

Which Unity? Whose Diversity?

Cultural Mindsets around Pluralism
in the United States

Andrew Volmert

Sarah French Brennan

Kristin Vierra

Luis Hestres

Theresa L. Miller

DECEMBER 2024



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
<hr/>	
What Are Cultural Mindsets, and Why Do They Matter?	4
<hr/>	
Methods	6
<hr/>	
What Are We Trying to Communicate? Five Core Ideas	8
<hr/>	
How Does the US Public Think about Diversity, Difference, Unity, and Other Ideas Related to Pluralism?	11
<hr/>	
Conclusion	34
<hr/>	
Endnotes	55
<hr/>	
About FrameWorks	57



Introduction

The lines of division in US society feel ever present. Our political discourse centers around cleavage and conflict. In the FrameWorks Institute's research with members of the public, worries about seemingly widening divisions abound as participants across our research projects consistently express a yearning for greater unity. Across groups, people want to find ways of coming together across our differences. Yet they frequently despair about this actually happening. And when probed, they often have very different ideas about what unity should entail.

These issues lie at the heart of pluralism—the active commitment to be in community across our differences. Whether or not people recognize the value of pluralism depends on how people think about fundamental topics like social difference, division, and unity. Understanding the cultural mindsets that people rely on to think about these topics—the deep, taken-for-granted ways of thinking that run below the surface of how we talk—is essential for understanding the barriers to and openings for pluralism.

FrameWorks has conducted deep-dive research to map the cultural mindsets that members of the US public use to think about concepts related to pluralism. We hope that the map of cultural mindsets we present in this report can be an asset for those working to advance pluralism in our society.

Key takeaways from this research include:

- People recognize the importance of dialogue and interpersonal relationships in resolving conflict, yet they typically struggle to see how structural and institutional factors affect conflict and its resolution.
- Members of the public widely celebrate diversity, though some ways of celebrating diversity leave histories of exclusion and marginalization in the background.
- Like the field, members of the public recognize that division is sometimes manufactured by conflict entrepreneurs, though dominant ways of thinking tend to leave systemic sources of conflict in the background.
- Past- and forward-facing understandings of unity lead to very different ideas about what should be done to achieve unity.
- When people think about solving problems in US society, they sometimes assume this can and should happen within existing systems, though sometimes people assume systems are rigged to thwart attempts to make things better.

We begin with a brief explanation of cultural mindsets—what they are and why they're important—followed by a review of research methods. We then discuss five core ideas that emerged from interviews with stakeholders in the field; they represent the central ideas that the field is looking to advance and build public support for. The remainder of the report offers a deep dive into the cultural mindsets that members of the US public use to think about issues related to pluralism. In presenting these mindsets, we highlight how each one enables or obstructs pluralism so that communicators can use this mindset map to make choices about how to position their ideas.

What Are Cultural Mindsets, and Why Do They Matter?

Cultural mindsets (or mindsets, for short) are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world and how we make decisions. In shaping how we think, mindsets structure and produce our beliefs and attitudes.¹

The mindsets that we hold can normalize or problematize aspects of the existing social order and, in turn, shape whether and what sorts of social change we support. For example, individualistic mindsets lead people to assume that life outcomes are the result of individual choice and willpower and that the proper solution to adversity is for people to cultivate self-reliance and pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Individualism affirms people's agency, but it also makes it difficult to see how broader structures and systems affect our lives. When people think individualistically, this can lead them to conclude that policies designed to change systems—for example, the systems that produce wealth and income inequalities—are unnecessary or misguided.

We all have multiple mindsets that we can use to think about a given issue. For example, while Americans often think individualistically, we also have access to more systemic mindsets. When these mindsets are activated, they bring into view social systems and the ways that contexts shape outcomes alongside individual choices. They also lead us to recognize the need for changes to systems, including via policy change.

Cultural mindsets are highly durable. They emerge from and are tied to cultural and social practices and institutions with deep historical roots. In our research, we focus on cultural mindsets that emerge from common, national social practices and institutions—mindsets that are shared across our national culture. It is important to recognize, however, that different people and groups will engage with these common mindsets in different ways. For example, a mindset can be more salient—more frequently drawn upon and more consistently used in thinking—for one group than for another. In addition, cultural subgroups within society also have access to distinctive mindsets that emerge from institutions and practices specific to these groups.

Mindsets are ways of thinking, not motivations. In tracing how mindsets work and their implications, we are examining patterns in how people think, not people's intentions. For example, as we have discussed elsewhere and revisit in this report, the ideal of colorblindness, in leading people to think that we should not focus on race, has the effect of reinforcing racial hierarchies by undercutting the idea that we need to actively address racism by addressing interpersonal bias and by changing laws and systems that advantage white people and disadvantage people of color. This does not mean that people who draw on this ideal intend this outcome—some people who use this mindset are undoubtedly sincere in opposing racism. By pulling apart mindsets and intentions, we can understand problems with aspects of our culture without calling into question the character of everyone who tends to think in a particular way.

How Does Cultural Mindsets Research Differ from Public Opinion and Other Social Survey Research?

Public opinion research examines the explicit attitudes and preferences that people hold about specific issues. Cultural mindsets research explores the deeper, underlying ways of thinking that shape and explain these patterns in public opinion. Where public opinion research examines what people think, cultural mindsets research examines how people think. For example, public opinion research might demonstrate that people support health education programs more than they support policies that promote access to healthy housing. Cultural mindsets research explains why this is, revealing the role that the mindset of *Health Individualism* plays in driving these opinions and preferences.

In addition, public opinion and other social survey research often segments people into distinct and exclusive groups—there are people who hold one view and people who hold another.² While cultural mindsets research can and should attend to group differences in how mindsets are held and used, it is premised on the idea that people across groups within a society have access to common mindsets and that people can and do draw on different mindsets at different times. This means that we can't separate people into groups who hold one mindset versus another. Mindsets research focuses on *how mindsets work* rather than *what groups of people are like* in order to identify ways of thinking that advocates and activists should seek to activate, expand, or background at the broader societal level.

Mindsets research can be paired with research on particular audiences or groups in order to develop strategies for specific campaigns or initiatives, but it is not itself segmentation research. That said, because different groups do, in some cases, rely on mindsets to different degrees—for some mindsets, some groups draw on the mindset with greater frequency than others—a mindset analysis can be used to inform audience strategies or segmentation research. In presenting findings, we highlight both commonalities and variations in groups' endorsement of mindsets as possible inputs for strategy or follow-up research.

For more on cultural mindsets and mindset shifts, see [Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?](#)

Methods

Stakeholder Interviews

At the outset of the project, in August–September 2023, FrameWorks researchers conducted 15 one-on-one interviews with field leaders and other stakeholders in the ecosystem of pluralism. Participants were selected in collaboration with New Pluralists, a transpartisan and multidisciplinary initiative that seeks to build a culture of respect and belonging in the United States. The sample was constructed to represent the various sectors and fields within the broader ecosystem and to include the ideological diversity of New Pluralists' coalition while also ensuring that some participants brought a structural perspective in addition to a cultural one.

These interviews were designed to elicit the core ideas that the ecosystem is looking to communicate and build support for. In analyzing these interviews, researchers looked for foundational commitments held across the ecosystem, especially areas of consensus. As pluralism is an emerging ecosystem and includes diversity in orientation and commitments, analysts also attended to areas of tension and disagreement. The result of the analysis was a set of core ideas and clarity about where consensus is lacking.

Cultural Mindsets Research with Members of the US Public

To map cultural mindsets, we employed two methods:

- 1. Cognitive interviews.** FrameWorks conducted 20 one-on-one, two-hour-long, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of the US public from January–February 2024. Employing an approach from cognitive anthropology, these interviews elicited talk and reasoning about pluralism and related issues, including diversity, difference, social division, and social unity in the United States. Interviews were coded to identify patterns in talk, and analysis looked for the underlying assumptions that explain these patterns. We selected participants to resemble a cross-section of the general public, with particular attention to achieving representative quotas of income, political ideology, gender, and level of education. We oversampled participants of color to ensure that the mindsets identified are truly shared across racial and ethnic groups.
- 2. Descriptive surveys.** In July 2024, FrameWorks fielded two nationally representative cultural mindsets surveys to measure the strength with which people endorse different mindsets related to pluralism. The first survey included 1,241 participants, and the second included 1,245 participants. Both surveys oversampled participants of color to ensure a minimum of 200 participants who identified with each of the following groups: Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American. Two surveys were conducted to ensure that the surveys were not overly long, which decreases participant engagement and data quality.

In addition to measuring endorsement of mindsets, the survey included scales designed to measure relevant attitudes (for example, egalitarianism, affective polarization, and authoritarian attitudes). It also measured support for policies that stakeholders in the field of pluralism have indicated interest in.

Analysis of the surveys examined how strongly people endorse different mindsets, differences in mindset endorsement across groups, relationships between different mindsets, and the relationships between mindsets and attitudes and policy support.

See Appendix A for a fuller description of methods.

What Are We Trying to Communicate?

