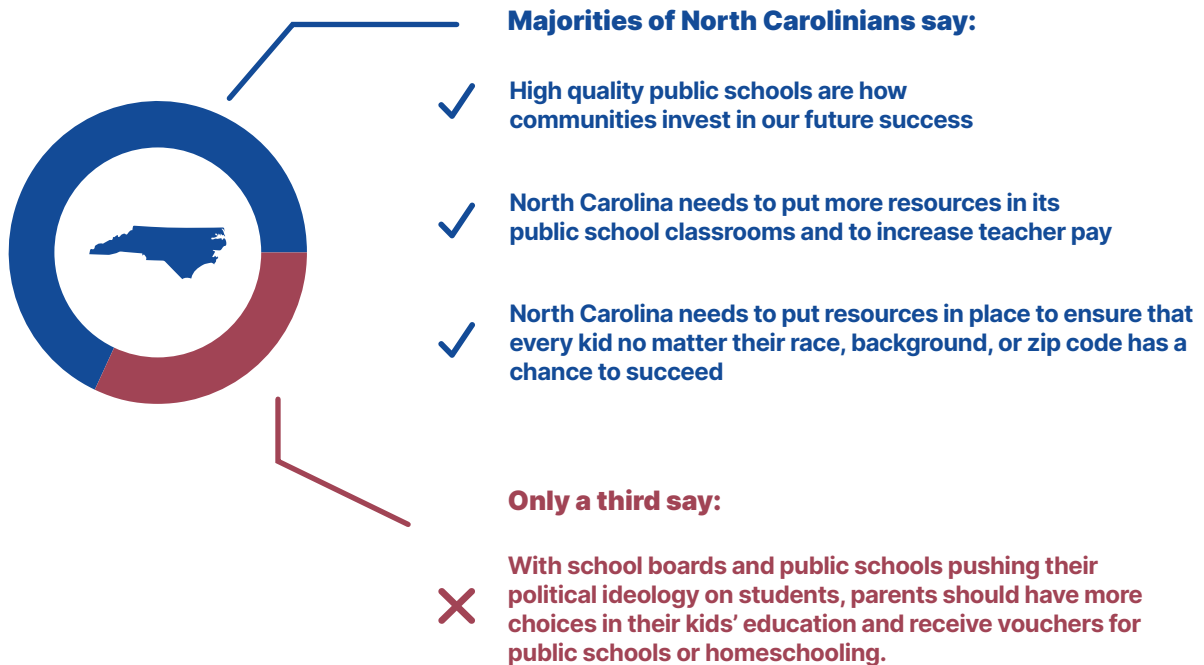
"I don't trust them at all, I trust them to do what benefits them, I don't feel like people are great especially in those positions, there's so much corruption so I just don't trust."

– Latina Voter

These sentiments were echoed in our quantitative research as well. When voters were asked to rate how much various people and groups impacted their lives in a negative manner, out-of-touch politicians topped the list of more than a dozen entities for groups that made voters' lives "much worse." The disdain for politicians did extend to both parties, with voters showing little trust to both Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature.

While people do not trust politicians, that skepticism does not extend to all government programs. When provided with a list of specific government investments, like schools and roads, North Carolinians support for "the government" increases.

Public schools were frequently mentioned as one of the most important institutions in North Carolina in our qualitative work, and support for funding for public education received strong majority support in our quantitative research.



5. Fear of chaos, desire for unity

A final unifying theme was a fear of chaos. Trump-style politics, civil unrest, and racial division have people worried about our nation's future. North Carolina voters see the division coming from both sides of the political equation and wish our disagreements could be more civil. While they fear chaos, there is a strong desire for unity – across party and racial lines. Unity is not only a solution to the chaotic division, but a better way to make progress for the future.

“Civil unrest is a big concern to me. I worry about the divisiveness of politics right now, and how everyone seems very on edge and ready to jump first into violence instead of having the tough conversations and finding some agreement. Our country has been very polarized and there’s a very strong sense of “us vs them” right now when we need unity the most.”
– White Suburban Woman

“The country has been very divided for the past four years, over pandemic, dividing people is a political strategy, they want us to go against each other so that they can keep the two sides. I’m a registered Independent but voted Democrat, but there are only two parties and dividing people tears our country apart. We would do a lot better if we were closer and more united in the US.” – Latino Voter

6. Agreement on equality, but room to grow on equity

North Carolina mirrors the nation when it comes to the value of equality. Black North Carolinians are much more likely than white North Carolinians to mention equality in focus groups. That being said, nobody likes racists and no one wants to be called a racist. In fact, in our poll ranking of North Carolina villains mentioned above, racists and white supremacists were second only to “out-of-touch politicians.” Not only is there an animosity toward racism, but we found that multi-racial messaging that is inclusive of all races (by including phrases like “no matter the color of their skin” or “Black, Brown, and white people”) often works better than color-blind messages.

However, that clarity is muddled when it comes to the practical impact of those lofty values. While voters will readily agree that people should be treated equally under the law, there is more resistance when it comes to ensuring equity, which acknowledges that people have differing

circumstances and thus may need differing levels of resources in order to thrive. For most people, personal freedom or responsibility to their own family supersedes the desire for equitable solutions for everyone.

While equity might currently be too high a hurdle, there is evidence that clear language that names specific racist outcomes like discrimination or historical wrongs, such as slavery and segregation, increases support for equitable solutions.

7. What to do about freedom?

From our research and the research of others around the country, it is clear that freedom is an important value to all Americans. It is often cited as a value that Republicans weaponize and that Democrats dismiss. While we certainly don't dismiss it, our research also did not make the path forward any clearer, because we aren't sure all Americans agree on what freedom really means.

We heard many different takes on what freedom really means...

