



# VOTE

**BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY!**



*Motivating young  
voters of color  
messaging guide*

*Advancement Project National Office*  
*October 2020*

# *Introduction*

Our nation has once again reached a moment of racial reckoning. Throughout 2020, young people of color have led the racial justice movement's response to police violence and the extrajudicial murders of Black people at the hands of white vigilantes. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020, as well as the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and Daniel Prude, sparked an international movement to defend Black life.

This messaging guide is being published by Advancement Project National Office in the shadow of one of the greatest miscarriages of justice this year: the refusal of the state of Kentucky to indict Louisville Metropolitan Police officers for the murder of Breonna Taylor. The decision, like so many other unjust rulings before, compels us to continue the fight to defend Black lives – both in the streets and at the ballot box.

With the fate of Black lives and our democracy literally on the ballot this fall, it is critical we motivate young voters to cast a ballot. This guide provides messaging insight on how to motivate young voters of color ahead of the November 2020 elections for President, sheriffs, state attorneys, judges and more. Based on focus groups and national polling of Black, Latinx, Native and Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) people ages 18-24 years old, we have crafted language to help advocates mobilize young voters of color to cast a ballot. Through consistent work with our Young Voters of Color Advisory Committee – a diverse group of Black and Brown young adults from across the country – we also learned the challenges facing this demographic and their vision for civic engagement.

We have used their feedback, opinions and dreams to thrive to inform our Young Voters of Color Campaign, *Vote. By Any Means Necessary*, and hope you will do the same.

We encourage you to incorporate the framing and sample messaging included into your Get Out the Vote work to best motivate and mobilize Black and Brown voters in the final days before the 2020 elections.

*Advancement Project National Office Team*

# *How Young Voters of Color Think and Feel about Voting*

In August and September 2020, Advancement Project National Office conducted a national poll of 1,915 young voters of color ages 18-24 years old (Black, Latinx, Native, and Asian and Pacific Islander voters). The summary below details findings from this survey, as well as three focus groups conducted on August 13, 2020 with Black voters in Georgia, Latinx voters in Florida, and AAPI voters in Virginia. Polling oversampled young voters of color in Florida, Georgia, Michigan and Virginia. In the month of August, Advancement Project National Office also assembled a diverse group of young people from across the country to discuss the voting challenges facing them, and their vision for an inclusive democracy.

## *Summary*

**Most plan to vote and are motivated to do so, but there is room to increase voter engagement.** Young voters of color rate their motivation to vote in the November election at a 7 on a scale from 1-10, with one being not at all motivated to vote and 10 being extremely motivated. Battleground voters were slightly more motivated to vote, and education is a top driver.

**Young voters of color face multiple challenges in casting a ballot.**

Members of the Young Voters of Color Advisory Committee identified several challenges facing them and their peers. These included a general lack of education around civics, politics and voting in school, few polling locations in their communities, a lack of transportation to polling locations, strict work and school schedules, and outdated information on websites run by election officials.

**Young people of color are widely pessimistic, and personally grappling with our country's mounting challenges. Few seem inspired by or engaged in the current political climate.**

Although most describe voting positively, seeing it as a way to have an impact on the issues they care about, there is widespread pessimism around the direction of the country. Seventy-five percent (75%) of young voters of color feel things in the country are headed in the wrong direction. Qualitative data shows many feel left out of the political process and conversation, and that their collective voice is not being heard.

**Racism is top-of mind for young voters of color.**

Across all demographics, racism and racial justice is the leading factor in making the decision on whether to vote in the 2020 election. Police brutality in addition to rising anti-Asian sentiments stoked by Donald Trump, were concerns among top concerns of Black and AAPI voters.

**Many young voters of color have taken political action; more say they are likely to take action in the future.**

While digital actions like posting and sharing content on social media are more common, large numbers have protested, or say they will. A quarter of young voters of color have protested in the summer's uprisings and one in four have voted in an election previously. Low propensity voters are still civically engaged through protesting and volunteering.

**Coronavirus is also a top concern.**

Young people are struggling greatly in time of COVID-19. Many spoke of the effects of COVID-19, the death of family members, and economic pressures. They worry about their job prospects, the health of their families, vaccines, school, and people wearing masks in their neighborhoods.

**Vote-by-mail is worrying and many saw opportunities for error.**

Many young people of color worry about vote-by-mail and the state of voting security. In all states, many worried about ballots being collected properly, and the COVID-safety of voting in person. Some worried vote-by-mail ballots had a "50/50" chance of being counted. Others "hoped" it would work out.

