

# Demos Action

**To: Progressive Leaders**  
**From: Adam Lioz, Demos Action Political Director**  
**Date: October 23, 2018**  
**RE: Responding Effectively to the GOP's Dog Whistle Closing Argument for 2018 Midterms**

Two weeks to the election, the GOP is once again doubling down on rhetoric intended to stoke voters' racial resentment using coded "dog whistle" attacks that preserve plausible deniability, a tactic [increasingly deployed](#) in the Trump era. Demos Action and partners have [conducted extensive research](#) on how to push back, including a new toolkit [available here](#).

On October 22nd, Alexander Burns and Astead W. Herdon [reported](#) in the New York Times:

*President Trump on Monday sharply intensified a Republican campaign to frame the midterm elections as a battle over immigration and race, issuing a dark and factually baseless warning that "unknown Middle Easterners" were marching toward the American border with Mexico.*

*The unsubstantiated charge marked an escalation of Mr. Trump's efforts to stoke fears about foreigners and crime ahead of the Nov. 6 vote, as he did to great effect in the presidential race. Mr. Trump and other Republicans are insistently seeking to tie Democrats to unfettered immigration and violent crime, and in some instances this summer and fall they have attacked minority candidates in nakedly racial terms.*

*...But Mr. Trump has not been alone in seeking to divide the electorate along racial lines this fall: As the congressional elections have approached, a number of Republican candidates and political committees have delivered messages plainly aimed at stoking cultural anxiety among white voters and even appealing to overt racism.*

On October 8th, Robert Costa and Matt Viser [reported](#) in the Washington Post:

*Republicans have cast the Trump resistance movement as "an angry mob," a term used by many of them to describe a faceless amalgamation of forces that they say threaten the country's order and, they hope, energize their voters.*

*...The characterization evokes fear of an unknown and out-of-control mass of people, and it taps into grievances about the nation's fast-moving cultural and demographic shifts that Republicans say are working against them. With its emphasis on the impact on traditional values and white voters, particularly men, it strikes the same notes as earlier Trump-fanned attention to immigrants, MS-13 gang members and African American football players protesting police treatment of young black men.*

You don't need to look far to see [rampant examples](#) of racial dog-whistling in recent weeks. A coordinated Republican ad campaign in New York [has been casting](#) Rhodes-Scholar Antonio Delgado, Democratic candidate in NY-19, as a "big-city rapper." Recently, embattled CA Rep. Duncan Hunter [released a TV campaign](#) implying his opponent Ammar Campa-Najjar is part of an effort of Islamists to "infiltrate" the U.S. government. Find more examples at the [Divide and Distract page](#) from our partners at [America's Voice](#), containing a database of race-baiting examples and links to submit or report new ads.

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New research details an effective way to fight back. Demos Action, Anat Shenker-Osorio (ASO Communications), and Ian Haney López (author of Dog Whistle Politics) have partnered on a Race Class Narrative project that shows how to talk around race and class together in ways that strengthen social solidarity while responding effectively to division and scapegoating. The research team's focus groups along with national and state-based surveys by Lake Research Partners demonstrate that candidates can run on a unifying race-class message that both mobilizes the base and increases appeal among persuadable voters, and provide clear guidance on how to do so.

The bottom line is this: the most effective response is to explicitly call out dog-whistle messaging for what it is - an attempt to divide and stoke racial resentment. Respond with a call for racial unity as we strive for a government and economy that works for all. "No matter if we're white, black, or brown we all want a better future for our families and we will not accept efforts to divide us."

[Please visit Demos Action's Race-Class Narrative homepage to learn more.](#)

Have further questions about how to counter racially divisive messaging and lead with a unifying, positive call for a multi-racial platform that works for *all* Americans? **Please contact us at [RCN@DemosAction.org](mailto:RCN@DemosAction.org).**