- Freedom is a libertarian ideal about relief from unnecessary government
- Freedom is about opportunity or the ability to thrive and achieve the American Dream
- Freedom is about patriotism and it is something that makes America special
- Freedom is about the rights we have to control our bodies and love who we want

Additionally, voters often hold contradictory views on freedom. Someone might prioritize freedom of one's body when it comes to getting vaccinations, but not when it comes to reproductive choice. And of course, there are times when each person's freedom can come into conflict with each other, such as when the freedom to own a gun comes into conflict with the freedom to be safe.

Given these various interpretations and contradictions of freedom, it is even more critical that we find a way to talk about it that both meets people where they are and aligns with our progressive goals. If we don't, the limited, small way of thinking about freedom that Republicans hammer home will remain the default.

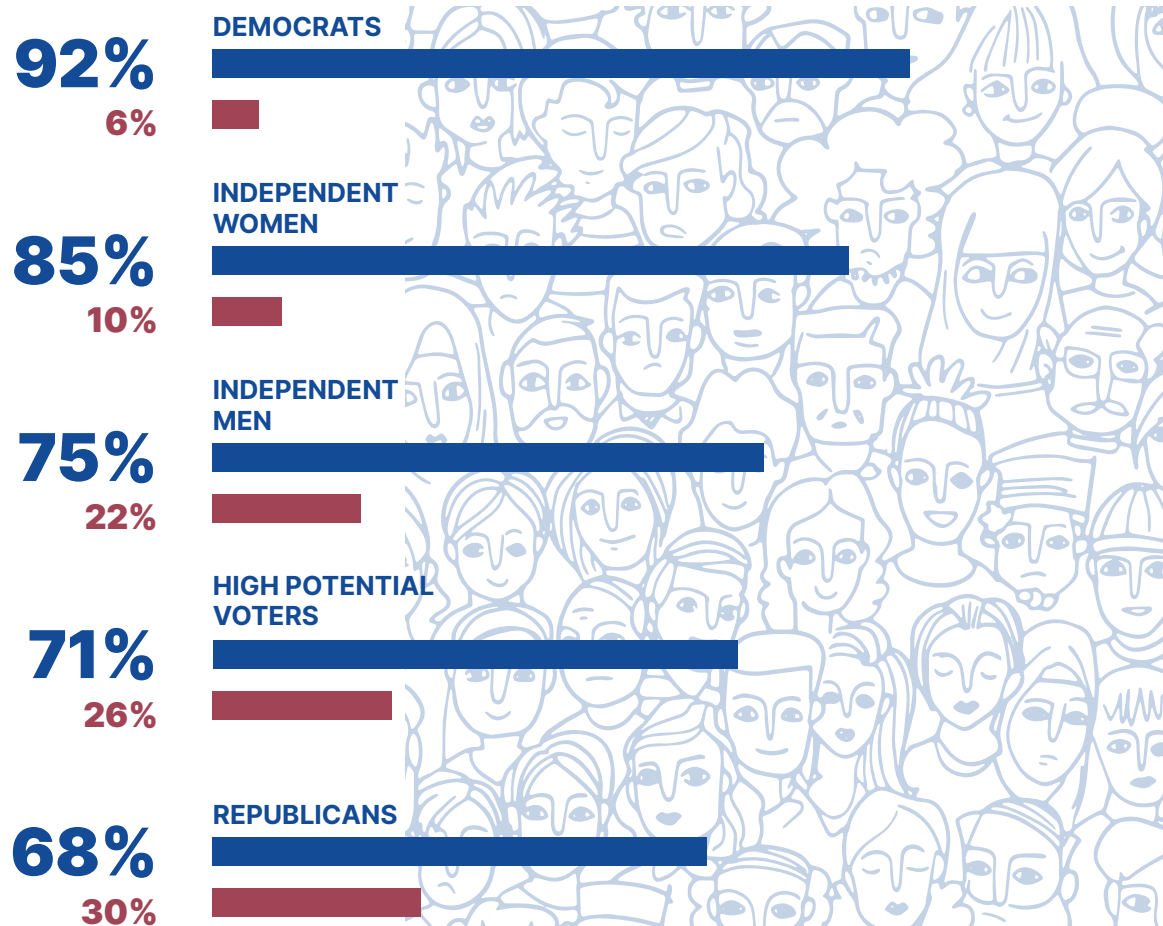
So now what?

As we attempt to construct a North Carolina Narrative that speaks to all North Carolinians, it is important to remember that narrative likely doesn't exist right now; rather, it is something we must build ourselves. North Carolinians may disagree on a lot of things, their values run the gamut, and we mirror the national landscape of partisan polarization, but there are the seeds of a shared truth ready to sow.

For example, while North Carolinians are both currently frustrated with politicians and their ugly politics, and skeptical of government handouts, they still recognize it would be better if we worked together, as shown in the graphic below. A future with shared prosperity may not be the reality people see today, but it is something they can believe in when we paint a compelling picture of what's possible.

% OF PEOPLE THAT AGREED WITH IDEA THAT:

- **"As American citizens, our fates are intertwined, so we should work together and get ahead together."**
- **"At the end of the day you have to look out for yourself, because it is the best way to get ahead."**



THE STORY OF US

In any given year, North Carolina is the quintessential swing state, with statewide elections usually being decided by a percent or two. Add to that an overarching air of malaise after two years of a global pandemic and the typical midterm backlash against the party in the White House, and we find ourselves in the midst of one of the toughest political environments for Democrats in recent years.

That being said, all hope is not lost. Voters see many ills with government currently, but are not blind to the role Republican politicians and their allies play in causing or exacerbating these ills. Voters don't necessarily see Democrats as the solution to these ills right now, but they do agree with progressive positions on core values such as shared prosperity and responsibility to one another. And they haven't given up their aspirations for an ideal government that can bring people together and get things done on behalf of all of us.