Five Core Ideas

Five core ideas emerged from our interviews with stakeholders working on pluralism. These are key ideas that members of the ecosystem believe need to be effectively communicated to members of the public. These core ideas orient the project—they help us understand the implications of cultural mindsets, and they are the big ideas that need to be conveyed through effective framing.

CORE IDEA #1

Pluralism is an approach to organizing society that celebrates and protects diversity while working toward unity.

Pluralism is alternatively understood as a process, philosophy, method, or framework that enables society to come together across differences. It offers ways of navigating a wide range of situations and contexts.

Pluralism is premised on the recognition of diversity. People have differing and conflicting beliefs, opinions, and values—both between groups and within themselves. Within pluralism, diversity is celebrated and valued.

At the same time, pluralism seeks unity amid diversity. This enables common ways of moving forward amid difference and disagreement.

CORE IDEA #2

Listening and action-oriented dialogue are central to a pluralistic approach.

Listening is a key component of the pluralistic approach. Listening is critical to finding commonalities and “coming together on a human level.” Listening is important across activities, though it can also include specific practices—for example, “story circles” or “listening circles” are facilitated conversations in which participants sit in a circle and take turns (without crosstalk) telling stories about their personal experiences with a particular topic.

While listening is important, pluralism does not stop at listening. Finding common ground also requires open, honest, action-oriented dialogue between individuals and communities with different perspectives, backgrounds, and ideologies. Dialogue requires curiosity and humility on the part of participants as well as the broader society. Dialogue must ultimately move toward action—negotiating values, co-creating solutions, and making decisions together.

Minoritized groups often do the work and bear the emotional weight of explaining their own minoritization to others. To overcome this injustice, all parties must be willing to talk about race and equity issues, and not dismiss these fundamental issues as being too divisive.

CORE IDEA #3

Pluralism is a common-sense approach to solving problems.

Pluralism is a pragmatic approach to a diverse world. In a “continent-sized, multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy” such as the United States, pluralism is the only realistic option. Diversity is an empirical reality. It may change in degree to some extent, and it is more fully expressed when societies are more open, but even if people want it to, diversity isn’t going away and must be negotiated. Diverse coalitions are needed for society to act, and practices and policies that emerge from pluralistic processes tend to be more durable.

The diversity of the country is deep, multifaceted, and ever changing, so it isn’t possible to settle issues once and for all. As the population changes and people make sense of identities in new ways, new forms of diversity emerge that must be negotiated. Pluralism provides mechanisms for the continuous mediation of differences that is necessary in a diverse society.

CORE IDEA #4:

Access to democracy, safety, and human dignity are necessary for pluralism.

The right social and political conditions are essential for pluralism. To start, all members of society need a voice in how society is run, without impediments. In practice, this includes protection of voting rights and pathways for civic and political participation.

Ensuring people’s safety and human dignity is likewise a precondition for a pluralistic approach. For open and honest dialogue to take place, participants’ safety and human dignity must be assured and respected. Honest dialogue requires that statements and ideologies denying another group’s fundamental human dignity or promoting violence be forthrightly challenged.

CORE IDEA #5:

Current conditions in the United States—inequality, affective polarization, and decline in trust in democracy—must be addressed to enable and strengthen pluralism.

Current conditions in the United States impede pluralism. Poverty and inequality make it difficult for people in certain communities to engage in civic life. Resource limitations and processes of social marginalization obstruct participation. In addition, high levels of affective polarization—dislike and distrust between Democrats and Republicans—make it difficult to envision commonalities across difference. When people mostly engage with others like themselves, it becomes easier to caricature differences and even dehumanize others. And the decline in trust in our democracy and institutions is leading to civic apathy and hopelessness.

To create conditions that enable pluralism, we need to address these challenges. That means addressing basic economic needs. It means prioritizing minoritized groups' voices in the work of pluralism in order to address inequities, as well as adopting approaches like targeted universalism and racial healing that can advance equity. Reforms to our democratic systems and institutions, such as electoral reforms or reforming the composition of Congress, could potentially reduce polarization and build trust in democracy by strengthening it. There's also a need for building local power and community ties across differences.

How Does the US Public Think about Diversity, Difference, Unity, and Other Ideas Related to Pluralism?

This section of the report describes the cultural mindsets that members of the US public use to think about pluralism and related ideas, including diversity, difference, division, and unity. All of these mindsets are available across partisan, racial, and other identities, though there are some important differences in the strength with which different groups hold these mindsets.

We identify key mindsets available, tensions that emerge from competing ways of thinking, and the implications of these mindsets for those working to advance pluralism. We note which mindsets tend to most strongly shape people's thinking and differences in the strength of these mindsets across groups.

FINDING #1

People Think about Societal Differences and Divisions Using Concepts Drawn from Interpersonal Relationships

When people think about difference, conflict, and related issues, they understand these in terms of relationships between individuals rather than thinking about groups or shared institutions. When people think about the sources of societal division, they look for individuals who could be driving it. When asked to think about diversity or division at the societal level, they implicitly analogize what happens in society as a whole to interpersonal relationships, treating relationships between groups just like relationships between individual people. And when they think about how we should approach differences as a society, they take interpersonal approaches for addressing differences (for example, listening and dialogue) and map them directly onto intergroup relations.

The Interpersonal Model of Society

This mindset is grounded in the assumption that society operates in the same ways as interpersonal relationships. According to this way of thinking, the same motivations and relationships that characterize individual conflict or cooperation can be applied to groups and nations.

We see this mindset appear in the tendency to use interpersonal examples as allegories for what happens within society as a whole and in the use of individual characteristics (that is, personalities) to characterize groups. This is a familiar mindset that is applied in wide-ranging ways across issues (for example, the analogizing of national budgets to household budgets is grounded in this foundational mindset).⁵

When drawing on this mindset, people reason that the same methods or processes for resolving conflicts between people should work to resolve conflicts between groups or nations. Primarily, people envision conflict resolution occurring through dialogue—sitting down together in an effort to understand the other’s needs, motivations, and goals.

Interviewer: *Would you say that coming together across differences is important in US society or not so much?*

Participant: *Very much so. Taking time and effort to get to know others, whether it is at a Walmart checkout line or you are just at your local grocery store—a simple hello goes a long way.*

White, man, Republican, age 41⁴

The Conflict Entrepreneurs Cultural Mindset

When thinking about the sources of division in US society, people often focus attention on troublesome individuals who, they assume, are fostering division for their own personal benefit or profit. Much like the field’s conception of conflict entrepreneurs,⁵ this mindset holds that there are influential individuals who leverage technology to intentionally foster division. These individuals, the mindset holds, push audiences toward radical, divisive, incendiary positions because it enhances their personal power or profit. Participants used this mindset to think about different types of people, including social media influencers, politicians, college professors, and political commentators.

Interviewer: *Why do you think the differences [between groups in the United States] have gotten bigger?*

Participant: *Because of the people who have been in office and the rhetoric that they’ve used. They’ve made it very divisive. And it’s not just Donald Trump, it’s the other people, as well. Both sides have made it like, either you pick our side or you’re against us, you know? I think that’s the kind of rhetoric that both political parties have had recently and that’s why there’s this big division between people.*

Latino, man, Democrat, age 30

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

— **The Interpersonal Model of Society gives people an easy lexicon for thinking about difference and division, though it backgrounds institutions.** This mindset enables people to reason about complex social realities, offering a ready conceptual toolbox for thinking about what fosters good relations between differently situated people. In particular, this mindset allows people

to think about the value of dialogue in addressing social issues—a key aspect of pluralism. However, because this mindset anchors thinking in individual relationships, it places collective institutions in the background, obscuring their role in shaping these relationships (for example, the ways in which the structure of the US political system structures party conflict). This limits people's ability to see how social relations build on but differ from individual relationships.

- **The *Conflict Entrepreneurs* mindset allows people to recognize the relationship between personal incentives and conflict.** This mindset closely aligns with the field's own understanding of the role of conflict entrepreneurs, productively bringing this problem into view. Importantly, it enables people to see how the desire for power and profit, coupled with the wrong incentives, can prompt division-producing behavior. The main limitation of this mindset is that, like the *Interpersonal Model of Society*, it doesn't help people see how systems (for example, media, political, and economic systems) shape those incentives and enable the behaviors of these individuals.

FINDING #2

Cultural Diversity Is Widely Valued, Though Conflicts about Values Are Sometimes Understood as Unresolvable

Research participants overwhelmingly said they value diversity and see it as a strength. Participants drew on several different mindsets to think about the positive aspects of diversity, seeing diversity as, alternatively, an essential feature of society, a distinctive strength of American society, and a source of meaning. Yet, alongside this, participants occasionally assumed that homogeneity is necessary for people's values to be respected.

The Difference as Defining Characteristic Cultural Mindset

This mindset consists of two assumptions. The first is that difference is inherent in society. When drawing on this mindset, people assume that there will always and inevitably be differences between groups, such as religious and cultural differences. Because society involves large groups of people, being in society is characterized by grappling with and trying to bridge these differences.

