

POWER TO THE



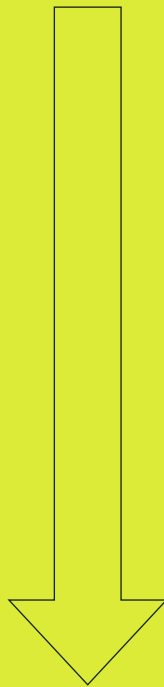
PEOPLE

CARE FOR THE



PLANET

HOW TO CRAFT
WINNING MESSAGES
FOR A SOCIALLY JUST,
GREEN EUROPE



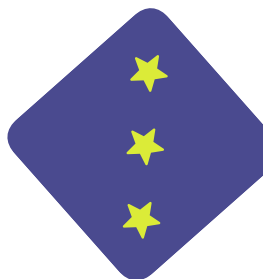
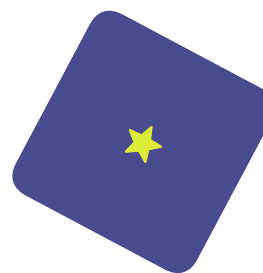
**A CONVERSATION
COMPASS
FOR ACTIVISTS**



THE EP ELECTIONS AND OUR PART AS CIVIL SOCIETY

In the high-stakes game of the 2024 European Parliament elections, we are gambling for nothing less than the future of climate and environmental policy in the European Union. For us as civil society, the rules are clear: Every policy decision must prioritise people and the planet to steer our societies towards sustainability and justice. The recent backlash against environmental and climate policies across Europe requires us to redouble efforts on our quest.

To win and avoid a European Parliament that puts people and planet in jeopardy, we must reconsider our tactics and reach outside our echo chambers. It's time to activate people who were not planning on voting to make a move for what we all want and need: A Europe of climate action, care for nature, community support and widespread solidarity.



**WE KNOW
OUR OPPONENTS
IN THIS GAME**



Far-right populists have increasingly instrumentalised climate action, environmental protection and marginalised communities to fuel fear and division — and their methods are spreading to the political mainstream.

**WE ALSO
KNOW
OUR ALLIES**



Civil society organisations across different sectors — climate, democracy, human rights and more — are more than ever committed to working together for socially just, sustainable, democratic and inclusive societies in Europe. National and local organisations are indispensable to reach people on the ground and in different contexts.

**WE KNOW
OUR
SUPERPOWERS**



To reclaim our story and motivate people to politically engage for fairer and greener societies, we must communicate clearly and compassionately. People listen to the other people in their lives, not to NGOs or institutions, so we aim to inspire and nurture conversations as a tool for building connections, dispelling misinformation, and mobilising collective action. We have the solutions and the grassroots power to tell a strong story about a socially fair green transition, rooted in shared values and hopeful realism.

**THIS GUIDE SERVES
AS A TOOL FOR
EMPOWERING PEOPLE
AND ORGANISATIONS
TO EFFECTIVELY
COMMUNICATE THEIR
VISION FOR A FAIRER,
GREENER EUROPE.**

**BY HARNESSING
WORDS THAT
RESONATE AND
STORIES THAT
INSPIRE, WE CAN
MOBILISE PEOPLE FOR
POSITIVE CHANGE, IN
2024 AND BEYOND.**

YOUR WILDCARD



To prepare this conversation compass, we have processed tons of studies and heaps of resources on narrative work that are already out there — and turned it into a very condensed guide.

THIS GUIDE

For further input and inspiration, we strongly recommend you browse through our [resources](#) & [recommendations section](#) [at the end](#).