Given the lackluster brand of Democrats in the state right now, it will not be enough to simply tell voters about progressive policy positions. We must show voters that Democratic candidates are authentic, good listeners, responsive, trustworthy, and above all, will actually deliver on the promises they make. What's more, it's important that Democrats appear as allies in conjunction with voters, not as paternalistic saviors.

Quick Narrative

Democrats are...

- Compassionate
- Ethical
- Experienced
- Focused on what matters

They will...

- Understand the issues at stake
- Bring different groups together
- Listen and respond
- Deliver practical solutions

They advocate for...

- A more prosperous state for all
- A safer, healthier future
- The freedom to thrive
- A responsive, not restrictive, gov't

They stand up against...

- Racists and white supremacists
- Radicals and extremists
- Greedy corporations
- Corruption and cronyism

Longer Narrative

With all the chaos, dysfunction, and division we've experienced in the past few years, it's easy to lose sight of all that is good in America and in our home state. The truth is hard-working, responsible people call North Carolina home. We work hard to contribute to our communities and provide for our families. Now it's time for our government to do the same. We need experienced, qualified, and compassionate candidates who understand what's at stake and can bring people together across our differences to deliver practical solutions. Politicians in North Carolina have been out of touch for far

too long, but Democrats have been listening to voters. They are ready to hold greedy corporations accountable and will work for broad prosperity shared by all, not for lobbyists and the one percent. Democrats are focused on the future: expanding Medicaid, fully funding our public schools, and providing better infrastructure like roads and broadband, so all who live here can thrive, from birth to our elder years, from the mountains to the coast, in our cities and rural towns. We all deserve a responsive government that allows us the freedom to reach our full potential. Let's come together and unite across our differences to elect a new generation of Democrats. Together we can make a better North Carolina for all.

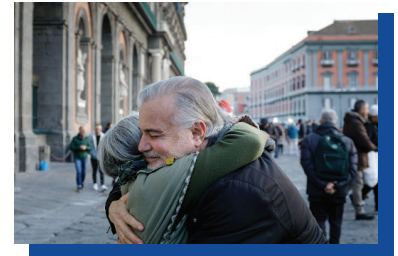
Associate Democrats With...

Note: these are voter submitted images from our qualitative research

Delivering solutions



Working together



For the people



For the future



Unity



North Carolina Voters In Their Own Words

***"I feel the Democratic Party is the "every man" party. Regardless of race, income, religion, they are the party for us all."
– Black Suburban Woman***

"I want the government to be working towards the best interest of the people, not itself." – Younger Man of Color

"I just want us to come back together and work for the better of the whole team and country and its people in a peaceful and unified way, like we do when tragedies happen like 9/11 or hurricanes and such. It seems that's the only time we work together, but if we could do that everyday this would truly be the best place on earth." - White Suburban Woman

***"[Democrats are] better spoken, more socially conscious than Republicans."
– Latino Voter***

"I would like to see government working at the will of the average person, not the wealthy. I would like to see more of the things that helped to create the middle class to begin with, without the redlining and other racist things that were done to keep minorities from being able to build wealth." – Younger Man of Color

"I want to see a government that supports and invests in our country's success and the success of its people. That doesn't

***create laws so much to regulate everything, but provides infrastructure and resources that allow for growth, independence and self-sufficiency."
– White Suburban Woman***

"I would like our government to help everyone get access to resources and opportunities to thrive. I wish our government was one which made everyone happy and worked for everyone." – First-time 2020 Voter

"I feel like [Democrats] fight for and represent people like me. I am a middle class citizen who is trying to survive and thrive!" – Black Urban Woman

Putting it in Practice

Examples you may use at the door, on the phone, or in the mail:

- As a [job], [candidate] has years of experience listening to voters, understanding what matters, and bringing people together to get the job done. He will stand up to greedy corporations and corrupt officials to make sure the government is more responsive to average people and small businesses.
- As a mother, [candidate] teaches her kids to be kind and follow the rules. She knows it shouldn't be any different for politicians. As a [office], she will stand up against the racists and radicals and advocate for a safer, healthier future for all, including fully funded public schools, better infrastructure, and more affordable healthcare.
- Instead of grandstanding on social media, [candidate] is focused on what matters: creating a more prosperous North Carolina for all. She will work to lower the skyrocketing cost of living, and expand access to healthcare and education, so more people have the freedom to thrive, not just survive.

THE STORY OF THEM

Encouragingly, voters do see Republican Party officials as a problem. We heard repeatedly from voters who connected Republican politicians with excessive wealth, racism, backwards thinking, and close-mindedness. Many of the groups Republicans associate with, such as lobbyists and the top one percent, are reviled.

That being said, given the partisan environment in North Carolina, we must be careful about how we label the parties. Many of our target voters have friends or family who are Republicans, or may themselves be at least sympathetic to the Republican label. Thus, when constructing the narrative against Republicans, we must be careful to 1) always discuss the actions and characteristics of Republican politicians, and 2) emphasize the lack of action among Republicans in removing unsavory elements from their party, rather than labeling Republicans directly that way.

That is to say, we've generally seen attempts to broadly paint all Republicans as complicit in January 6th or as racists fall flat. Voters loathe these two groups, but personally know too many "good" Republicans for that label to be able to stick to all. The more salient framing is that Republican leaders are caving to these extreme groups and not doing enough to stand up to them.

Quick Narrative

Republican politicians are...

- Out-of-touch
- Self-centered
- Slow to change
- Power-hungry

They will...

- Take us backwards
- Prioritize profits over people
- Cave to lobbyists, the top one percent, and greedy corporations
- Hurt average North Carolinians

They encourage...

- Chaos
- Division
- Dysfunction
- A weakened democracy

They don't stop allies who engage in...

