

The logo consists of a red square with the word "FAITH" in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, the words "IN PUBLIC LIFE" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, also in all caps.

FAITH ON THE FRONTLINES 2022 CAMPAIGN NARRATIVE

This document draws on insights from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the Voting Rights Lab, the Research Collaborative, Over Zero, and listening sessions with faith leaders in Georgia, Florida and Ohio working to ensure free, fair and safe elections at the state and local levels.

Document purpose

Values-based narrative framework for public remarks, written materials such as op-eds, sermons and congregational resources, as well as media interview preparation. You can use it to help shape your own messages, and use passages verbatim.

Our grounding

We believe in the divinely given dignity of every person, the moral call to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that God desires our liberation and freedom. We believe that the equality of all is a foundation of the well-being of the community and that working together toward the good of one another is an expression of the common values of our many faiths.

We thus have a moral responsibility to ensure that all of our neighbors' voices are heard in free, fair, safe elections that hold elected officials accountable to the will of the voters. Consultation of the people, which is the foundation of democracy, begins with counting the people's votes. Bringing democracy and freedom into being requires prophetically calling public officials to protect and expand access to the polls, and to honestly certify the results of the 2022 elections. We must also uphold the values of truth and courageous peace during an election season with heightened risk of disinformation-fueled violence.

Our narrative – placing 2022 in a deeper context

Throughout our sacred texts and history, when people of faith come together and act upon the divine call to love our neighbors and seek justice, our communities become healthier and more free. We see this over and over – from the Exodus to the abolition of slavery to the U.S. Civil Rights movements to our current confrontation of white supremacy.

In 2022, politicians and demagogues who advance white Christian nationalism seek to interfere with our election process, put up barriers to voting, and resort to intimidation to deny us the freedom to choose our leaders, to make our own decisions about our lives, and to provide for our families. Their dehumanizing and dishonest messages are meant to stop the promise of democracy for all from becoming realized.

As people of faith, we know that injustice never has the last word. When we work together to ensure that voting is safe and accessible for all, no attempts to divide, deceive, intimidate or prevent us from casting a ballot and having it counted shall prevail.

In 2020, diverse faith leaders worked together to help people cast ballots amid widespread confusion about how to vote, and to ensure that election officials counted every vote and honored the will of the voters. As a result of these collective efforts, our neighbors voted in record numbers and attempts to stop certification of the results failed.

We must continue this work today, not only for ourselves but for our families, neighbors and future generations. While voting alone will not tear down all the barriers and injustices we face, it is an essential step toward building a nation where everyone is free to provide for their family and live with dignity in safe, healthy communities. Ensuring that everyone has the freedom to participate in the election safely, accessibly and without interference from white Christian nationalism is essential moral work for people of faith.

Our challenges

In this election season we face many challenges, but we can meet these head on with clear, focused messaging. Below is guidance that is relevant to urgent challenges identified by leaders in key states, which are broadly applicable.

Doubts about whether voting matters:

Widespread doubts across race, religion and state – but especially in African-American communities – about whether voting makes a difference in people’s lives and communities discourage trust and participation in the 2022 election. For good reason, voters and nonvoters alike often feel unheard and unrepresented. People feeling they have no stake is both a symptom and a cause of continued unresponsiveness.

Politicians who serve only a powerful few seek to stoke these feelings so people will not hold them accountable to serving us all.

What we can do: Key #1 - Acknowledge that people often feel unheard for good reason.

Key #2 - Portray voting as one step toward enacting policies that enable us to raise healthy families and live with dignity – not a transformative one-step solution.

Key #3 - Tie voting and participation in civic life to concrete policies that address our communities’ problems and enable us to thrive. Choose policies that are locally relevant and impactful.

Values to invoke in our messages and stories: accountability, voice, family

Example message:

“We know that voting alone doesn’t solve all our problems, but it’s a necessary step. The journey to justice runs through the polling place. That’s why we’re here to make sure the doors stay open until every person has a say in who represents us. When we all have fair access to the ballot, we have the power to hold our leaders accountable to fixing the problems that go unsolved year after year, that stand in the way of raising a healthy, safe family with dignity.”

Barriers to voting:

Since the 2020 election, state legislatures have passed sweeping and complicated anti-voting laws that intentionally target Black and Brown voters. Voting options in many states that help people in under-represented communities cast a ballot – like 24-hour drop boxes, vote-by-mail, helping others vote by mail, and early voting – have been scaled back or taken away. This creates practical obstacles and confusion. While details of threats and barriers to voting vary from place to place, actions we can take are consistent no matter where we live.

