To: Interested Parties  
From: Co-Director of Electoral Powerbuilding  
Date: February 15, 2022  
SUBJECT: Race, Voter Suppression, and the 2022 Election

The Electoral Elephant in the Room

As operatives both at Community Change Action and with our in-state partners across the country begin to formalize our best plans to ensure progressive victories this fall, the role and impact of race and voter suppression remains front of mind.

In this memo we will unpack how Black and Latino communities have historically voted and are viewing this election cycle — as well as how we must navigate the deeply and inextricably tied issues of voter suppression and race.

Race, Voter Suppression, and the 2022 Election

Republicans have made racial resentment a feature of their campaigns in a more obvious way in the last decade. Whether it be on Black Lives Matters, policing, or immigration, we’ve seen consistent polarization leading to more divergence on racial issues between the parties than at any point since the 1970’s. One recent example is the promise by President Biden to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer with a Black woman, leading one Republican Senator to remark that he wanted “a nominee who knew a law book from a J. Crew catalog” — implying that a Black woman could not meet those standards. This is fairly representative of the GOP’s increasing use of racial dog whistles and policy attacks against the New American Majority to attract white voters. Since the 2008 election of Barack Obama we have seen increased whitelash resulting in increased white support for the GOP.

Credit: Eric Gay from the Associated Press
While Community Change Action and our grassroots partners work with white voters in situations where their votes are needed to win, those efforts are focused on younger white voters who may be more open in their racial attitudes, are facing economic headwinds, and have more progressive political tendencies. These voters also tend to end up enmeshed and confused by the changes to voting systems that the GOP creates.

**BLACK VOTERS: Most impacted and targeted by GOP policies**

As we have seen for decades, people of color continue to support the Democratic Party and its agenda at a higher rate than white folks. Black voters in particular have been in the spotlight recently as their voting power becomes determinant in many states. When Black voters turnout in high numbers states can flip Blue — as we saw in 2020 states in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Georgia. in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Georgia. But when they are demotivated, such as in 2016, the right wins.

Recently, the Black community has led conversations on reforms to policing — including the **end of No Knock Warrants** — and because of it we are likely to see police reform taken up as a policy priority for grassroots and advocacy organizations. Within this election cycle, Community Change Action will continue to work with Black-led organizations to inform voters on how policies on offer from both parties will affect their lives. We will also organize voters to support legislation that will help level playing the field for their communities.

Black voters are looking at policies more closely. They are skeptical of the failure by Democrats to pass voting reform, police reform, and parts of the Build Back Better legislation. While there have been inroads by Republicans around economic and
educational issues within the Black community in recent years, they still represent the most supportive and consistent voting bloc for Democrats. The below quote from our 2020 focus group encapsulates what we see and hear in the field:

"As usual many in power are doing all that they can to suppress the vote of anyone who does not support their political position. Too many antics are employed to suppress the votes of many disenfranchised populations - requiring certain types of ID that are not always affordable, limiting access to polling stations, only supplying polls with 3-4 working machines, thereby resulting in long lines where folks must wait 6-8 hours to cast their votes.

It's all games used to make this process cumbersome and turn people away instead of using technology and common sense to make sure that all who are citizens are fully able to participate. Now, additional games and tactics will be introduced to further constrain the acknowledgment and counting of votes received because those in power do not like the results.

Deana E.
Georgia Black Voter

Black voters in particular are feeling the effects of voter suppression efforts. At the same time, internalized narratives around the decisiveness of Black electoral power — especially in key states like Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin — have empowered Black voters who know they can reward or punish those running. For example, after then-Secretary of State Brian Kemp tried to limit those who could vote via voter roll purges, Black voters responded by proceeding to flip the state Blue in 2020 for the first time since 1992. Black voters weathered long lines and overcame last-minute polling location snafus and unannounced changes to voting locations. Many were inflamed knowing they were the target of Kemp’s voter suppression proposals as well as the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. With Kemp and Abrams on the ballot again this year, it is likely we see similar efforts by Black voters to make a statement with their vote.