The second assumption is that living together across our differences is good. The need to engage with others across differences is not lamented but seen as a meaningful part of what it means to be human. The recognition of diversity and interconnection is seen, within this way of thinking, as something to be embraced. The mindset does not include specific assumptions about *why* diversity is good beyond the idea that it is a central part of the human experience.

Interviewer: *What comes to mind when you think about “society”?*

Participant: *Collaboration of people from different backgrounds.*

Asian American, man, Republican, age 29

Society—it’s a group of people, of random people from different places, from here and there, that come together [...] and share different values, different beliefs, and have different things to bring.

Latina, woman, Democrat, age 22

The *Exceptional Diversity Cultural Mindset*

This mindset is grounded in the familiar idea of American exceptionalism.⁶ The core assumption of the mindset is that the United States is unique in its amount and treatment of racial and religious diversity and that this sets the United States apart from other nations.

The mindset is related to the idea of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” that welcomes peoples from around the world.⁷ According to this way of thinking, a central defining feature of the United States is its inclusive character and its embracing of diversity. When drawing upon this mindset, people tend not to talk about exclusionary aspects of US history and society, such as slavery, genocide against Indigenous peoples, or imperialism abroad.

Within this mindset, the diversity of US society is understood as a sign of its superiority. The United States is seen as *more* diverse and *more* welcoming than other countries—especially for people fleeing oppression—and, in turn, better than other countries.

People traveled here. If I look back in history, when people wanted to leave oppression or wanted to leave for a better life, the first place they wanted to come to was America because America was a diverse place to be. It was a place of opportunity. People that couldn’t live one lifestyle in another nation, another country, they would come to the United States.

Black, woman, Democrat, age 67

We’re the most diverse country in the world when it comes to different races, different religions. That’s part of that adaptability that America has.

Native American, man, Republican, age 24

The *Diversity Is Enriching Cultural Mindset*

People often assume that diversity enriches individuals and society alike. According to this way of thinking, being exposed to people of different backgrounds and hearing different perspectives increases people’s understanding of the world. Diversity enriches through mutual learning and exposure to different opinions, experiences, and perspectives.

People tend to think of this process of mutual learning passively—simple exposure to different people and experiences is valuable. The mindset doesn’t include attention to particular ways of engaging with others or skills that might be required to gain value or insight from others who are different.

The mindset is used to think about different types of diversity, including racial and ethnic differences as well as differences in opinion or thinking.

Interviewer: *Would you say that diversity has an effect on society?*

Participant: *I think it does have an effect on society, but in a good way, to bring different outlooks on life, different opinions, and different ways of living. I feel like that's a good thing to have in society.*

Latina, woman, Democrat, age 22

Interviewer: *Would you say that diversity is important in American society or not so much?*

Participant: *I think it's very important. I think it holds a lot of cohesiveness for the whole—for the country. I think it's important because I think it helps us to all recognize, respect, and build upon the fact that we are a collective group of people with different points of views and different origins, and I think that helps us to grow and understand that we're not all—we're just not all one monochrome, and I think that brings a lot to our perspectives, to our culture, to how we enjoy certain things, and I think that it's a very important component here in society.*

Black, woman, Democrat, age 64

The *All Opinions Have Value* Cultural Mindset

According to this mindset, all opinions have value, and there is no single correct view. Rather, different and even conflicting ways of understanding issues hold truth and have value. In turn, we should listen to and respect all sides of issues.

This mindset leads people to criticize any unwillingness to engage with or listen to others who disagree, no matter what they think. This is seen as “biased” and unreasonable.

There's always two sides. No one is right or wrong because that's your personal opinion.

Latina, woman, Democrat, age 61

In my opinion, there's no right or wrong. It's really the same coin, just different sides. It really just depends on how you view things.

Asian American, man, Republican, age 29

The *Like with Like* Cultural Mindset

As we've seen in past research on how people think about neighborhoods and residential locations, members of the public sometimes assume that people naturally want to be around others like themselves—they naturally self-segregate to be near people like themselves, including those from similar racial or ethnic backgrounds.⁸ In our interviews about pluralism, we saw a similar assumption—that people naturally want to live near other people who are similar and who hold similar values.

Yet there's an additional feature to this mindset, which we haven't identified in past research—the assumption that places reflect the values of the majority of people who live there. The values of the community shape everyday social interaction and norms, as well as government decisions—they animate what it's like to live in a place. In turn, the assumption goes that if someone lives in a community that doesn't share their values, their values won't be reflected and respected in the same way that others' are.

It is important to underline that this mindset centers on similarity of values, not racial or ethnic similarity. People talked, for example, about how people from around the world migrate to the United States due to a shared valuing of freedom and how people might move from New York to Texas to be near others who share conservative values.

They're going to move to areas where people live that share the same opinions. Or they will try to stay where they are from just because they support those ideas. Just like here in Texas, most Texans don't really migrate anywhere else, just because they like the conservativeness of Texas and they decide to stay here. And other people do the same, in other places like California.

Latino, man, Democrat, age 30

I think the solution to the division [we see in the United States] is to go to where you believe your—you don't try to force your ideas down the government of the current place. You go to a government that respects your ideas [... by, for example,] moving from New York to Texas.

Native American, man, Republican, age 24

This mindset—unlike the others discussed in this section—leads people to think that it is preferable to live around others who share one's values and to see diversity of values as a problem because this makes it impossible for everyone's values to be respected.

THE STRENGTH OF DIVERSITY-AFFIRMING MINDSETS ACROSS GROUPS

In our surveys, we're able to look at the degree to which participants agree with statements that encapsulate the core assumptions of different mindsets. By looking at different groups within the sample, we can better understand whether different groups endorse mindsets to the same or different degrees.

The survey shows that core diversity-affirming mindsets—the *Exceptional Diversity* and *Diversity Is Enriching* mindsets—are relatively strongly endorsed across groups. We can see this by looking at the mean scores for the mindsets (see Table 1).

Mean scores for mindsets indicate survey participants' average level of agreement with statements that encapsulate the mindset. In the survey, participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with such statements, using Likert-type scales—typically, a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” For simplicity of interpretation, mean scores have been translated to a 100-point scale, with zero indicating the highest level of disagreement and 100 indicating the highest level of agreement. These means are not the percentage of participants who agreed with statements but rather the average level of agreement with them.

Table 1: Mean Scores for Diversity-Affirming Cultural Mindsets

	Whole Sample	Partisan Affiliation		Racial Identity			
		Democrat	Republican	White	Black	AAPI	Latino
<i>Exceptional Diversity</i> mindset	68.9	73.7	64.5	68.5	68.7	71.6	68.4
<i>Diversity Is Enriching</i> mindset	77.6	83.4	71.3	76.7	80.2	78.2	76.9

The items were on seven-point Likert-type scales (see Appendix B for items). Means have been transposed to a 100-point scale, so 50 represents the midpoint of the scale (“neither agree nor disagree”). As scores get closer to zero, this indicates increasingly strong rejection of the mindset. As scores get closer to 100, this indicates increasingly strong

The mean score of 77.6 for the *Diversity Is Enriching* mindset is quite high relative to scores we tend to see in cultural mindsets survey research, indicating relatively strong endorsement of this mindset. While the mean for the *Exceptional Diversity* mindset is slightly lower (68.9), this is nonetheless a reasonably high score, indicating that this mindset, too, is quite strongly held.

Partisan differences in endorsement of these mindsets are notable, though they are not nearly as large as differences we sometimes see (for example, mean differences for mindsets around race and racism can approach 30 percentage points, whereas these are just greater than 10 percentage point differences).⁹ While Democrats endorse these diversity-affirming mindsets more strongly than Republicans,¹⁰ it is important to note that Republicans also, on average, endorse these mindsets quite strongly.

Differences based on racial and ethnic identity are not significant, with three to four percentage points at most between groups. This indicates that reliance on these mindsets barely varies, if at all, based on racial and ethnic identity. These diversity-affirming mindsets are relatively strongly endorsed across racial and ethnic groups.