- Racism and discrimination
- Corruption
- Violent extremism
- Dangerous misinformation

The Longer Narrative

As we recover from a global pandemic, worry about war overseas, and struggle with inflation and the rising cost of living at home, it's more important than ever to have political leaders that are authentic, responsive, and pragmatic. Unfortunately, Republican leadership has failed to meet these basic standards. Republican politicians in North Carolina are out of touch with what voters want and care about, instead focusing on scoring political points, lining their pockets, and grandstanding. At this pivotal point in our state, we cannot afford leaders who will cave to lobbyists, continue to give handouts to the top one percent and ever more greedy corporations, and take us backwards on healthcare and education. By attempting to gerrymander their hold onto power, Republican politicians in our state have sowed chaos in our elections, encouraged division among neighbors, and worsened the dysfunction in government. They have not done enough to call out the racist people and violent extremists in their party, nor have they

fought against corruption and cronyism. Their inattention to our problems and disdain for our values are hurting North Carolinians from the mountains to the sea, in small towns and rural areas, and across Black, Brown, and white communities. It's time to vote them out.

Associate Republican Politicians With...

Note: these are voter submitted images from our qualitative research

Chaos



Corruption



Taking us backwards



Division



Dysfunction



North Carolina Voters In Their Own Words

*"I vote against people I feel are going backwards or are not progressive or open to change...those who want to revert back to how things were a long time ago."
– White Suburban Woman*

*"Voting for someone who is willing to be endorsed by racists of any kind is not something I can support, nor is it helpful [for] myself or my families' lives. It is more likely to make things even MORE difficult."
– Younger Man of Color*

*"[Republicans are] just out for themselves. Want it their way. So polarized. Not open to hearing all sides."
– White Suburban Woman*

*"I feel that the Republican Party is traditionally designed to keep the rich rich and not be as concerned about the middle to lower class people and their advancement."
– Black Rural Woman*

*"Government shouldn't be involved with pandering to lobbyists, Wall Street, and special interests. Our ideal is that politicians represent the interests of their voters, but reality shows us they represent their campaign contributors and lobbyists."
– White Suburban Woman*

*"I feel our government is corrupted by all the corporate money being pumped into politics via television ads, lobbying, and such."
– Younger Man of Color*

*"I believe the current Republican Party represents old, racist, rich white men that are focused on oppressing people rather than being democratic. January 6th, voter suppression, private prison system, Ronald Reagan economic philosophy...the list goes on."
– Black Suburban Man*

*"[Republicans] are stubborn and not open to change or any opinion...This stuff is way before Trump, the issues are so deep."
– Latina Voter*

*"I remember when you could talk to Republicans and now they're being radicalized and becoming fanatical... They're full of hatred."
– Latino Voter*

Putting it in Practice

Examples you may use at the door, on the phone, or in the mail:

- [Opponent] has hurt average North Carolinians by focusing more on what lobbyists and corporate donors want than what we need. He has repeatedly voted to give tax breaks to corporations at the expense of fully funding our public schools. We can't afford more leaders who prioritize profits over people.
- [Opponent] is not focused on what North Carolinians want and care about. Instead, he voted for gerrymandered political districts, in a blatant attempt to unfairly stay in power and continue to serve himself. A vote for [opponent] means further chaos, division, and dysfunction in our government.
- By sharing inflammatory posts and dangerous misinformation on social media, [opponent] has given air time to racists and fundamentalists and furthered our division. We don't need more radical politicians taking us backwards with their extremist views on banned books, women's healthcare, and more.

THE CONTRAST

The Quick Narrative

Democrats are...

- Fighting for the future
- Building coalitions
- The adults in the room
- Pragmatic & Responsive
- For the people
- Working together

Republicans are...

- Bringing us backwards
- Furthering division
- Causing chaos
- Radical & Slow to change
- For the top one percent
- Working to keep their power

The Longer Narrative

Here in North Carolina, we deserve leaders who are authentic, responsive, and pragmatic. But Democratic and Republican leaders are presenting two very different visions for our state, guided by different values and seeking different goals.

On the one hand, Democrats know the last few years have been hard with the pandemic, rising cost of living, and increasing division at home and abroad. They want to roll up their sleeves and get to work, bringing people together to find solutions for the problems that face average North Carolinians. Whether it's expanding Medicaid so more people can live healthier lives, fully funding our public schools so our children can thrive, or providing better infrastructure like roads and broadband, Democrats are fighting for the people and for the future.

On the other hand, Republican politicians have been consumed with fringe politics like book bans and protecting their own power at all costs through gerrymandering and dismantling the rights of voters. They have fostered chaos and corruption in government, brought us backwards on our racial divisions, and repeatedly prioritized handouts for the top one percent and greedy corporations over funds for schools and families.

After more than a decade in power, legislative Republicans have only succeeded in making healthcare more expensive and cutting funding for education, while lining their pockets and those of their donors. They cannot be trusted with leadership any longer. For a brighter, more prosperous future for North Carolinians from the mountains to the sea, in small towns and rural areas, and across Black, Brown, and white communities, we need to elect Democrats to lead in Raleigh.

Flipping the Script on Republican Value Frames

Flip the discussion from **scarcity** to **prosperity**:

Republicans want you to believe...

There are **limited** resources, and you and your family are **hurt** when resources go to others.

Democrats know...

We are all affected by how well America is doing, so you and your family are **better off** when the whole country is **prospering**. Scarcity is not guaranteed, but rather driven by corporate greed and hoarding of resources.

Flip the discussion from the **individual** to the **collective**:

Republicans want you to believe...

At the end of the day, everyone should only **look out for themselves**, because it is the best way to get ahead.

Democrats know...

As American citizens, we have a **responsibility** to our family **and** our communities. Since our **fates are intertwined**, we should all **work together** and **get ahead together**.

Flip the discussion from one of **division** to one of **unity**:

Republicans want you to believe...

Too many people reject America's **traditional values**, and it's time to stand up to those people who are trying to **change America for the worse**.

Democrats know...

