

The Arizona Narrative Project

PROGRESS NOW ARIZONA



Understanding Arizona voters, what they care about, and how to connect with them. A messaging toolkit developed by Progress Now Arizona.





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A word from **us:**

We first joined conversations about bringing a narrative project to Arizona in summer 2017. We were excited, but also skeptical. After all, we've experienced how messaging research is often done: a national organization decides research is needed, months of time and money are spent, and then, at the end, recommendations are handed down to local organizations. That work certainly has its place, but we wanted to do things differently.

What you have in your hands (or computer) is the culmination of months of research into what Arizona residents are thinking and feeling in this political moment. Just as importantly, it's also the result of months of conversations with organizers, communicators, advocates, and elected officials. Ultimately, we hope it's a tool that helps all of us to tell the truth about what's happening in Arizona today and offer a vision for what the state could look like tomorrow.

We start with a broad overview of current voter attitudes and beliefs. This overview only barely scratches the surface; if you're interested in knowing more, check out the reports at progressnowarizona.org/research. From there, we move to an overview of the messaging framework that emerged, and discuss how to apply the framework to specific issues. We conclude with suggestions for how to put the framework into action.

Our hope is that you will find ways big and small to take these findings into the field. Get in touch any time and let us know how it's going -- we can't wait to hear from you!

Timeline of Research

October: Stakeholder interviews and meetings

November: Online journals with base Anglo, persuadable Anglo and base Latino voters from across the state

February: Ethnographies: persuadable Anglo women in Chandler, base Latina women in Glendale, mixed-race mixed-gender base millennials in Tucson, Latino men in Yuma

March: Online survey (800-person sample, reflective of Arizona population)

June/July: Focus groups with mixed-gender African-Americans in Phoenix, mixed-gender Asian Americans in Phoenix, mixed-gender Navajo voters in Phoenix and on the Navajo Nation

01

The Landscape

Voters see our political system as broken.

Across party lines, and across race, age, gender, and geography, voters agree that our political system is broken. They believe that politicians make decisions based on money, and that they listen more to donors, lobbyists, and corporations than to the people who elected them. Voters are frustrated by partisan bickering and by the sense that politics is omnipresent and not related to people's day to day concerns. And voters see all of us paying the price: our schools are underfunded, our healthcare and prescription drugs are too expensive, our utility bills are too high, etc.

“

First of all, you can't even get noticed unless you're rich. Like that's the first problem. And in order to get rich, you have to basically pander to like rich people or corporations. So we just— **there's just no representation for the common person anymore.**”

- Tucson

“

Because those with money are going to make sure that any change benefits them and if there is a change and it doesn't help them they are going to use their money and power to make sure that change doesn't happen. They are going to make the change to help them. If it doesn't help them they are going to stop it and if it helps them they are going to advance it.”

- Phoenix

Voters don't distinguish between politicians and government.

Voters conflate government institutions with the corrupt politicians who currently inhabit government. They think both are broken and corrupt.

“

In the big picture, like the federal, like, they've all, like, basically been bought out, like corporations. And **it's a matter of which corporations are they gonna serve.** And they have to pretend to act like they care about what we think. And to a certain degree they do it in order to get elected, but if they can kind of pretend for a while, like, you know, they get all this money and they're not helping people.”

- Tucson

“

Well I think we were all kind of commenting earlier about how the sales pitch is one thing and then what you actually get when they're in office, I think they're, they're both alike in that, they seem to fuel a division by being disrespectful of each other, and you know, using inflammatory words towards one another, that **they're kind of modeling that we're not a unified America** because they can't have a civilized discussion about their disagreements to come to some kind of agreement. So I think on both parties there's stubbornness and just a general, almost contempt—”

- Tucson

Voters have negative feelings about Republicans and Democrats.

Although Republicans are seen as closer to corporate interests, **voters think both parties are corrupt.** In addition, voters think Democrats are weak and unable to articulate what they stand for.

Voters have negative feelings about Republicans and Democrats.

“
I think Democrats
are corrupted too.”
- Tucson

“
No, I think it’s changed. I think that’s why I said the parties have become more similar when I was a young kid, I remember people going for Democrat because they wanted more help. They wanted more help from the government. That’s why you go to Democrat. At least when I was a kid, your parents will talk, and as I got older at school, I kind of saw that as well. At least it seemed to me, my interpretation of it. But now I don’t see that anymore. I think Democrat, 20 years ago I would have said, yeah. Now I don’t, they become worse than the Republicans.”