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

- **The *Difference as Defining Characteristic* cultural mindset leads people to treat diversity as a fact, not an option.** Because this mindset includes the assumption that society, *of course and inevitably*, involves people with different backgrounds figuring out how to live together, it naturalizes diversity *in a good way*. Diversity is not something that can be combated; it's simply the condition of human life with others. This prompts people to think about how people can bridge and cope with differences rather than thinking of diversity as threatening. At a foundational level, it fosters a pluralistic orientation.
- **The *Exceptional Diversity* cultural mindset leads to the idea of diversity as essential while obscuring truths about the United States' treatment of marginalized groups and people.** On one hand, this mindset orients people productively toward diversity as essential to what it means to be American, which, given positive identification with America, leads to affirmation of diversity as a core value. On the other hand, the depiction of the United States as the beacon of inclusion and justice leaves unaddressed the oppression of Black people, Native Americans, and others within the United States, as well as the United States' role in oppression around the globe. This partial view can obscure these injustices, making it more difficult to recognize and address them, which is necessary to move toward a just pluralism.
- **The *Diversity Is Enriching* cultural mindset affirms diversity, though it offers a passive view of pluralism.** In celebrating diversity and affirming the need to respect human differences, this mindset provides a strong foundation for pluralistic thinking. It doesn't, however, provide a clear sense of what we must do to live these values—a sense of the active practices required to facilitate mutual learning and conflict resolution. It's a great starting point but must be built on and expanded to lead to a full understanding of the practices needed for pluralism.
- **The *All Opinions Have Value* cultural mindset prompts openness to difference, but in the process it can sometimes background justice.** This mindset leads to acceptance and celebration of diversity of viewpoint. Yet, in remaining neutral among *all* viewpoints, including viewpoints that actively dismiss or reject diversity, it may—in a classic paradox of pluralism—validate viewpoints that close the door to pluralism.
- **The *Like with Like* cultural mindset prompts fear of diversity, though if narrowly focused, it could potentially be channeled to highlight the importance of shared pluralism-promoting values.** This mindset, generally speaking, undercuts pluralism by painting diversity of values as a problem. It can easily lead to thinking of homogeneity, not diversity, as the ideal. However, in a few cases, participants used the mindset to talk about the need for agreement on values like freedom that are, at least in certain forms, foundational for pluralism. It's possible that, if channeled in the right ways, this mindset could be co-opted to make the case *for* pluralism—through a shared commitment to *pluralism-supporting* values, we can live in a community that affirms a diverse social life where we each experience our way of life as respected. This is, at this point, only a hypothesis, but it could be tested in future research.

FINDING #3

At Times, Conflict and Division Are Seen as Purely “in Our Heads”

Across issues—but especially when people talk about racial and other identity-based conflicts—there’s a tendency to think that if we just talked or thought about these issues differently, they’d go away. In these ways of thinking, these conflicts exist only in our imagination, and so solving them is just as simple—if we just don’t see race, or whatever source of division is being contemplated, then these conflicts will dissolve.

This way of thinking is grounded in a real insight—that these dimensions of social life are very much created by people and can be solved by people. And it can lead to a somewhat productive, if partial, critique of grievance politics—it’s true that conflict entrepreneurs and others looking to stoke outrage and emphasize conflict can make negotiating these conflicts difficult. Yet, as we discuss next, in reducing conflict to patterns in talk, these mindsets also make it impossible to see the underlying bases of grievances and address them.

The *Colorblind Racism* Cultural Mindset

The classic and familiar version of this way of thinking is what scholars have called “colorblind racism.” According to this way of thinking, if we stop talking and thinking about race—if we just “don’t see race”—then racism will disappear. The mindset is grounded in the idea that race exists only in talk and in thought, so if we just don’t talk or think about race, then racism will fade away.

This is Black History Month, and it makes me sad to think about Dr. King, you know? He fought for the Black community to be part, not to be segregated. And here today we have so many Black leaders that are trying to segregate, you know? Trying to segregate the Black community into what he fought so hard to get them out of. And it just ... it bothers me to see that.

White, man, leans Republican, age 49

This mindset functions, as we have discussed elsewhere, as part of the ideology of white supremacy.¹¹ Scholarship has widely recognized this as itself a subtle, adaptive form of racism.¹² As our and others’ previous analyses have shown, and as the quantitative research discussed under finding #7 confirms, the idea of colorblindness strengthens attachment to the status quo and is closely tied to mindsets that are clearly and obviously racist. It is also closely linked with the idea that the real problem today is reverse racism against white people.

This is not to say that people who hold and use this mindset are necessarily trying to uphold white supremacy. Some people use the idea of colorblindness, knowingly and in bad faith, to undercut claims for racial justice in order to maintain existing racial hierarchies. Others sincerely believe that colorblindness is the path to racial justice. Mindset analysis is not about people’s intentions but about how assumptions structure thinking. Qualitative and quantitative data show that this mindset functions to undercut the idea that racism is a problem that needs to be addressed.

The *Collective Imagination* Cultural Mindset

In this mindset, *all* identities and social divisions are, like race, understood as figments of our imagination—there’s no reality to them. According to this way of thinking, if we *stop* talking about a particular division—if we stress our commonality rather than our differences—then the social division and any conflict attached to it will disappear.

This mindset is frequently used to criticize grievances from marginalized groups. Groups that raise identity-related complaints are thought to be stoking division. When groups do this, they exhibit a “victim mentality” and cut themselves off from the rest of society. According to this way of thinking, it’s this emphasis on division that makes the resolution of conflict impossible. If these groups focused instead on commonalities and deemphasized division, this would—the thinking goes—bring about reconciliation and unity. In this way of thinking, marginalized groups may genuinely *feel* alienated, but this is only in their heads, and these feelings would disappear if they stopped focusing on them.

I’m not a big fan of identity politics. [...] People, I feel like, want to set themselves apart in a certain label. I, again, like to treat everybody as a human. Yeah, we may have some differences. We probably have a lot of things we agree on, and maybe I’d rather focus on the things we agree on.

White, man, Republican, age 45

There’s a lot of differences in how people perceive a difference. [...] How we were raised, how we were socialized to believe what a difference is carries a lot of weight in how our society is. [...] I think that differences are seen based on a perspective of what we were taught as we evolved into society from our parents, from whatever institution or religion that we come from. I think that those differences are given definition based on those background thoughts, and sometimes, differences to one person may not seem like a difference to another person. [...] If you are different, you’re taught that that kind of difference is not necessarily accepted, or condoned, or embraced, or looked at with skepticism based on the values and morals set in your mind.

Black, woman, Democrat, age 64

THE STRENGTH OF “ALL IN OUR HEADS” MINDSETS ACROSS GROUPS

The survey shows that there are moderate-to-large differences in the strength of *Colorblind Racism* and *Collective Imagination* mindsets by partisan affiliation (see Table 2). Mean scores for Democrats and Republicans differ by around 20 percentage points for both mindsets.¹³

Table 2: Mean Scores for “All in Our Heads” Cultural Mindsets

	Whole Sample	Partisan Affiliation		Racial Identity			
		Democrat	Republican	White	Black	AAPI	Latino
<i>Colorblind Racism</i> mindset	56.2	47.4	66.4	58.0	48.8	52.0	59.2
<i>Collective Imagination</i> mindset	49.2	39.4	61.1	53.3	36.4	48.7	49.2

The items were on seven-point Likert-type scales (see Appendix B for items). Means have been transposed to a 100-point scale, so 50 represents the midpoint of the scale (“neither agree nor disagree”). As scores get closer to zero, this indicates increasingly strong rejection of the mindset. As scores get closer to 100, this indicates increasingly strong endorsement of the mindset.

Differences by racial identity are significant but smaller. In particular, white Americans endorse the *Collective Imagination* mindset more than Black Americans do, with a 17 percentage point difference in means between groups (a medium-sized effect).¹⁴

Mean scores for both mindsets are relatively low across groups, though the scores for Republicans indicate that, on average, Republicans (somewhat) agree with these mindsets.

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

- **The *Colorblind Racism* cultural mindset leads to ignoring racism rather than confronting it.** In the name of eliminating racism, this mindset prompts active ignoring of it. In leading people to see discussions of racial injustice as a problem, it flips the problem around—it’s actually claims of racial injustice that are the issue. This strengthens racism denial and undercuts steps to promote racial justice.
- **The *Collective Imagination* cultural mindset highlights the self-created character of social division—but denies the deep ways identity is built into the fabric of society.** To the extent that this mindset is grounded in recognition that social identities and divisions are socially constructed, it opens space for addressing and resolving conflicts. However, by suggesting that division is purely and simply the product of how we think and talk, the mindset denies the very real effects of these social categories. The mindset makes it difficult to see that these categories shape and are produced through social systems, institutions, policies, and practices, resulting in real differences in wealth, opportunities, and lived experience. These effects don’t disappear just because we stop talking about them. While this mindset enables people to see that grievances can be unproductively stoked, by obscuring how division is grounded in underlying social and material realities, it gets in the way of just, pluralistic ways of handling division.

FINDING #4

The Shared Desire for Unity Papers over Very Different Ideals

When people think about the state of the country right now, there's a shared yearning for greater unity. Across groups, people express a desire to find common ground and come together. Yet underneath this seemingly shared goal are, in fact, two very different understandings of what unity means and requires.

The *Unity through Restoration* Cultural Mindset

This mindset is deeply nostalgic. It imagines a past in which Americans were, supposedly, socially and politically unified, and seeks a return to the past as a way to restore unity.

According to this way of thinking, the past several decades have involved a decline and deviation from this idealized past, when life was simpler, safer, more peaceful, and more unified. The polarization and division of today represents, in this way of thinking, a fall from this previous state.

This desire to restore the past implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—leads to support for returning to the social hierarchies of the past (for example, around gender and race). This is sometimes articulated explicitly, as when people complain about new ideas and identities being “in your face” or “forced down our throats,” as we sometimes hear in talk about transgender people.

We lost touch with more of the simplistic way of living and have gotten away from a lot of morals and values. [...] These types of life adjustments, if you will—socioeconomical adjustments, geographical, even geopolitical, internationally—I would love to see more time instead of things being forced down our throats.