America is strongest when we are **united across race**, including Black, white, and Brown Americans, and we need to work together to make a **better country for everyone**.

Flip the discussion from **nostalgia** to **progressive patriotism**:

Republicans want you to believe...

America is the **greatest country in the world**. We need to stop trying to change it for the worse,

and instead **return America** to the greatness we experienced in the **20th century**.

Democrats know...

America is a great country, not because we have always lived up to our foundational principles, **but because we have never stopped trying to be better**. It is our **duty** as Americans to **come together** and **build a stronger future**.

Flip the discussion from the **"freedom from"** to the **"freedom to"**:

Republicans want you to believe...

By eliminating consumer and worker protections, you are gaining **freedom from** government interference.

Democrats know...

True **freedom is about having the freedom to reach your full potential**, which is why we fight to stop corporate abuse, expand access to education, and make healthcare more affordable, so everyone is **free to thrive**.

Fight feelings of **cynicism** with examples of **government efficacy**:

Republicans want you to believe...

There is too much **dysfunction** in government today, and **nothing ever seems to get done**. Public officials are mostly focused on scoring political points, lining their pockets, and grandstanding. Unfortunately, there's **little individuals like me can do** to change the situation.

Democrats know...

When Americans come together, **we can accomplish a lot**, whether it is the government and private companies partnering to produce a life-saving vaccine against COVID-19, our neighbors helping each other out after a storm, or average citizens coming together to fundraise or speak up for a cause.

North Carolina voters want **unity and racial reconciliation**. Whether it's defunding the police, critical race theory, or whatever the next issue Republicans will try to capitalize on, it is important to emphasize unity and name their motive – inflaming division is meant to distract from Republican failure to offer any meaningful solution to our country's challenges.

Counter **racial resentment** with a call for **racial reconciliation**:

Republicans want you to believe...

We spend **too much time looking backwards** and dwelling on the past when it comes to race, and we need to **stop blaming white people** for awful historical things they had nothing to do with. We live in the greatest country in the world, and we need to **stop trying to change it for the worse**.

Democrats know...

We must address the **legacy of slavery, segregation, and racism** we have in North Carolina, so that **everyone can have a fair shot** at success, regardless if you are Black, white, or Brown. Those who seek to divide us on race want to distract us from coming together and creating a **more prosperous state for all**.

Note: White voters buy into racial unity messaging that specifically includes them.

When talking about uniting communities across race, specifically include mention of white communities.

- America is strongest when we are united across race, including Black, white, and Brown Americans, and we need to work together across communities to make a better country for everyone.

When talking about the benefits of a multi-racial democracy, highlight that both white and POC communities will be able to thrive, and use a specific example of it successfully happening. This helps cut through some of the natural cynicism people may have about a seemingly lofty goal. In other words, we are better united, and it's been done before, so we can do it again.

- In the late 1800s, white farmers in Wilmington united with Black middle class voters to elect a multi-racial coalition to local government. The coalition successfully passed reforms, such as debt relief, that helped both the white and Black populations in the city. Let's once again come together - Black, white, and Brown - to build a strong and prosperous North Carolina for all.

In the Words of a First-Time 2020 Voter

"Democrats! Take the freaking gloves off and fight back! Call out the Republicans for all the reprehensible things they have done. The Republicans sling mud and lie, lie, lie, and the Dems take it without fighting back...So call them out on their record and make them defend their nonchalant attitude [on] the issues that absolutely affect [us] citizens... Ask the Republicans to name what they have done for us. They will brag about all they have done. So counter with the truth...Use their records and words against them!"

THE ISSUES: PUTTING THE FRAMES IN PRACTICE

The North Carolina Narrative Project sought to unearth the values, aspirations, and fears of everyday people in our state and meaningfully connect those with Democratic electoral goals and progressive priorities.

In this section, we present background on several key issues and provide examples on how to apply our value-laden frames into issue-specific narratives that can advance our priorities and push back against the opposition's.

The guide below walks through the overall opportunities and challenges for each issue, the traps we can expect Republicans to lay on each one, suggestions for how to use our value frames to rebut those traps, and finally, a longer narrative that could be told.

This is not meant to be a policy white paper or a detailed script, but merely a guide for advocates and candidates to collect the necessary insights on issue-specific messaging to address challenges and develop strategies for outreach.

Issues



CLIMATE CHANGE



DEMOCRACY & GOOD GOVERNANCE



ECONOMY & JOBS



EDUCATION



HEALTHCARE

CLIMATE CHANGE



Background

From the breathless peaks of Mount Mitchell, to the waves rippling across the long stretch of the Outer Banks, North Carolina is rich in natural beauty that residents enjoy throughout the year. Voters' admiration for the state's unique scenery and access to nature cannot be overstated, and the desire to protect our public spaces is a priority for many.

"We have four distinct seasons, so we are able to enjoy all types of weather, so I love the season changes and the beauty here. NC has mountains and beaches along with some amazing landmarks."
– Rural Woman

"I like the greenery...the nature that exists in North Carolina and that there are lots of outdoor recreational activities, even in cities." – New Arrival

North Carolinians want to live in a state with a healthy environment that is protected by policies to improve sustainability, build resiliency, and preserve their access to natural spaces for current and future generations to enjoy.

Unfortunately, North Carolinians have already begun to feel the impact of climate change. Hurricane devastation, flooding, and tornadoes are impacting communities from the east to the Piedmont and mountain regions more frequently. Voters are looking for candidates who can help address these issues.

"I value candidates who care about the environment and are willing to pass legislation to address climate change."
– White Suburban Man

What's more, big industrial polluters continue to contaminate our air and water, and oil and gas companies are enjoying record profits, all while repeatedly dodging accountability and regulation. Black and Brown, rural, and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by this lack of regulation and protections against environmental pollution and profiteering.