- Tucson

Voters know very little about state politics.

When it comes to politics, **voters are paying much more attention to Trump and to the national discourse** than to anything happening in Arizona, and Ducey and state legislators have very low name recognition. **Within the context of state politics, education and healthcare are top issues.**

Priorities for the AZ State Government

% top priority

TOP TIER

- Making **healthcare** and health insurance more affordable in AZ (71%)
- Improving AZ's **neighborhood public schools** (68%)
- Preventing 30,000 AZ **children** from **losing health insurance** coverage due to Congress's inaction (61%)

2nd TIER

- Protecting AZ's **environment**, air, and water (59%)
- Keeping **taxes low** and **balancing the state budget** (58%)
- Encouraging more clean, **renewable energy** (52%)
- Attracting more **high wage jobs** (52%)
- Protecting and expanding **voting access** for AZ's citizens (51%)

3rd TIER

- Protecting women's access to **reproductive health care** services (49%)
- Raising taxes on the rich** and **large corporations** to fund schools (45%)
- Fixing AZ's roads**, highways, and other infrastructure (43%)
- Lessening the **influence of money** and campaign donors on AZ (43%)
- Creating a way for AZ residents to **buy into state Medicaid program** (42%)

4th TIER

- Cracking down on illegal **immigration** (39%)
- Reforming AZ's **criminal justice** system (38%)
- Raising taxes on the rich** and **large corporations** to balance the budget (34%)
- Providing AZ **DREAMers** with **in-state tuition** to AZ public universities (32%)
- Strengthening **workplace protections** and benefits for AZ workers (28%)

How voters see Trump: it's complicated!

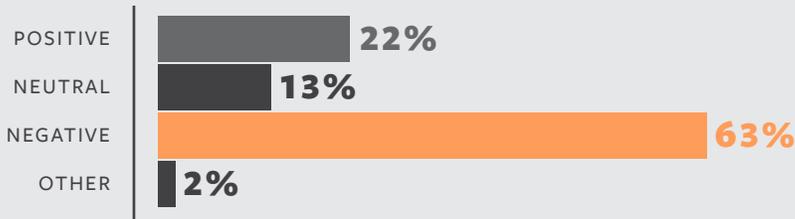
For Latinos living in heavily first and second-generation communities, Donald Trump and his anti-immigrant agenda pose an existential threat to how they and their friends, family members, and neighbors lead their lives. As such, he is likely a key symbol for engaging and ultimately organizing these

voters. From conversations with stakeholders, it seems the same is likely true for other communities directly threatened by Trump's policies, like Muslim Americans.

On the other hand, white voters, especially more moderate white voters, and Latinos from more

multi-generational communities, like the Latino men we spoke to in Yuma, are less affected by Trump day to day. They support some of his policies, even if they see his conduct as unprofessional. For them, rhetoric that paints Trump as a villain may feel partisan and therefore be a turn-off.

Negative Sentiments About Trump Outnumber Positive Sentiments by 3-to-1 Margin



MOST POPULARLY ASSOCIATED WORDS:

INCOMPETENT	STUPID	ASSHOLE
LIAR	EFFECTIVE	EGOMANIAC
IDIOT	DANGEROUS	IMPULSIVE
DIFFERENT	PRESIDENT	DISHONEST
ARROGANT	CORRUPT	DISGUSTING
BULLY	IGNORANT	GREAT
UNSTABLE	DETERMINED	BOLD

“

He just wants to make his thing—make America great again, and he is only thinking about Americans, and not people personally because when will we really see all of this racism, if not until he came into office. All of these people thinking whites are better than blacks, Hispanics and any other race. I mean, it has always been there but now, since he has been running the country, they feel like they can just come out and just be better than any other race.”

- Phoenix

“

No. You just say government and Trump is the thought.”

- Phoenix

“

Since you're on Twitter, I think it's totally inappropriate that Donald Trump gets on Twitter and argues with people. As a president, that type of person and role model, you can't do that, man.”

- Phoenix

“

I think it started back when Obama came in. I think that's when it started, and that lines were drawn and everybody was getting really heated and then your race mattered and your female/non-female, and it just kind of started to boil and get to where that is. But now it's, with Trump it's like, um, you know, I have a feeling some of my best friends feel, but we don't talk about it because the minute you start to talk about it, you're like, “Ooh, their opinion's different than mine,” so, and they're heated about it, and so you just wait.”