White, man, Republican, age 41

You don't have the same black and white rules that we used to have before. Everything is different, from how we raise our children to the dynamics of our families. Even the small things we took for granted, like gender identity. That's a very complicated and very, uh, sensitive topic now. Whereas that wasn't a concept before. And if it was even talked about at all, it was whispered about. Hushed conversations. And now we have to deal with that being exposed to our children and what direction of external conditioning we are giving them. Is that okay? How does that pertain to us, to our survival, our evolution? We have so many issues like global warming and constant wars and nuclear bombs and all these other things going on. It's just, it's very complex right now. There's no one solid idea about society right now. It's just chaos.

Native American, woman, independent, age 34

When people draw on this mindset, they do not always express explicit discomfort with social change or a desire to restore an older social order. However, as we discuss under finding #7, this mindset is linked to exclusionary ways of thinking about race and gender that are grounded in

historical social hierarchies. Even if people don't consciously avow support for these hierarchies, the imagination of a unified past necessarily places in the background the realities of racial, gender, and other hierarchies that were foundational features of the social and political order. When people valorize the past and imagine restoring it, this leads to questioning of those who are adopting new identities and ways of living or pushing for social changes (for example, to advance racial justice). The path to unity, according to this mindset, is for these groups to stop upsetting the apple cart.

The *Unity through Progress* Cultural Mindset

Alongside the *Unity through Restoration* mindset is another quite different understanding of unity and division. According to this mindset, social division in the United States is, at least in part, a result of injustice. The United States is seen as divided because of unaddressed injustices, such as injustices against Black Americans. In this way of thinking, social conflict is a result of oppressed groups raising claims about these injustices and dominant groups rejecting these claims.

Like the *Unity through Restoration* mindset, the *Unity through Progress* mindset looks to the past, but where the *Restoration* mindset sees the past as an ideal to be emulated, the *Progress* mindset sees the past as the source of the problem to be solved.

Unity, according to this way of thinking, requires confronting these injustices as a society and taking steps to address them. In contrast to the *Unity through Restoration* mindset, in this mindset, the path to unity requires *new and different* ways of coming together—it requires progress *beyond* the injustices of the past. In the following quote, we see how this mindset shapes thinking about the government's role.

I think that the government has a really big role to play with resolving divisions because they need to make sure that their systems that are in place do help out other people and people that are really in need. They shouldn't be turning a blind eye to certain things that are injustices.

Black, woman, independent, age 23

THE STRENGTH OF MINDSETS ABOUT UNITY

In our survey, we find substantially stronger endorsement of the *Unity through Progress* mindset than the *Unity through Restoration* mindset. This may be, in part, an artifact of the survey format and social desirability bias, which makes people more inclined to endorse positive-sounding and forward-looking statements than negative or backward-focusing ones.

Table 3: Mean Scores for Cultural Mindsets About Unity

	Whole Sample	Partisan Affiliation		Racial Identity			
		Democrat	Republican	White	Black	AAPI	Latino
<i>Unity through Restoration</i> mindset	56.6	48.1	67.4	58.3	52.0	54.0	56.7
<i>Unity through Progress</i> mindset	70.3	78.7	61.2	67.2	78.5	71.6	72.8

The items were on seven-point Likert-type scales (see Appendix B for items). Means have been transposed to a 100-point scale, so 50 represents the midpoint of the scale (“neither agree nor disagree”). As scores get closer to zero, this indicates increasingly strong rejection of the mindset. As scores get closer to 100, this indicates increasingly strong endorsement of the mindset.

The picture changes a bit, however, when we look at group means. Among Republicans, the *Unity through Restoration* mindset has slightly higher mean endorsement than the *Unity through Progress* mindset. For Democrats, the *Unity through Progress* mindset is much more strongly endorsed—the mean is 30 percentage points higher than for the *Unity through Restoration* mindset.¹⁵

As with other mindsets, we see smaller but meaningful differences in endorsement by racial identity. There is a six-percentage-point spread for the *Unity through Restoration* mindset, with the mean for white participants being six points higher than for Black participants, and an 11-point spread for the *Unity through Progress* mindset, with the reverse pattern (the mean for Black participants is 11 points higher than for white participants).¹⁶

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

- **The *Unity through Restoration* cultural mindset, in its current form, undercuts a just pluralism.** While the search for common ground is very much consistent with pluralism, this mindset—as it currently exists—is not. The past does, of course, include positive aspects, and seeking to revive its virtues need not inherently mean overlooking its problems. However, in its current form, this mindset, which offers a vision of an idealized past *without* problems and injustices, does not work in this way. By obscuring the injustices of the past, this mindset undercuts support for addressing injustices. Communicators should avoid appeals to nostalgia and past unity, as this is likely to cue this mindset. Further research would be required to identify ways of talking about unity and division in the past that enable people to hold in mind, simultaneously, both positive and unjust aspects of the past and its approach to social conflict.

- **The *Unity through Progress* cultural mindset couples common ground with inclusion.** This mindset productively brings together a desire for common ground with a pluralistic orientation. It is grounded in an egalitarian view of diversity that is compatible with and arguably inseparable from pluralism. Communicators should seek to actively cue and expand this mindset by offering visions of a *future* pluralistic unity.

FINDING #5

People Alternately Hope for Change through Existing Systems and Despair of This Possibility

When people think about how we can resolve conflicts and address social divisions, they sometimes think about working in and through existing systems—particularly through the political process. Yet, at other times, they assume that the system is so deeply broken—or rigged—that working through existing systems is hopeless. This either results in fatalism or a desire to fundamentally change how these systems work.

The *System Faith* Cultural Mindset

This mindset is grounded in the assumption that current social and political systems are essentially good and functional. When drawing on this mindset, people can recognize flaws in these systems, but they assume that social problems can and should be resolved by working within them. For example, people might advocate for voting or writing elected representatives as the best ways for individuals to work to address social problems because these can result in changes to laws and public policies. In this way of thinking, unwillingness to engage with or work through existing systems is itself an impediment to change.

Interviewer: *How do people come together across difference?*

Participant: *By rallying, by voting, [...] giving to causes.*

Latina, woman, Democrat, age 61

Interviewer: *How do divisions in society usually get resolved?*

Participant: *With laws implemented. Back in the days, I think African Americans couldn't go on a bus, and there was a law implemented for that. And a bunch of other laws.*

Asian American, man, Republican, age 29

The System Is Rigged Cultural Mindset

As we describe in a [recent report](#), the *System Is Rigged* mindset is becoming stronger and stronger in American culture. The core assumption of this mindset is that, in the United States today, “the system” is rigged by the powerful few to benefit themselves at the expense of “regular” people. This mindset is strongly held across demographic and ideological lines, shaping the way that people think about the full array of social issues.

This mindset is flexible. The slots in the mindset can be filled in quite different ways—who is rigging the system, in what ways, and against whom. For example, in one application, corporations and politicians are thought to rig the economic system against workers, while in another, liberal coastal elites are understood to be rigging our educational system against the (white) middle class. At times, there is a sense that elites are intentionally trying to foster polarization and division in order to divide “us” and enable them to more effectively manipulate outcomes to their benefit.

In many cases, the mindset produces fatalism. If the system is rigged, how can we possibly address our problems? Trying to do so through the system feels pointless, as we see in this quote, which applies the *System Is Rigged* mindset to government:

Crazily, the government should solve itself. But they're not going to solve themselves. I think government has a responsibility to help mediate and find compromise for its constituents. And maybe this is why I feel like nothing's getting done, is because [...] I feel like they are the problem. They're not the solution. So then [...] if it's not them, then who is it? I don't know. That's maybe why I don't feel like anything's getting done, because they're the problem. Or at least part of the problem.

White, man, Republican, age 45

In other cases, this leads people to want to tear down and possibly transform the system: If the system is rigged, maybe we need a new system. Either way, in contrast to the *System Faith* mindset, when people draw on the *System Is Rigged* mindset, they assume that working *within* existing systems is typically a waste of time. The only exception is if we can work within systems to unrig them—but people typically struggle to envision how this could happen.

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

- **The *System Faith* cultural mindset promotes a sense of efficacy while placing limitations with existing systems in the background.** On one hand, this mindset gives people a sense that social problems and divisions can be fixed—a critical ingredient for any social change effort. On the other hand, this mindset makes it hard to see how existing systems, including our political system, actually foster division and make it more difficult for groups to come together across differences.¹⁷
- **The *System Is Rigged* cultural mindset can fuel fatalism, though it can also help people see the need for systems change.** From the perspective of pluralism, the *System Is Rigged* mindset is challenging. It can fuel fatalism and create a sense that divisions are deep and intractable.

However, to the extent that the cultural changes discussed earlier can and should be accompanied by structural change, this mindset also holds promise. Even here, the mindset can be used to stoke exclusionary thinking—the idea that we need to take the system back from “those people” who are rigging it against “us.” Yet, it also can help people see the need for structural changes that can promote a more democratic and egalitarian distribution of power in society.

FrameWorks has recently conducted research on how to engage with this mindset through framing—how to talk about rigged systems in ways that inoculate against exclusionary applications and steer the mindset in more productive directions. For findings from this research, see [*Filling in the Blanks: Contesting What “the System Is Rigged” Means*](#).