Republican Traps

Government overreach

Republicans will use voters' fear of government overreach to argue that any action to protect the environment will harm businesses, kill jobs, and raise costs for consumers.

Denialism

Republicans will deny climate science, invoke religion, and mock the idea of global warming during cold weather. They will minimize any observed effects of climate change, saying it is natural and not man-made, and they will portray climate activists as hysterical and exaggerating.

Our Frames

Working Together

As North Carolinians, we strongly value our communities and our state's natural beauty. We need to come together to fight climate change and protect our people and our places. By taking care of each other and our planet, we can ensure a safer and healthier future for all.

Adults in the Room

Republican politicians, beholden to their corporate donors in Big Oil and the utilities lobby, continue to deny and delay climate change action. Democrats know the threats to our climate are critical and are focused on what matters: securing a safe, healthy, and prosperous North Carolina for all.

For the Future

We must protect our environment in order to make our state a better, safer, and healthier place for the future. By protecting access to clean air and safe drinking water, and investing in high-quality, good-paying jobs in clean energy, we can ensure that future generations will be able to live healthy, support their families, and thrive.

The Narrative

Democrats know how precious our natural resources and spaces are in North Carolina. They recognize the threat of climate change not only puts our access to clean air and safe drinking water at risk, but also our ability to live, work, and enjoy our lives. They will fight for stronger environmental protections and more investment in high-quality, good paying jobs in clean energy because it is the only way to ensure we can have a safe, healthy future where we can all continue to thrive.

Meanwhile, Republicans continue to act on behalf of their wealthy corporate donors and lobbyists in the oil and gas industry. They deny the effects of climate change we can see with our own eyes, all while pocketing millions of dollars to continue to let industrial polluters and reckless corporations operate unchecked. Their desire to stay in power has meant they have blocked any progress we could make on climate change reversal, putting us all at harm. We must act now to protect our people and our places.

DEMOCRACY & GOOD GOVERNANCE



Background

For North Carolina voters, the act of voting is viewed as a civic duty within our democracy. Whether it's due to a personal responsibility in honoring those who paved the way for equal representation before them, or to ensure a better future for their community, voting is a tool used to enact change.

"When I think of others who were not afforded this opportunity, I can't help but feel blessed to have a voice of change. Voting is my civic duty and is important to me as a good citizen that connects me to the democratic process." – New Arrival

"I vote because I want to make sure that I am helping this country move in a positive direction. I feel like if I don't vote and if others don't vote, then our politicians won't actually represent what the constituents want or their beliefs." – First-Time 2020 Voter

Unfortunately, ever-changing election laws, misinformation, and discriminatory voting barriers have posed persistent challenges for North Carolina voters. Voters are concerned about our elections, and trust has been shaken due to false narratives spread by Republicans, decades of gerrymandering, and a sense that entities like corporations and the media are paying to influence election results.

"We are one of the most gerrymandered states, and it's ridiculous." – NC Voter

"Corporations have all the money and control the media and where it goes/what information is circulated." – First-Time 2020 Voter

Of course, the attack on the Capitol on January 6th was a culmination of the increasingly violent rhetoric on election integrity. North Carolina voters truly revile anyone involved in the attacks that day, and strongly support holding the insurrectionists accountable.

Republican Traps

Voter Fraud

Republicans will claim that many onerous policies, from voter ID to restricted early and absentee voting, are necessary to prevent unscrupulous people from voting multiple times, voting when they are not eligible, or voting where they do not live, despite scores of evidence that this does not happen.

Race-Baiting

Republicans will use ugly tactics to institute policies that disproportionately impact the ability for Black and Brown communities to vote.

The Big Lie

Many Republicans continue to push Trump's lies about the security of the 2020 election, and will use it to cast doubt on any results unfavorable to them in 2022 and beyond.

Pox on Both Houses

Republicans know that voters have a disdain for politicians of all stripes, and they will use this to hammer home the idea that government cannot be trusted and must thus be diminished. The more cynical voters are about government efficacy, the better it is for Republicans.

Our Frames

Unity

Our state is stronger when we all have a say in decisions that impact our lives. We need to come together to support voting rights laws that ensure every North Carolinian, no matter their race, background, or zip code, can elect leaders who deliver on our priorities.

Patriotism

America has long been a beacon of hope in the world for our strong and vibrant democracy. We must protect our freedom to vote, and conduct free and fair elections, in order to protect America and our standing in the world.

Adults in the Room

Republicans are throwing doubt on certified election results, trying to make it harder for people to vote, and instigating violence and chaos. Democrats respect the rule of law and want to ensure our elections remain free and fair.

The Narrative

Protecting our democracy should be a bipartisan issue. Unfortunately, Republicans have spread lies about the 2020 election, failed to condemn those who attacked our Capitol in 2021, and have made it more likely that violence and disorder will reign in future elections. They care chiefly about staying in power, and are willing to do so by any means necessary, including gerrymandering electoral districts and dismantling the rights of voters. Their egregious behavior has sowed chaos in our elections, encouraged division among neighbors, and worsened the dysfunction in government. They have not done enough to call out the racist people and violent extremists in their party, nor have they fought against corruption and cronyism.

Democrats believe that free and fair elections are the bedrock of our democracy and part of what makes America great. They want to work together with people across political ideology, race, and background to ensure that the freedom to vote is protected. They know our state is strongest when we all have a say in decisions that impact our lives. What's more, they want the government to work for the average person, not special interests and the extremely wealthy. They believe in a government that can help you when you need it, but doesn't get in your way, and one that makes sure your tax dollars are spent wisely. They know the success of our country depends on the success of our people, and want to provide the infrastructure and resources for everyone to be free to thrive.

ECONOMY & JOBS



Background

North Carolinians value hard work and responsibility to their families and their communities. They pride themselves on independence and self-sufficiency, and are quick to decry the idea that they are looking for handouts.