- Chandler

02

Our Frame

1. Be relentless in connecting those in power now to the corruption currently associated with government. We need to repeat it over and over and over and over: those in power now are corrupt and are intentionally undermining government to benefit themselves, their donors, lobbyists, and greedy corporations, taking much-needed resources away from the rest of us.

2. Talk about the state that we want to live in: one that offers opportunities to all of us, regardless of the color of our skin or where we come from, instead of just the wealthy few. Talk about how government can level the playing field for all of us, if we take responsibility for getting involved. By taking action, we can create an Arizona that works for everyone.

3. Finally, talk about the need to rein in corruption and bad actors going forward. We are fighting to ensure that rules are enforced fairly in the future, and that there are no free passes for the well-off, greedy corporations or political donors.

Q:

OK, now you're going to do something a little different. On each of the following 11 screens you will find a series of descriptions of types of people or groups of people. For each screen, please select the description that brings out the **most positive** reaction from you, and then select the description that brings out the **most negative** reaction from you.

RANK ORDERED DESCRIPTIONS
THE WELL-CONNECTED
THE WEALTHY
MILLIONAIRES
THE RICH
THE WEALTHIEST
BIG CORPORATIONS
THE RICHEST
WEALTHY CORPORATIONS
CORPORATE INTERESTS
BILLIONAIRES
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS
THE TOP 1 PERCENT
THE ELITE
THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT
LOBBYISTS
GREEDY CORPORATIONS
CORRUPT CORPORATIONS



Bringing It All Together

It's time we fight for an Arizona that offers opportunities to all of us.

A state where everyone can afford to see a doctor when they're sick. A state where all children have good public schools that prepare them for the future. A state where people can have a good-paying job that lets them save, or take time off to get well or care for a sick family member. A state where our political leaders listen to OUR voices, and are honest and accountable to US, not to money from greedy, corrupt corporations and their lobbyists. We all know our politics are broken, with partisan bickering and self-serving officials standing in the way of progress. **But together, we can ensure government opens up opportunities for everyone, no matter the color of our skin or where we come from.**

On the following pages, we apply our frame to a series of specific issues. We've been careful to choose language that research suggests will be effective. But these are not intended to be recommendations for exact sentences or phrases you should use word-for-word. Instead, they are suggestions of how our general frame could be applied to a few of the issues that matter most to Arizona residents.

Education

Schools, like families, should help our children grow into healthy, strong, well-rounded adults. But year after year, conservative lawmakers have cut taxes for their rich friends instead of funding education. They listen to lobbyists and corporate donors instead of teachers and parents, and our children pay the price. Bottom-of-the-barrel salaries for teachers and other school staff have led to a huge educator shortage and to over-crowded classrooms that make it hard for students to learn and succeed. We need leaders who will fight for the schools our children deserve.

Healthcare

Everyone deserves to be able to see a doctor when they're sick. No one in America should be going without treatment they need because they can't afford it. But today, Arizona families face out of control out of pocket costs for things like premiums, co-pays, and prescription drugs. That's because corrupt politicians are listening to money from greedy insurance and drug corporations instead of paying attention to the needs of families.

Jobs & The Economy

No one should have to choose between keeping their job and taking time off to get well or care for a sick child or family member. In 2016, Arizona voters approved a measure to gradually increase the state's minimum wage to \$12 by 2020 and provide earned sick time to workers if they get sick or need to care for a sick child or parent. Nearly 800,000 Arizonans got a raise, nearly a million got sick time, and unemployment actually went down. But that didn't stop politicians from listening to lobbyists and corporate donors and attempting to repeal our minimum wage increases and paid sick days. We need leaders who will fight for our families and working people, not more of the same corrupt politicians.

Clean Energy

Arizona is the sunniest state in the nation, and yet we get only 6% of our energy from solar! That's because APS, the state's largest utility company, has spent millions to get politicians elected who will do as they want. APS and their friends have re-written the rules to benefit themselves, even if it means that Arizonans end up breathing dirty air and drinking dirty water. We need to fight back and demand more clean energy to create good jobs, keep our air and water clean and ensure we can pass down a healthy environment to future generations.

Things to **Think About**

When possible (and when we can do it in a way that feels authentic!), **cast our solutions as “consensus” and “mainstream,” contrasting with conservative extremism, and present ourselves as the ones willing to put partisanship aside to focus on solving problems.** Even left-leaning voters are very responsive to positions that sound “balanced” and “moderate” and are interested in candidates, campaigns, and organizations that have set aside partisanship to focus on what matters. While there’s room to be bold and aggressive, we need to be sure we’re channeling energy effectively and going after the true bad actors—greedy corporations, lobbyists, the political establishment, corrupt officials—instead of the opposing party.