FINDING #6

Thinking about Solutions Typically Stays at the Level of Individual Change

When interview participants were asked what could be done to resolve conflicts and social divisions in the United States, they defaulted to actions that individuals could take. This turn to individual-level solutions reflects the individualistic baseline of American culture. Because people tend to assume that individuals’ choices and actions are responsible for outcomes—in their own lives and in society more broadly—they tend to see changes to individuals’ choices and actions as the solution.

Solution #1: Better Leaders

Frequently, participants talked about the need for better leaders. If only we had leaders with better character, the thinking goes, we’d be able to cooperate across our differences and our divisions would be solvable.

This solution traces back to *Personalism*—a dominant cultural mindset that people use to think about government.¹⁸ People widely equate government with the individual leaders in charge. In turn, they assume that what the government does is a reflection of leaders’ preferences.

Interviewer: *Do you think anything needs to happen to help people to come together across differences or not so much?*

Participant: *I think there needs to be a groundbreaking, high-level figure—say, like a president, or like a celebrity, or something that has the high-level authority over everyone. Somebody who everyone will listen to needs to come in, and needs to just calm everything down, and have real conversations with people over these subjects.*

Latino, man, Democrat, age 31

Solution #2: Dialogue

Drawing on the *Interpersonal Model of Society*, participants frequently reasoned that *more and better dialogue* is what's needed to solve social conflicts and address divisions. Just as interpersonal problems require us to talk through issues to reach mutual understanding, so too do collective problems.

People think about dialogue on multiple levels. Sometimes, people focus on dialogue at the community level, talking about how individuals in conflict need to sit down and talk through their differences to sort out conflicts. At other times, they focus on dialogue among political leaders, seeing willingness to engage “the other side” in dialogue as the key to decreasing partisanship and polarization in our politics.

I think that people need to be able to hear the perspective of someone—what their daily walk is, what their challenges are that other people may not face for various reasons because they're different, or because their world is different, because they have a different upbringing, or they have access to different things, or society treats them a certain way. I think open dialogue is one of the best tools for people to get for empathy, and understanding why people feel a certain way about what's going on in society, or how they're treated.

Black, woman, Democrat, age 64

I think it just takes just discussions. Eventually if you talk, genuinely talked about the problems, you'll come to a compromise.

White, man, Republican, age 48

How Do These Mindsets Obstruct or Enable Pluralism?

- **The focus on better leaders highlights the importance of leadership while placing other factors out of mind.** This focus enables people to see how leadership is critical to addressing conflict and division. To the extent that leadership matters for pluralism, people can readily recognize this. However, this focus on leadership limits attention to policy and systemic changes that could help promote pluralism and backgrounds institutions and the role they play in shaping collective decision-making.
- **Attention to dialogue is a promising starting point.** The focus on dialogue among the public aligns with this focus within the pluralism ecosystem. People see that a dialogic orientation that involves not just speaking but also listening is crucial. The ecosystem can leverage and build on this existing recognition. Because the public uses the *Interpersonal Model of Society* to think about dialogue, public thinking about it does not generally include attention to the institutional and systemic conditions that can promote or foster dialogue. Communicators should build on the public's existing recognition of the value of dialogue by highlighting the conditions needed to enable it.

FINDING #7

Thinking about Pluralism Is Situated in a Broader Cultural Context—Some Mindsets around Pluralism Are Linked with Individualistic, Exclusionary, and Naturalistic Thinking; Others Are Linked with Collective, Inclusionary, Designed Systems Thinking

Mindsets about diversity, difference, division, and unity are situated within a broader cultural context. In another project—the [Culture Change Project](#)—FrameWorks has conducted cross-cutting research that explores the foundational mindsets that shape public thinking across issues. In this research, we have found that some mindsets cluster together, forming loosely linked networks of thinking.¹⁹ The more strongly people endorse one mindset in a cluster, the more strongly they tend to endorse others in that cluster. Mindsets in a cluster hang together because they're grounded in assumptions that are, in some way, mutually reinforcing.

We have identified two main clusters:

- 1. A naturalistic, exclusionary, individualistic cluster.** This cluster includes mindsets like *Individualism* (assumption: our personal choices determine our outcomes in life), *Pathologizing Black Culture* (assumption: Black communities have dysfunctional cultures that produce bad outcomes), and *Gender Essentialism* (men and women are naturally different). These mindsets are mutually reinforcing, leading people to see society as a “natural order” with different roles for different groups. Existing inequities are attributed to natural characteristics of groups. This order shouldn't be challenged or changed, and it's up to individuals to navigate this order to the best of their abilities.
- 2. A designed, inclusionary, systemic cluster.** This cluster includes mindsets like *Systemic Thinking* (assumption: social systems determine our outcomes), *Structural Model of Racism* (assumption: racism built into systems produces racial inequities), and *Gender Is Constructed* (assumption: gender is socially constructed). These mindsets are, similarly, mutually reinforcing, leading people to see society and our outcomes in life as a product of collective choices. Existing inequities are attributed to collective decisions and unequal power between groups. This designed order should be changed to make society more egalitarian.

It's important to highlight that these clusters are loosely linked networks of mindsets, not tightly organized ideologies or worldviews. They tend to hang together, but they're sets of discrete mindsets. And some mindsets don't fit neatly into either of these clusters.

It's also critical to stress that **these are related ways of thinking, not groups of people**. While some groups tend to more frequently draw upon mindsets in one cluster than the other, **both sets are available and are drawn on across groups**. In one moment, someone might draw on mindsets from the first cluster and, in the next, draw on mindsets from the second cluster.

The mindsets around pluralism discussed in this report are, in some cases, clearly linked with and situated within one of the clusters described earlier, while some mindsets don't fit neatly into either cluster. Understanding how mindsets about diversity, difference, division, and unity are situated within this broader cultural context deepens our understanding of these mindsets and can illuminate potential implications of these mindsets that might not otherwise be apparent.

Next, we draw on survey data to identify which of the mindsets around pluralism fit within each cluster and which ones don't fit neatly within either one.

The *Unity through Restoration*, *Colorblind Racism*, *Collective Imagination*, and *Like with Like* Mindsets Are Located in the Naturalistic, Exclusionary, Individualistic Cluster

Quantitative data makes clear that four mindsets—*Unity through Restoration*, *Colorblind Racism*, *Collective Imagination*, and *Like with Like*—fit squarely within the first cluster. These four mindsets are positively correlated with the naturalistic, exclusionary, and individualistic mindsets that comprise this cluster. This means that as endorsement of one mindset increases, so does endorsement of the other mindset. For example, the *Unity through Restoration*, *Colorblind Racism*, and *Collective Imagination* mindsets are each strongly correlated with *Individualism* and *Pathologizing Black Culture*, and the *Like with Like* mindset is moderately correlated with these mindsets. These four mindsets—*Unity through Restoration*, *Colorblind Racism*, *Collective Imagination*, and *Like with Like*—are also all positively correlated with each other, with mostly large correlations. (See Table 4 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

Correlations with attitudes provide further evidence that these mindsets are anti-egalitarian and pro-social hierarchy. All four mindsets are strongly or moderately positively correlated with social dominance attitudes (that is, support for social hierarchy) and authoritarian attitudes (that is, support for strong leaders who will discipline society). The four mindsets are all *negatively* correlated with egalitarian attitudes (that is, support for social equality) and with pro-immigrant attitudes, meaning that as endorsement of these mindsets increase, egalitarian and pro-immigrant attitudes decrease (and vice versa). (See Table 5 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

Together, these correlations clearly indicate that these four mindsets—the *Unity through Restoration*, *Colorblind Racism*, *Collective Imagination*, and *Like with Like* mindsets—are linked with thinking that naturalizes and justifies social and political inequality.

These results are consistent with the implications derived from qualitative research, as discussed earlier. Whatever the intentions of people who draw upon them, these mindsets lead people to seek unity and order by minimizing injustices, strengthening hierarchies, and suppressing differences.

The *Unity through Progress, Diversity Is Enriching, Exceptional Diversity, and Interpersonal Model of Society* Mindsets Are Located in the Designed, Inclusionary, Systemic Cluster

Survey analysis shows that four mindsets—*Unity through Progress, Diversity Is Enriching, Exceptional Diversity*, and the *Interpersonal Model of Society*—fit within the second cluster. These four mindsets are positively correlated with the designed, inclusionary, and systemic mindsets that comprise this cluster. All four mindsets are, for example, positively correlated with *Systemic Thinking* and the *Structural Model of Racism*, though the strength of these correlations varies (correlations are strongest for the *Unity through Progress* mindset). These four mindsets are also positively correlated with each other, with mostly large or moderate correlations. (See Table 6 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

Correlations with attitudes provide further evidence that these mindsets are pro-egalitarian and anti-social hierarchy. All four mindsets are positively correlated with egalitarian and pro-immigrant attitudes and negatively correlated or uncorrelated with pro-hierarchy attitudes. Patterns are clearest for the *Unity through Progress* and *Diversity Is Enriching* mindsets, which have moderate or large positive correlations with egalitarianism and pro-immigrant attitudes, and small or moderate negative correlations with social dominance and authoritarian attitudes. The *Exceptional Diversity* mindset and *Interpersonal Model of Society* have weak negative or no correlations with social dominance and authoritarian attitudes but have small or moderate positive correlations with pro-immigrant and egalitarian attitudes. (See Table 7 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

These results indicate that the *Unity through Progress* and *Diversity Is Enriching* mindsets fit squarely within the cluster of designed, inclusionary, and systemic mindsets. The *Exceptional Diversity* and *Interpersonal Model of Society* also are clearly connected to this cluster, but the links are looser, indicating that they do not lie at the center of the cluster.