# *Messaging Strategies to Motivate Young Voters of Color*

- **Respond to feelings of powerless and not being heard.** Black and Brown voters feel largely left out of national political conversations and feel overlooked by decision-makers. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of young voters of color agreed with the statement: “Too often, communities of color and young people are left out of the process and overlooked by the people in power making decisions about our lives. Voting is the best way to build political power and take control of our future.” Qualitative data found that also found that Black and Latinx respondents felt unspoken to and disconnected from politics. When speaking to these voters, acknowledge their disillusionment and the failure of political entities to effectively engage young voters. Position voting as a way to build community power.
- **Explicitly discuss race and racial injustice.** Among Black, Latinx, Native and AAPI voters, racial justice was the most important issue motivating them to cast a ballot. Because young voters overwhelmingly detailed voting as one of the most important ways to impact change on the issues they cared about, position casting a ballot as a way to address issues like racism, police brutality, and immigration.
- **Focused messaging on inequality and power work best.** Among low propensity voters, what works best is positioning voting as a way to ensure the voices of communities of color are heard and build political power. Messages positioning voting as one way to fight systemic injustice also resonated with this audience.

**Focus on the issues, not the Presidential horserace.** Half of young voters of color (53%) surveyed agreed that they not excited about presidential candidates Joe Biden or Donald Trump. Since neither candidate is a motivating factor driving turnout, focus on the issues Black and Brown voters care about: racism and education.

- **Voter education, especially around vote-by-mail, and how to reduce the risk of coronavirus exposure is needed.** Like all potential voters, these audiences need education about new voting methods and how to reduce the risk of coronavirus exposure. This audience responded extremely well to instructive content detailing how-to-vote, key deadlines and voting requirements.
- **Connect protest and organizing to voting.** Young voters of color responded well to bold messaging around the issues they care about – racism, inequality, and their lack of representation. Translating images of recent protests to voting was very well-received including strong, vibrant images that visualized the victims of state violence.

- **Messaging emphasizing voting as a responsibility resonates the least.** Messaging describing voting as “everyone's duty” in a democracy was among the worst performing messages for young voters of color, especially low propensity voters. Young Black and Latinx voters described voting as a choice and an action in which their community did not always feel welcome to participate.

# *Vote. By Any Means Necessary!*

## *Sample Talking Points*

- It is abundantly clear that our nation is headed in the wrong direction and that Black and Brown communities are bearing the brunt of two pandemics: the novel coronavirus and state violence. The failure of our nation's criminal legal system to secure justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor and others, indicate that our nation desperately needs change.
- COVID-19 has exposed pre-existing inequities in health care, employment, education and housing between communities of color and their white counterparts. Black and Brown people have experienced disproportionate contraction and fatality rates, as well as unemployment rates because of an overrepresentation among low-wage workers.
- These issues have affected young people across the country. Many have lost family and friends to COVID-19. Many more struggle to juggle work, school and childcare in an unprecedented national emergency.
- With over 200,000 Americans succumbing to the coronavirus and millions mobilized by the unjust killings of Black people this summer, it is clear that the time for change is now.
- Throughout 2020, young people of color took action leading demonstrations and marches to demand justice. These efforts yielded important wins like:
  - The passage of Breonna's Law, banning no-knock warrants in Louisville, Kentucky.
  - The affirmative vote of the Minneapolis City Council to begin the dismantling of its police department which further lead to Minneapolis Public Schools to terminate its contract with school resource officers
  - The introduction of the BREATHE Act in Congress, which would divest federal funds from policing and mass incarceration.
- This is what's possible when young people of color take the lead and demand better for their communities. This what happens when the nation follows their lead.
- This November, Black and Brown young people have an opportunity to translate the political power they've built in the streets to make change at the ballot box. By voting,



young voters can lead the transformation of their communities on issues like racial justice, health care, police brutality, the economy and education.

- Gen Z and Millennials will be the [largest voting bloc](#) this year, making up 37% of the electorate. That's more than 1 in 3 voters! Voting is one more way young voters of color can make their voice heard and ensure that the people elected to public office reflect their values and commitment to key issues.
- **This election is about more than the presidential candidates; it's about our communities.** Locally, judges, district attorneys, sheriffs, and school board members in our neighborhoods are up for election. These public officials will determine whether police and white supremacists are held accountable, whether youth in communities of color will get a quality education, and whether Black and Brown community members will face disparate treatment in court and face harsh sentencing.
- Elections for mayor, city council and county governing bodies will determine whether our communities will ultimately divest from policing and mass incarceration or implement a new vision for public safety. By voting, young voters of color can continue to build power to ensure their voices are heard on issues that directly impact them and their families.
- **Regardless of how they vote, Black and Brown voters must make a plan to ensure they vote safely.** Voting early, when there will be less people at the polls, is one way Black and Brown voters can vote without jeopardizing their health or the health of their loved ones.
- Contrary to public narratives, vote-by-mail is another safe and secure way to vote. Voters can ensure their ballot is counted by requesting their ballot early, returning it to their local election offices or a drop box. Voters should track their ballots online to ensure it is received and counted.
- In the midst of a global health pandemic, the nation has reached a watershed moment around race and justice. Despite the attacks on communities of color, young voters of color must vote by any means necessary.