WHAT THIS GUIDE CAN TELL YOU

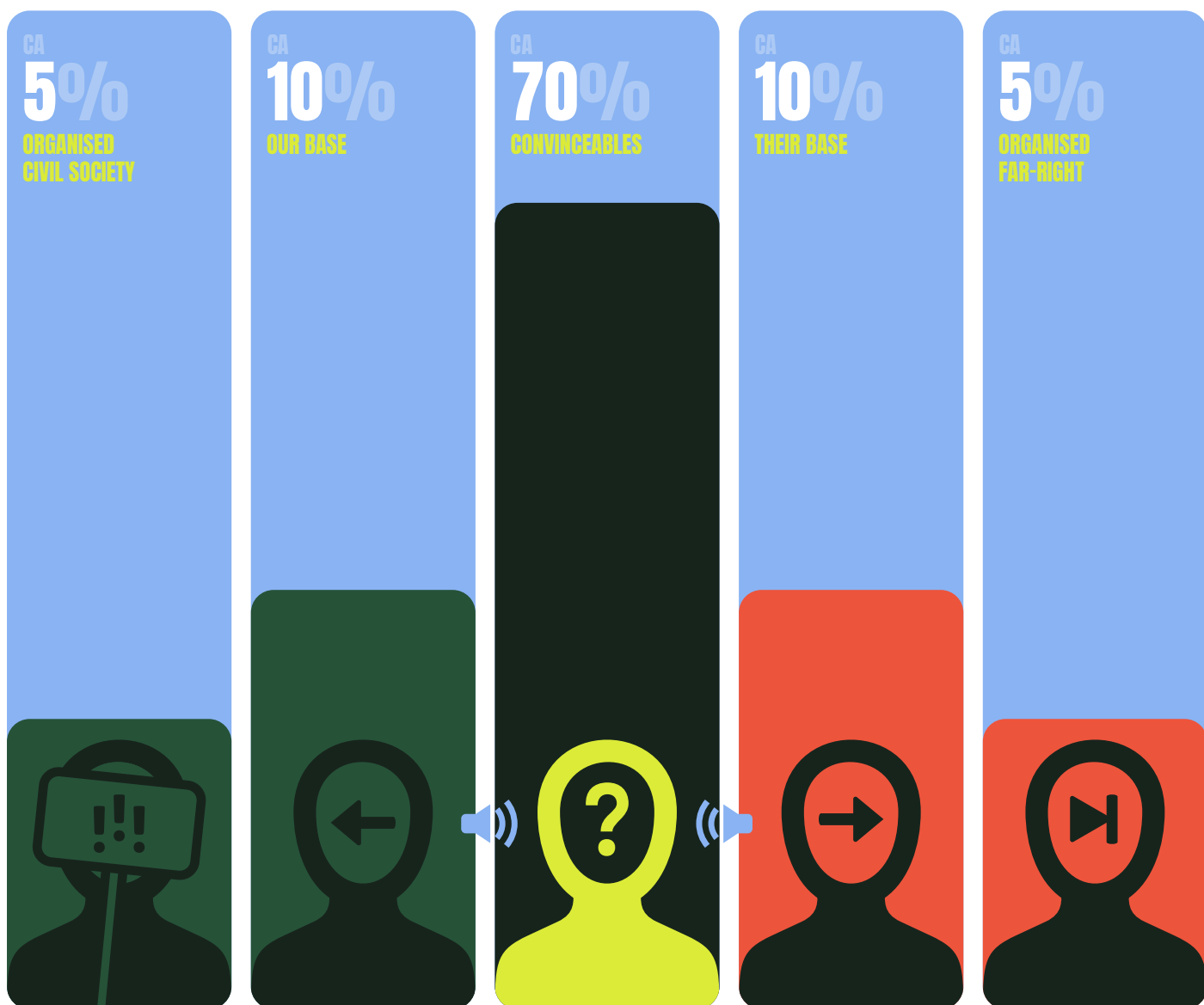
- ⇒ How to convince undecided people that are open to progressive ideas, of our cause
- ⇒ How to purposefully outplay messages rooted in hate and fear
- ⇒ How to tell a stronger story as civil society organisation or activist

AND WHAT IT (PROBABLY) WON'T

- ⇒ How to handle your racist aunt/uncle
- ⇒ How to publicly respond to hate speech
- ⇒ How to persuade far right populists that they are wrong

WHY THE “CONVINCEABLES” ARE A CRUCIAL PLAYER

Being mindful of our energy and capacity, we suggest refraining from trying to change the minds of those who disagree with us. Instead, research tells us that focusing on engaging with the “silent majority,” “moveable middle,” or “convincebables” — people who hold moderate or undecided views and are susceptible to persuasion — can make a decisive difference in elections or public discourse.



This suggests that we as civil society should put effort into strengthening our “base”, the people that already support us, and provide them with messages, tools and materials to reach the “convincebables”. The far-right movement is strikingly good at that!

WINNING MESSAGES MUST...

EXAMPLE

Everyone, no matter where you live, or where you come from, deserves a decent, safe, warm home this winter. We must reinvest in energy as a source of our common wealth, not collective woe; with access to clean, affordable energy a basic right for all.

EXAMPLE

Fossil fuel CEOs and the politicians they influence (...)

**INSTEAD
OF**

The fossil fuel industry (...)

LEAD WITH VALUES

Our vision of a better Europe is guided by fundamental values that unite us. By appealing to people's shared intrinsic values — such as compassion, care, equality, freedom, and connection to nature — we can foster deeper connections and inspire meaningful action. Research consistently shows that messages grounded in those values are more effective in building support compared to those rooted in extrinsic values like recognition, power, and wealth. Therefore, our communication efforts must be firmly anchored in carefully selected intrinsic values to resonate with our audience and drive positive change. Harms or hindrances to our vision should take secondary place in our messages.

BE INCLUSIVE DON'T INCITE DIVISION

Far right populists often create “in- and out-groups” to address people's need to belong and stir them up against possible scapegoats. Let's not fall into that trap! We want to promote an expansive, diverse “us” to make people feel included.

MAKE IT SIMPLE AND SPECIFIC

Far-right populists often convince by offering (apparently) simple solutions to complex problems — while NGOs tend to explain away what sort of “system change” we need. The key to inclusive messaging is to avoid any jargon, expert terminology as well as understatement while clearly describing our challenges and, crucially, the concrete changes we need. At the same time, we should stay realistic and not over-promise — people know change is not immediate or easy.