These quantitative results align with the qualitative analysis and the implications discussed in the findings in this report. The *Unity through Progress* and *Diversity Is Enriching* mindsets are quite clearly inclusionary and diversity-affirming. It is also unsurprising that the *Exceptional Diversity* mindset is linked with this cluster but less strongly—this mindset celebrates diversity but, in placing histories of exclusion out of mind, can obscure the active steps needed to achieve inclusion.

The results for the *Interpersonal Model of Society* are perhaps the most interesting and important. It is unsurprising that this mindset is positively linked with egalitarian and inclusive attitudes, as it orients people toward the value and need to address difference and division in reciprocal and respectful ways, particularly through dialogue. It is, however, more surprising that this mindset is positively (if relatively weakly) linked with *Systemic Thinking* and the *Structural Model of Racism*. As we discussed earlier, in modeling society itself on interpersonal relationships, this mindset places systems and institutions in the background. We might expect, then, a negative correlation with these systemic mindsets. The fact that, instead, we see a positive relationship with them indicates that **people can simultaneously model society on interpersonal relationships and**

recognize the importance of systems and structures. This is a highly promising finding for the ecosystem of pluralism, which foregrounds interpersonal connection and trust while recognizing the importance of systems and the need for structural changes (for example, to address racism and other forms of oppression and to strengthen democracy).

The *Conflict Entrepreneurs*, *All Opinions Have Value*, *System Faith*, and *System Is Rigged* Mindsets Are Not Neatly Located in Either Cluster

While some mindsets are clearly located within one cluster or another, quantitative analysis shows that four mindsets—*Conflict Entrepreneurs*, *All Opinions Have Value*, *System Faith*, and *System Is Rigged*—do not fit clearly in either cluster. These mindsets have small positive correlations with the designed, inclusionary, and systemic mindsets, no or very small correlations with exclusionary mindsets around race and gender (such as the *Pathologizing Black Culture* mindset), and no, very small negative, or small positive correlations with *Individualism*. In other words, these four mindsets have very weak relationships with the clusters, and these relationships do not follow a clear pattern. (See Table 8 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

The pattern with attitudes is similar. The four mindsets are all positively, but relatively weakly, correlated with egalitarian and pro-immigrant attitudes. The mindsets are not correlated with social dominance attitudes, but all four mindsets are positively—if weakly—correlated with authoritarian attitudes. (See Table 9 in Appendix C for correlation tables.)

These correlations indicate that these mindsets don't fit squarely within either cluster. While they are, perhaps, slightly closer to the designed, inclusionary, and systemic cluster, the links with this cluster are weak, and there are also some links with the naturalistic, exclusionary, and individualistic cluster.

These results are consistent with the implications drawn from qualitative analysis. The *System Faith* and *All Opinions Have Value* mindsets can lead people to understate the injustices of the status quo. The *System Is Rigged* mindset can lead to fatalism and can—depending on how its blanks are filled in—be used in exclusionary ways. And the *Conflict Entrepreneurs* mindset, in spotlighting individuals, can make systemic thinking difficult.

What Does This Broader Cultural Context Mean for Pluralism?

- **Ways of talking that *seem* similar can have *very* different implications.** While it might not seem that different to elevate dialogue, as the *Interpersonal Model of Society* does, and to think of divisions as a product of talk, as people do when they draw on the *Collective Imagination* mindset, the quantitative analysis shows that these ways of thinking are bound up with *very* different ways of thinking about the world. Similarly, beneath the seemingly shared goal of greater social unity lie ways of thinking with profoundly different orientations toward equality and hierarchy. Pluralists need to recognize how similar ways of talking can be tied to ways of thinking with very different implications.

- **A pluralistic focus on relationships seems to be compatible with a systemic perspective.** Our findings indicate that people can simultaneously attend to the value of interpersonal relationships (and even model society on these) while recognizing that systems and structures matter and need to be changed. This suggests that, for the public as for the pluralism ecosystem, a pluralist cultural project and structural approaches to injustice have the potential to be mutually reinforcing.

- **Pluralists must be careful when talking about dialogue not to suggest that division is merely a matter of choice or that talk itself is the answer.** Unlike the *Interpersonal Model of Society*, the *Individualism* and *Collective Imagination* mindsets actively depress systemic thinking. It is, thus, critical that communicators *avoid* inadvertently cuing these mindsets. When talking about dialogue, pluralists must avoid reinforcing the idea that existing divisions and conflicts are the result of individual choices or imagined grievances that will disappear as soon as we find common ways of talking. To avoid cuing these mindsets, communicators must take care to acknowledge that while dialogue is critical to resolving divisions, conflicts often have systemic roots and require not only changes in how we deal with each other interpersonally but also policy and structural changes.

Conclusion

Understanding the cultural mindsets that members of the US public use to think about diversity, difference, division, and unity is critical for pluralistic efforts. This study provides a clear picture of how people think about issues related to pluralism. By understanding this terrain, we gain the ability to better navigate our way toward a pluralistic future.

This cultural terrain is not simple. The common yearning for unity and dialogue is, on its face, quite promising. Yet it covers over very different understandings. Some are productive ways of thinking that embrace diversity and difference. Yet alongside these are other ways of thinking that—whether those who draw on these mindsets intend it or not—envision a unity premised on suppressing difference or serve to delegitimize the claims of marginalized groups. By seeing this complexity, advocates and activists gain the ability to build on shared productive ways of thinking without inadvertently cuing and reinforcing less productive ones.

To advance pluralism, advocates and activists must find effective ways of strengthening these more productive mindsets and moving the less productive ones to the background. This will ultimately require new ways of talking about unity and difference—ways that people across demographic groups and across the political spectrum can see themselves in.

Appendix A

Research Methods and Samples

On the following pages, we provide additional information about research methods and samples to accompany the general description of methods provided on pages 6 and 7. Here, we focus on the methods used to test frames—focus groups and survey experiments. In total, 2,506 participants from across the United States were included in these methods.

Stakeholder Interviews

To develop an effective strategy for communicating about an issue, it's necessary to identify a set of key ideas to get across. For this project, these ideas were garnered from stakeholders within the broader pluralism ecosystem. FrameWorks researchers conducted 15 interviews, each lasting roughly 60 minutes, via Zoom. Interviews were conducted in August–September 2023 and, with participants' permission, were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Interviews with stakeholders consisted of a series of probing questions designed to capture their understanding of what pluralism is, different approaches to it, the challenges to pluralism in the United States, and the steps and solutions needed to advance it. Interviews were semi-structured in the sense that, in addition to preset questions, FrameWorks researchers repeatedly asked for elaboration and clarification and encouraged stakeholders to expand on concepts they identified as particularly important.

Analysis employed a basic grounded theory approach.²⁰ A FrameWorks researcher identified and inductively categorized common themes that emerged in each interview and across the sample. FrameWorks researchers consulted with the New Pluralists team to refine these core ideas, incorporating feedback provided on the document. This procedure resulted in a refined set of themes.

Cultural Mindsets Interviews

FrameWorks researchers conducted 20 one-on-one, two-hour, in-depth, semi-structured cultural mindsets interviews with people across the United States from January 26–February 23, 2024. Interviews were conducted over Zoom and were recorded with participants' written consent.

All participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and selected to represent variation along several dimensions: race and ethnicity, residential location, age, gender, educational background, income, political views (as self-reported during the screening process), and family situation (for example, married or single, with or without children). Non-white demographic groups were oversampled to ensure that all cultural mindsets identified are, in fact, shared across racial groups and that white people's views were not prioritized and misrepresented as common. See Table A-1 for full demographic information.

Cultural mindsets interviews are designed to allow researchers to capture broad sets of assumptions, or cultural mindsets, that participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area—in this case, diversity, difference, division, unity, and other issues related to pluralism. Interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions covering participants' thinking on those topics in broad terms. Researchers approached each interview with a common set of topics to explore but allowed participants to determine the direction and nature of the discussion.

To analyze the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understood issues.²¹ First, researchers identified common ways of talking across the sample to reveal assumptions, relationships, logical steps, and connections that were commonly made but taken for granted throughout an individual's dialogue. The analysis involved discerning patterns in what participants said (that is, how they related, explained, and understood things) and what they did not say (that is, assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, participants revealed conflicting mindsets on the same issue. In such cases, one conflicting way of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other in that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants' thinking (that is, participants drew on this mindset with greater frequency and relied more heavily on it in arriving at conclusions).