That being said, there is massive frustration with the status quo, where it seems average people are working harder and harder for less and less. The cost of living, for everything from housing to groceries to healthcare to college tuition is rising, and people are struggling to keep up.

"There are too many people in this country working poverty wages to be able to barely make rent or feed their kids. There are too many people in this country who are over-worked and underpaid, disrespected and thrown to the side."

– First-Time 2020 Voter

There is a strong desire for higher quality jobs and better wages. While greedy corporations and the tax-evading top one percent are reviled, it's important to note that wealth itself is not the enemy. Many North Carolinians have dreams of building wealth to secure the future for themselves and their progeny.

"We are trying to create new generational wealth for our family. By investing in our community and making smart decisions, we hope to lead a comfortable way of living for generations to come."

– Younger Man of Color

Many aspects of the economy will be out of our control – smart messaging can't reduce inflation or fix a supply chain breakdown. However, it will be critical to address voters' desires for personal economic security and frustration with the current system.

Republican Traps

Hard Work / Personal Responsibility

Americans strongly believe in their own agency and autonomy, and consistently lift up the values of hard work and responsibility when it comes to jobs and the economy. Republicans capitalize on this by insinuating that those who are struggling are simply not working hard enough to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

Scarcity

Republicans will make the economy seem like a zero-sum game, where in order for someone to have more, someone necessarily has to have less.

Pro-Business

Republicans will claim that low tax rates for corporations help businesses create jobs and spur innovation, and that to raise them will mean a loss of work and income for the state.

Handouts

Republicans will argue that any help from the government is a handout that is likely to encourage people to be lazy and dependent.

Socialism

Republicans will take any opportunity to claim Democrats want to take your hard-earned money through higher and higher taxes and that Democrats reject a capitalist system in favor of a socialist one.

Our Frames

Freedom to Thrive

Every North Carolinian deserves the freedom to spend time with their loved ones, to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and to live free of the fear of rising medical costs. Democrats will work to extend these freedoms and create more high-quality, well-paying jobs so that everyone who works hard and plays by the rules can achieve their own version of the American Dream.

Shared Prosperity

It's been a tough few years, but hardworking Americans are bringing us back from the pandemic. We are all better off when the whole country is prospering, that's why Democrats are working to get things done for North Carolinians by rebuilding the middle class and lowering the costs of basic needs.

Fairness

Democrats believe hardworking people deserve a shot to get ahead. It's time to level the playing field and crack down on greedy, rule-breaking corporate CEOs that hoard wealth by choosing not to pay their workers fairly and refusing to pay their fair share of taxes.

Narrative

Everyone deserves the freedom and opportunity to thrive. But too many people in North Carolina are overworked and underpaid. Democrats believe we can change the status quo, so that North Carolina is a place where we can work together to achieve and share in broad prosperity for all. That's why they are working to bring down the costs of basic needs, like childcare, healthcare, education, and energy, and to create more good-paying, high-quality jobs for hardworking people. It's time we build an economy where prosperity grows from the bottom up, and the middle out so that working families, small businesses, and family farmers have the opportunities and tools they need to build a good life.

Republican leaders believe the economy should only work for a select few: their corporate mega donors and wealthy friends in the top one percent. Instead of focusing on giving struggling North Carolinians the help and breathing room they need, Republican legislative leaders have used their time in office to slash taxes for corporations. They have done nothing to address skyrocketing costs, and have only made it more difficult to access high-quality, affordable education and healthcare. Republicans' continued deference to the ultra wealthy means we all suffer, from the mountains to the sea, in small towns and rural areas, and across Black, Brown, and white communities.

EDUCATION



Background

North Carolina has a long history of investing in public education. For decades, we led the nation in early childhood education and our world-renowned universities and community colleges continue to give North Carolinians a sense of pride.

"We have some of the finest educational places in the world". – NC Voter

"Without the government, I would not have had access to my schools or my university, and I would probably not be getting very far in life." – First-Time 2020 Voter

Across race, place, and background, North Carolinians unite on increased access to quality education. Voters agree that a better future begins with better access to a high quality education, as it ensures more students graduate with the knowledge and skills for success in jobs and higher education.

And yet, year after year, Republicans continue to stall on policies to fully fund public schools in accordance with state Supreme Court rulings, raise teacher pay to the national average, and lower tuition and expand financial aid for higher education.

"Both higher and public education have suffered immensely because the Republican legislature has inadequately funded education." – NC Voter

In their latest string of attacks, Republicans have even sought to ban long cherished books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, censor discussions of American

history in the classroom, disparage hardworking educators, and marginalize LGBTQ+ students.

Republican Traps

Parental Rights / Freedom

Republicans will paint public schools in opposition to voters' cherished values of freedom of choice and parental rights. They will say we should not invest in a system that dictates what a child learns and is run by radical liberals, and instead parents should be free to send their child to private schools or homeschools with less interference.

Government Dysfunction

Republicans will lean in on voters' distrust of government and its efficiency and portray public schools as failing beyond the ability to repair. They will say we have spent millions of taxpayer dollars with little measured improvement, and should stop wasting money.

Culture Wars / Radical Ideology

Republicans will use public schools as their latest battleground in the culture wars in order to distract from their inaction on funding. They will portray educators as radical liberals, demonize LGBTQ+ students, inflame racial divisions, and more.

Our Frames

For the Future

Investing in our public schools now means a stronger economy and future for North Carolina. We must increase funding for public schools, so we can retain good teachers, principals, and support staff, maintain modern facilities, and give students the tools they need to succeed.

Unity

Republicans are using our public schools to further divide our communities along racial and political lines. Democrats know that our public schools should not be about politics, but our children and their future. We need to once again make public schools a place where we can all come together and work to succeed.

Pragmatic

Radical Republicans are hurting our public schools with their extremist views, from trying to ban books and censor discussions in our classrooms, to denigrating educators and failing to fully fund schools. Democrats know our country is strongest when we all have a chance to succeed, and that starts with access to free, high quality public schools.