In the online survey, language about “leveling the playing field” and electing people who are “honest...and stand up for their values” outperformed language about “women, young people, people of color, and working people taking back power” or “electing a younger, more diverse set of candidates.” This pattern held across all audiences, including people of color. Similarly, voters, including people of color, say that they care less about electing a candidate who “looks like me and sounds like me” or “has worked in the local community” and more about electing someone who is “honest” and

“listens to the people.” The same pattern held in the online journals. Of course, **it’s critical to have diverse candidates, spokespeople, and leaders**, for many reasons—including the fact that regardless of what they say, voters want to see themselves represented in our campaigns and our movements. But when it comes to messaging, **it makes sense to balance language that foregrounds identity with language about building a better Arizona for all of us and electing leaders who will listen, be honest, and be accountable.**

In this case, respondents were asked to rank qualities they look for in a political candidate. On each of the following 11 screens they were presented a series of descriptions of types of people or groups of people, and asked to select the description that brings out the **most positive** reaction, and then select the description that brings out the **most negative** reaction.

RANK ORDERED DESCRIPTIONS
HONEST
ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PEOPLE
PROVIDES OBJECTIVE FACTS, NOT SPIN
LISTENS TO THE PEOPLE
SOMEONE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN TRUST
TRANSPARENT
DOESN'T TAKE MONEY FROM SPECIAL INTERESTS
DOESN'T PROMISE THINGS THEY CAN'T DELIVER
DOESN'T ONLY SAY WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR
TELLS IT LIKE IT IS
HAS A RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT
PROVES TO YOU THEY ARE NOT BOUGHT
WORKED IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY
KNOWS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO STRUGGLE
INDEPENDENT FROM EITHER PARTY
WANTS TO BLOW UP THE SYSTEM
LOOKS LIKE ME AND SOUNDS LIKE ME



03

How to Use

Be real!

In this political moment, voters across the political spectrum fundamentally desire authenticity. **Their BS meter is incredibly high, and they pick up on political spin very easily.** Voters are more inclined to trust candidates who don't over-promise, who are consistent about what they believe and why, and who don't sound like typical politicians. The same is true of organizations and issue campaigns.



Wash, rinse and repeat, repeat, repeat!

Current knowledge says the average person needs to see or hear your message 7 times before it even remotely begins to resonate with them. People are busy and distracted and so we need to make sure we repeat our message as often as we can, using the same language in every interaction with voters—online and off. Progressives love to have tons of different facts, but if we want voters to hear us and our message, we need to repeat, repeat, repeat. **We know our message resonates with voters. We should be shouting it from the rooftops every chance we get.**

Tell stories.

Storytelling is the single best tool for getting our message out. **Begin by sharing your story of self—a story about who you are and why you are part of this work.** When did you first decide to get involved in social change? Why did you make that choice? How has your life been different since that moment? From there, you need to offer your audience a story about where we are now, the story of the problems we face as a community, a state, or a society. What's happening? Why does it matter? Who is to blame? Who's fighting back? Finally, you need to tell a story about what could happen if the listener takes action. If we act collectively to address the problems we face, how might our communities change? How might we change as individuals? This toolkit offers some starting points to help as you shape your story.

6 steps

to bring our
frame to life.

1

Meet Arizonans where they are.

2

Talk about the state we want to create.

3

Be relentless in calling out the opposition and connecting them to corruption in government.

4

Be real, authentic, and honest.

5

Tell stories, drawing on your own experiences.

6

Repeat, repeat, repeat!

Additional resources:

We recommend checking out the Midwest Culture Lab (<https://tinyurl.com/MidwestCultureLab>), which has great resources on how to tell stories and create content in a way that's real, authentic, and grounded. We also recommend checking out the Demos Race-Class narrative. Their research in four states (Ohio, Indiana, California, and Minnesota) found similar results to what we learned in Arizona. In addition to calling out corruption, they recommend explicitly articulating the ways in which conservatives use racism to divide working people and protect their own power, paired with a call to collective action. Although we have not tested their specific language here in Arizona, their results certainly overlap with our findings, especially when it comes to pointing out the corruption in the current political establishment. More information about their research and their specific recommendations is available at <https://tinyurl.com/DemosRCN>.