Interference with election certification:

In most communities, elections are overseen and staffed by dedicated, well-trained people who take their jobs quite seriously. But in some places, 2020 election deniers have inserted themselves into important roles. Knowing who you are dealing with is critical. Dedicated officials will need messages of **solidarity** in the face of threats and disinformation, while those who espouse conspiracy theories may require bold public **pressure** to fulfill their oath to honestly certify the election results.

What we can do: Key #1 – Provide your congregation and community with accurate, nonpartisan information on how to vote.

Key #2 – call on officials with election oversight responsibilities to protect and expand access to the ballot.

Key #3 – call on officials with election oversight responsibilities to honestly certify the results of the election.

Values to invoke in our messages and stories: honesty, accountability, courage, sanctity.

Example solidarity message for election officials withstanding pressure:

“People of faith believe that voting is sacred. Anything that interferes with our neighbor’s ability to vote and to have their vote counted is sinful. Across faiths and across race, we are here to support courageous public servants doing the hard work of making sure that everyone can make their voice heard and hold their elected leaders accountable.”

Example pressure message for election officials who may be wavering:

“People of faith believe that voting is sacred. Anyone who interferes with our neighbor’s ability to vote commits a grave sin – especially officials who took an oath to uphold our democracy. Across faiths and across race, we are here to hold accountable any official who puts conspiracy theories or the interests of a political party before our neighbor’s freedom to vote.

Intimidation and violence:

The threat of violence against voters and people who run elections at the local level is serious and growing. Fortunately, you can proactively take action now to help prevent violence and to stop its spread if an incident occurs locally.

What we can do: Key #1 – Avoid inflating the severity of threats. Instead, help people feel empowered by emphasizing coming together.

Key #2 – Acknowledge local threats, place them in historical context, and emphasize how we, as a community, have overcome intimidation and violence in the past.

Key #3 – Publicly show up as diverse faith leaders in solidarity with targeted communities of voters. This requires preparation in the form of building relationships across religious and racial lines, monitoring threats, and making response plans in advance of potential incidents.

For more detailed guidance on messages that decrease the risk of violence, see [this guide](#) from our partners at Over Zero.

Values to invoke in our messages and stories: Courage, dignity, community and voice.

Example message:

Across faiths and across race, Georgia voters are showing up today in solidarity and support for everyone’s freedom to cast a ballot without fear or interference. We are nonviolently standing up for each other’s dignity and freedom to thrive – values we share across religions. We saw during the Civil Rights Movement that when people come together as communities of faith, freedom overcame violence and division, and people of all races gained greater access to choosing our leaders. We will not be turned around by those who attempt to deny our dignity and freedom based on race or religion or gender. We are coming together across race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability to exercise our freedom to choose the future of our communities’ leaders and policies through our sacred vote.

Language guidance

Opinion research from the Voting Rights Lab and ASO Communications reveals that certain election-related terms are more effective than others.

Say this	Instead of this
“Election “Attacking our freedom to vote”	“Voter suppression”
“Election interference”	“Election theft”
“Election manipulation”	“Election rigging”
“Vote by mail”	“Vote absentee”
“Make freedom and democracy real for all of us”	“Democracy reform” or “fix our democracy”
“Freedom to vote” and “right to vote”	“Voting rights”
“Free, fair, safe elections”	“Election integrity”
“Make voting safe and accessible”	“Make it easier to vote”

Constructing a compelling narrative

Sequence:

1. Lead by appealing to broadly shared values, such as family, solidarity, dignity and freedom.
2. Second, describe the antagonist, their motivation, and the problems they create.
3. Third, invoke a vision of what we accomplish by working together in service of our values.
4. Finally, make our call to action for the audience.

Elements:

Protagonists – People of faith coming together to ensure free, fair, safe elections that hold our leaders accountable to serving the entire community – no matter what we look like, how we pray or where we live. We are motivated by love for one another, and the belief that we all have dignity and deserve the freedom to raise families in a community where everyone thrives.

Antagonists (choose the most relevant to your context) – Certain politicians who serve only a powerful few. People who follow and spread a white Christian nationalist ideology, conspiracy theories and violence. Candidates who use violent and dehumanizing rhetoric to demonize people on the basis of race, religion or party. They use fear, bigotry and dishonesty to divide and distract us, and hoard power for themselves.

Conflict – Whether every American will be free to participate in choosing leaders who help us thrive, or a powerful few will govern to further white Christian nationalism and the interests of corporations. This election season is a crossroads moment for freedom and democracy.

Resolution – Everyone who seeks to vote can do so, the results of the election are honestly counted and certified, peace prevails at polling places, and leaders take office who we can hold accountable to enacting policies that enable us to thrive. Leaders genuinely consult and reflect the will of voters.

Imagery – Diverse people of faith, physically gathered in mutual support. The ballot. Safe communities. Fulfilling the oath of office.

Underlying assumptions – The future of democracy is at stake, and is worth saving. Our words and actions can have an impact.