The Narrative

Our state is strongest when we all have a chance to succeed. The best ticket to the American Dream and to keeping our state prosperous is through free, high quality public schools. Providing quality public schools for all children used to be a nonpartisan issue, but unfortunately that's not true anymore.

For years, Republicans have been underfunding our public schools and undermining teachers and parents looking to provide the best for our children. They are failing to meet the state's constitution mandate to provide students with the skills needed to succeed in the future. Their radical positions on banning books and censoring honest discussions on history and race is furthering divisions and causing chaos in classrooms. We cannot afford to be brought backwards by their extremism.

Democrats believe that every child deserves a quality education, no matter the color of their skin or where they call home. They want to increase funding for public schools, so we can retain good teachers and principals, maintain modern facilities, and give students the tools they need to succeed. They know investing in our public schools now means a stronger economy and future for North Carolina.

HEALTHCARE



Background

Reeling from a prolonged pandemic, North Carolinians want to be healthy and live in a state where quality and affordable healthcare is accessible for all. The good news is North Carolina is home to world-renowned healthcare, with more than a dozen hospitals in the state considered among the best in the nation.

Unfortunately, despite this vast amount of innovative research and treatment expertise housed within the state, many North Carolinians are unable to afford care. Healthcare is often sacrificed for financial reasons – rationing medication in order to pay bills, putting food on the table over treatments, and skipping appointments in order to not miss work.

“We should not be allowing citizens to struggle and have to make choices between medication, hospital visits, doctor’s care, food and paying their bills.”
– White Suburban Woman

“I wish we had free clinics and free dental clinics. I wish the income level was higher to be approved for Medicaid. So many of us can not afford doctor visits or medication without having to choose it over food or electricity.” – NC Voter

On top of economic barriers, Black and Brown communities face racial disparities within medical care, leading many patients without in-language resources, lack of providers from diverse backgrounds, and inability to receive quality care due to racial bias.

Despite the strong need for action, Republicans continue to delay on issues such as Medicaid

expansion, rural hospital funding, and Black maternal health protections. And of course, they have buckled down on making it more difficult for North Carolinians to access their full range of reproductive healthcare options, from birth control to abortion, as well as gender-affirming care.

Republican Traps

Handouts

Republicans will utilize voters’ reverence for hard work and self-sufficiency to paint any attempt to expand healthcare access as a government handout for the undeserving and lazy, and something that will raise costs for everyone else.

Freedom

Republicans will take advantage of Americans’ value for freedom to portray any attempt to make healthcare more affordable and accessible as one that will naturally lead to less choice for patients. They will insinuate that government provided healthcare will lead to death panels, long waits, and substandard care.

Our Frames

Freedom to Thrive

Too many working people are held back today by health problems they can’t afford to treat. We need to make healthcare more affordable and accessible, so that more North Carolinians can start to build wealth, achieve their American Dream, and be free to thrive.

Equality

Everyone deserves access to healthcare, regardless if you live in an urban or rural area, if you are Black, white, or Brown, or if you are rich or poor.

For the Future

We all benefit when more people can lead healthier lives. By ensuring that North Carolinians can get access to preventive care, prescription drugs, nearby hospitals, mental health services, maternal care, and more, we ensure a brighter, more prosperous future for all.

The Narrative

No one should be denied care for an illness or chronic condition because of where they live, what they look like, or how much money they have. And yet, every day millions of North Carolinians make painful decisions between going to a doctor's appointment or taking an extra shift at work, filling their prescription or putting food on the table, and getting treated or paying their bills.

Democrats want to make healthcare more affordable and accessible, so average families can spend less time worrying about where and when they can get care, and more time working towards the American Dream and enjoying their lives. They want to tear down the barriers that prevent too many North Carolinians from accessing care so that we can all thrive in a brighter, healthier North Carolina.

After a decade in power, Republican legislators have failed to accomplish much beyond making healthcare more expensive for everyone and failing to expand Medicaid, which would allow more rural folks the access to the hospitals and care they need. They have lined their pockets with donations from insurance companies and special interest lobbyists, all while reducing patient protections and quality of care. They continue to add more restrictions on reproductive healthcare under the guise of being pro-life, while doing nothing to help improve the racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. Their actions have brought our state backwards.

CONCLUSION: THE STORY OF NOW



We've devoted a lot of time over the previous pages to what should be said about Democratic and Republican politicians. We operate in an electoral space, and electing candidates who can pass progressive legislation and holding accountable those who do not is essential.

But we would be remiss if we did not end on the main source of power for progressive change this decade: collective action by a coalition of engaged North Carolinians. In the face of an extremely well-organized opposition, it will be critical for everyday people to unite and work together for true multi-racial democracy that is pro-worker, pro-women, pro-environment, pro-people.

Our research has highlighted that we are living in a country and a state that is increasingly divided and chaotic, and that distrust of politicians of all stripes is high. But it has also shown that despite it all, people have not lost their faith that a better world can exist. People believe that our fates are intertwined, that we are better off when the whole country is prospering, that we are strongest when we are united as Black, white, and Brown Americans, and that we will never stop trying to be better.

It's an optimism and a dedication to making it work that we see all across our communities in North Carolina. Everyday people stepping up to turn things around – lending a hand to neighbors in need, working hard to keep each other safe, holding elected leaders accountable, defending our hard won democracy, and even running for office. It truly takes a village to make progressive change happen.

As we continue into this decade, we must fight not only the evils of greed, corruption, and racism, but also the sometimes debilitating impacts of apathy and helplessness. The opposition has spent a lot of time and money trying to convince us that we have no power. It's time for a new generation of leaders to prove them wrong. Let's create a more responsive government where opportunity and prosperity flourish, and build a North Carolina that works for everyone.