Community Change Action and our partners will work to ease access by supporting legislative reforms efforts as well as increasing access to voting by mail (VBM) opportunities. This includes actually signing folks up for VBM, and explaining deadlines and next steps should ballot rejections occur. We also will continue to collect and share stories of hardship and partner with other organizations in the case of needed legal action. This is on top of the campaign tactics we have long perfected of canvassing, phone banking, and relational voter turnout. Community Change Action is leading a Defend Black Voters campaign in Michigan that is designed to push back on corporate support for right-wing attacks on voting rights.
LATINO VOTERS: Under resourced and misunderstood persuadable voters

Latinos have been treated as a monolithic group for decades, but the long-time warning that there are significant cleavages within the community is only now being heard in some organizational and consultant circles. There is a variety and divergence of views across the Latino community for many issues with, for example, nearly 8% of the Black population in this country being Afro-Latino (a group that makes up 6.3% of the total Latino population in the U.S.). In 2020, we saw in South Florida how diverse Latinos are in terms of variances by country of origin and in the persuadability of this group. Factors like country of origin and cultural experiences with socialism impacted the likelihood of those voters turning out for Republicans, leading to the largest margin of loss by a party in the State of Florida in 3 decades.

Among differences, Latinos have internally are obvious ones such as the location the voter presently lives in; language preference; and more hard to determine pieces like country of origin (and depending on timing the timing when the move to the United States there is a variety of attitudinal and lived experience differences within even the same nationality); the length of time since emigrating by either that person or a family member; and the level of assimilation a family has undergone. The concept of being “Latino” itself is blurred in places across the Southwest, especially Texas where many will tell you the “border crossed them” and are more likely to refer to themselves as “Tejanos.”

Additionally, Latinos represent a fifth of the country but are rarely placed at the center of the country’s political debate and are even more rarely treated in electoral programs as key to victories. The last election showed the chronic underinvestment in this constituency combined with the lack of consistent face-to-face contact resulted in a loss of support for Democrats among Latinos from the border areas of Texas to Nevada and New Jersey. However, we also have seen a bounceback where numbers have remained steady for Latino’s identification and support for Democrats increased in a less hyper-partisan environment.

Nonetheless, participation in our democracy is actually something highly valued by Latino voters. Voter suppression laws often hurt Latino participation — and Latino voters face voter suppression combined with a deluge of disinformation. For example, in Houston, Texas we are seeing nearly 40% of all ballots being returned due to new laws. Houston has a population that is 45% of the Latino, Arizona had a law on the books for six decades requiring English proficiency to reduce the “ignorant Mexican vote.” In 2022, we will continue to execute culturally competent
bilingual programs with our partners in Arizona and in key states like Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico and Wisconsin, including in digital and traditional communication platforms such as *El Tiempo Latino*. Community Change Action will also support a constitutional amendment ballot initiative called Arizonans for Fair Elections that will protect the rights of voters to remain on the popular permanent early voting list (PEVL) and allow for Arizonans to be automatically registered to vote.

For the 33% of Latino voters that are foreign born or first generation – the tie to being “Latino” is significantly stronger than for those who are third generation or more. The latter are significantly closer to white voters in attitudes – and are also the group most likely to use YouTube as a news source and to be connected on social networks per Nielsen. This allows for more significant reach by digital programs with a community that also has lower established partisan affinity. Because Latinos are not as “loyal” to a party, they represent a significant voting bloc that requires persuasion and messaging.

Source: Pew Research Center
These factors led Community Change Action to test leveraging the relationships between young trusted messengers and their audience to mobilize voters. We are continually interested in making sure that this diverse community is receiving the best information possible about their ability to vote and who represents their interests, targeting voters that are often ignored or overlooked in traditional campaign plans.

Our movement is navigating the choppy waters of both targeted voter suppression and the many layers of complexity that diversity itself brings. Community Change Action remains firmly committed to Black, Latino and immigrant communities because we know they can be decisive in choosing the path our country takes. Ultimately, voters’ motivation to overcome structural obstacles is driven by seeing their own success woven into progressive representation. Together in 2022 we will turn out voters of color, figure out how to message various subsets and empower and engage our communities in civic life—not just for one election but for year-round engagement and to win legislation that makes a difference.