EXAMPLE

Agriculture is colourful and not brown [i.e. fascist]. But we are also here to make it very clear that we are in favour of democracy in Germany and reject right-wing ideas.

Farmers' leader,
at a protest in Germany

EXAMPLE

European institutions must subsidise home renovations for low-income households.

This will yield significant energy savings, outweighing the initial investment, and prepare homes for future energy crises.

EXAMPLES

- ⇒ From Friends of the Earth Europe: [*Stories from the Frontline of Climate Hope*](#) and the [*Power of Solidarity in Action*](#);
- ⇒ [*Beautiful Trouble*](#) offers a host of other deeply inspiring and creative activist examples from across the world. **Uplift alert!**

BE CONCISE ABOUT OUR STANDING

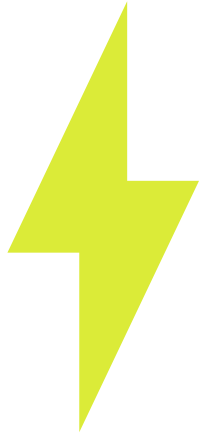
Although our agenda (reinforced in this guide) might be gearing up against far-right parties and populists, we advise against flatly blaming 'the far right'. Since most people don't have a clear definition of what far right means, using that term can reinforce polarisation and evoke the unhelpful framing of 'far left vs far right'. Instead, we can contrast the motivations of our opponents (e. g. dehumanise, fuel fear and hate) with our shared values, and pivot to what we think needs to happen.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE: WHAT WE ARE FOR

The amount and degree of populist dis- or misinformation can be overwhelming, so we easily get caught up in our opponents' tactics and distractions. But we don't want to actually give a platform to the populist messaging we oppose! So, instead of defending, debunking, or debating facts, we are better off saving time and energy to strengthen our own messaging, shifting our focus to what we stand for and the positive changes we're working towards in Europe. By highlighting underlying values and communities' needs, addressing who holds decision-making power, and being specific about policies, rules and budgets, our messages become clear and less vulnerable to attacks.

TELL SUCCESS-STORIES AND HOW THEY INSPIRE US

As civil society we tend to under-use what we have aplenty: Case studies of people like you and I achieving extraordinary changes for society through empowerment, collective action, and hope. Hearing a relatable story from someone we trust can be a real game-changer! So beyond showcasing those stories on our websites, we should be ready to — enthusiastically — tell them to our neighbours, aunts, foster-nephews and in our community centres.



UTILISE METAPHORS WISELY

The metaphors we use greatly influence our associations and motivations towards the issue we describe. Notice how different it feels to refer to far right politicians and populists as “attackers” or “enemies” in contrast to “opponents in the game” (as we do in the introduction above).

TO EVOKE POSITIVE VALUES AND NOT FEED THE FEAR AND HATE MACHINE, WE CAN CONSIDER THESE METAPHORS INSTEAD OF MILITARISTIC LANGUAGE:



Harmonising voices for climate action

Portrays the diverse voices within the environmental movement as different musical instruments coming together to create a powerful symphony of change. Highlights the need for collaboration, unity, and diversity of perspectives to achieve environmental justice goals.



Setting sail on the journey to justice

Depicts the environmental movement as embarking on a collective journey towards a more just and sustainable future. Highlights the need for vision, courage, and collaboration to navigate the challenges ahead and reach the destination of environmental justice and well-being for all.



Growing a better future together

Compares environmental/social activism to tending a community garden, where nurturing efforts lead to the growth of positive change. Illustrates the importance of patience, persistence, and community involvement in cultivating a sustainable future.

RESOURCES & READING RECOMMENDATIONS

Huge kudos to all people who did the following field work, please read and support them:

- ⇒ Fresh research on “The turnout gap” in the EU Elections including message testing in 5 countries:
<https://comms-hub.org/insights/>
- ⇒ The unmissable work of narrative trailblazer Anat Shenker-Osorio:
<https://asocommunications.com/messaging-guides/>
- ⇒ A toolkit full of examples by the amazing folks at PIRC:
<https://publicinterest.org.uk/narratives-we-need/>
- ⇒ Lots of easy-to-use guides — including the roadmap proposed above — by the makers of “Race Class Narrative”:
<https://www.wemakethefuture.us/resources>
- ⇒ A comprehensive toolkit for charities, exceeding messaging:
https://commoncausefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CCF_communications_toolkit.pdf
- ⇒ Guides to empower communities, with local focus on Ireland:
<https://hopeandcourage.ie/category/guides/>
- ⇒ Parable communications, an excellent narrative coach:
<https://parable.ie/>
- ⇒ Our own narrative research with focus groups from 5 countries, ahead of the 2019 EP Elections:
<https://friendsoftheearth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/how-to-talk-about-the-societies-we-want-in-europe.pdf>
- ⇒ George Lakoff’s groundbreaking classics: “Metaphors We Live By” (co-authored by) Mark Johnson and “Don’t Think of An Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate”
- ⇒ On EU Elections forecasts, we relied on research by ECFR, GSCC and Datapraxis

CREDITS

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Design: Awe Studio

Image credits:

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Published: May 2024

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