Analysis centered on ways of understanding that were shared across participants, as cultural mindsets research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. While there was no fixed rule or percentage used to identify what counts as "shared," mindsets reported were typically found in a large majority of interviews. Mindsets found in a smaller percentage of interviews were only reported if there was a clear reason why they only appeared in a limited set of interviews (for example, the mindset reflected the thinking of a particular subgroup of people).

As we describe in the next section, we primarily relied on large-sample surveys to explore variations between groups rather than looking at variation within our interview sample, as generalizations based on small numbers of participants would be inappropriate. However, in analyzing cultural mindsets interviews, researchers noted whether specific mindsets appeared more frequently in some racial/ethnic groups and used the qualitative data to generate possible interpretations of such differences. Where differences in mindset salience were borne out by the surveys, researchers returned to these interpretations from the cultural mindsets interviews to help make sense of these results.

Table A-1: Cultural Mindsets Interviews Demographic Information

Demographic Variable	Number of Participants
Age	
18–29	4
30–44	6
45–59	5
60+	5
Gender	
Man	10
Woman	10
Race/Ethnicity	
White (non-Hispanic/Latino)	8
Hispanic or Latino/a	5
Black/African American	4
Other (for example, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native)	3
Income	
\$0–\$39,999	4
\$40,000–\$69,999	7
\$70,000–\$99,999	5
\$100,00–\$149,999	2
\$150,000+	2
Education	
High school diploma or less	6
Some college or associate degree	8
Bachelor's degree	4
Graduate/professional degree	2
Political Party	
Republican/closer to Republican Party	9
Democrat/closer to Democratic Party	9
Other/independent	2
Marital Status	
Single	10
Married	10
Parental Status	
Has children	14
No children	6
Residential Location	
Rural	5
Suburban	7
Urban	8

Cultural Mindsets Surveys

Two online surveys were administered to gather data from a total sample of 2,486 participants (survey 1 N = 1,241; survey 2 N = 1,245) aged 18 and over and from the United States. To prevent participant burnout and reduce the length of the survey, items were divided between two surveys.

Both surveys began with participant consent and a series of standard demographic questions, followed by batteries designed to measure cultural mindsets, support for policies of interest to stakeholders in the pluralism ecosystem, and relevant attitudes like authoritarianism and egalitarianism. Each battery consisted of multiple questions and was primarily measured using Likert-type items with seven-point response scales. All batteries within each section were randomized.

Target quotas were set according to national benchmarks for age, gender, household income, education level, race/ethnicity, and political party affiliation. In addition, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American groups were oversampled above national benchmarks to support subgroup analyses, with a minimum target of n = 200 for each group.

All analyses regarding race/ethnicity were conducted using the nationally representative sample and the oversample to ensure adequate power for stratified analyses. Analyses regarding all other demographic variables were conducted using only the nationally representative sample. Data was collected in July 2024 by Dynata, which also hosted the survey. See the information that follows for more information about the sample composition.

Prior to conducting any analyses, we performed a series of factor analyses to assess the psychometric properties of our scales. For scales that had not been previously tested, we conducted exploratory factor analyses (EFA) to establish their psychometric robustness. Items with rotated factor loadings below $|0.50|$ were dropped from each battery. For scales that had been previously tested, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to test the expected dimensionality of our outcome scales. Survey items were specified to load onto their intended factors, with correlations among factors estimated freely using the marker method approach. We used Maximum Likelihood Estimation with Robust Standard Errors (MLR) to account for potential deviations from normality and model misspecifications. For model fit evaluation, we adopted an inclusive approach that considered multiple fit indices. Recognizing that chi-square is overly sensitive to sample size and minor model misspecifications, we used three approximate fit indices: the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA),²² with thresholds of < 0.050 for close fit and < 0.080 for reasonable fit; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI);²³ and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), with thresholds of > 0.900 for acceptable fit and > 0.950 for excellent fit.

Once finalized, Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to assess internal consistency among the items in each battery. Given that there are various heuristics for determining acceptable internal consistency, we determined that batteries with internal consistency scores approaching .60 or above would be considered acceptable.

In both surveys, after assessing internal consistency, items within each battery were combined into composite scores that indicated participants' average ratings of the mindsets or attitudes measured by each battery.

Across both surveys, we ran correlations to determine the relationships between and among (1) cultural mindsets, (2) attitudes, and (3) policy outcomes. A threshold of $p < 0.05$ was used to determine whether two variables were significantly correlated. A correlation coefficient within the range of 0.1–0.3 was considered a small association; a correlation coefficient within the range of 0.30–0.50 was considered a medium association; and a correlation of 0.50 or higher was considered a large association.

We used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether participants from various demographic backgrounds differed significantly in their endorsement of cultural mindsets and attitudes. Further, we used Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons to identify where significant differences between demographic groups occurred. An effect size within the range of 0.2–0.49 was considered a small association; an effect size within the range of 0.5–0.79 was considered a medium association; an effect of 0.8 or higher was considered a large association; and an effect of 1 or higher was considered a very large effect.²⁴

As with all research, it is important to remember that results are based on a sample of the population, not the entire population. As such, all results are subject to margins of error.

Table A-2: Survey 1 Demographic Information

Demographic Variable	Main Sample N	Main Sample %	Oversample N	Oversample %	Total N	Total %
Age						
18–24	80	8%	20	8%	100	8%
25–34	192	19%	31	13%	223	18%
35–44	176	18%	32	13%	208	17%
45–59	240	24%	53	22%	293	24%
60+	313	31%	104	44%	417	33%
Sex						
Male	491	49%	119	50%	610	49%
Female	510	51%	121	50%	631	51%
Nonbinary/other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Gender						
Man	489	49%	119	50%	608	49%
Woman	502	50%	121	50%	623	50%
Trans Man	2	<1%	0	0%	2	<1%
Trans Woman	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Genderqueer	8	<1%	0	0%	8	<1%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Demographic Variable	Main Sample N	Main Sample %	Oversample N	Oversample %	Total N	Total %
Region						
Northeast	213	21%	40	17%	253	20%
Midwest	181	18%	36	15%	217	17%
South	392	39%	89	37%	481	39%
West	215	22%	75	31%	290	24%
Race/Ethnicity						
Caucasian/white (non-Hispanic/Latino)	604	60%	1	0%	605	49%
Hispanic or Latino	146	15%	54	23%	200	16%
Black/African American	152	16%	48	20%	200	16%
Asian	63	6%	137	57%	200	16%
American Indian/Alaska Native	12	<1%	0	0%	12	1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	<1%	0	0%	2	<1%
Other/biracial or multiracial	22	2%	0	0%	22	2%
Income						
\$0–\$24,999	182	18%	32	13%	214	17%
\$25,000–\$49,999	212	21%	50	21%	262	21%
\$50,000–\$99,999	321	32%	72	30%	393	32%
\$100,00–\$149,999	158	16%	38	16%	196	16%
\$150,000+	128	13%	48	20%	176	14%
Education						
High school diploma or less	337	34%	25	10%	362	29%
Some college or associate degree	261	26%	62	26%	323	26%
Bachelor's degree	252	25%	90	38%	342	28%
Graduate/professional degree	151	15%	63	26%	214	17%
Political Party						
Republican/closer to Republican Party	402	40%	63	26%	465	37%
Democrat/closer to Democratic Party	480	48%	140	58%	620	50%
Neither	119	12%	37	16%	156	13%
Marital Status						
Single	352	35%	78	33%	430	35%
Married	468	47%	125	52%	593	47%
Married but separated	12	1%	2	<1%	14	1%
Divorced	111	11%	21	9%	132	11%
Other	58	6%	14	6%	72	6%

Table A-3: Survey 2 Demographic Information

Demographic Variable	Main Sample N	Main Sample %	Oversample N	Oversample %	Total N	Total %
Age						
18–24	87	9%	11	5%	98	8%
25–34	184	18%	25	11%	209	17%
35–44	179	18%	41	17%	220	18%
45–59	252	25%	65	27%	317	25%
60+	306	30%	95	40%	401	32%
Sex						
Male	497	49%	117	49%	614	49%
Female	510	51%	120	51%	630	51%
Nonbinary/other	1	<1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Gender						
Man	491	49%	116	49%	607	49%
Woman	508	50%	119	50%	627	50%
Trans Man	1	<1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Trans Woman	1	<1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Genderqueer	5	<1%	2	<1%	7	<1%
Other	2	<1%	0	0%	2	<1%
region						
Northeast	179	18%	48	20%	227	18%
Midwest	211	21%	36	15%	247	20%
South	374	37%	75	32%	449	36%
West	244	24%	78	33%	322	26%
Race/Ethnicity						
Caucasian/white (non-Hispanic/Latino)	603	60%	0	0%	603	49%
Hispanic or Latino	158	16%	42	18%	200	16%
Black/African American	142	14%	58	24%	200	16%
Asian	63	6%	137	58%	200	16%
American Indian/Alaska Native	10	<1%	0	0%	10	<1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	<1%	0	0%	1	<1%
Other/biracial or multiracial	31	3%	0	0%	31	2%

Demographic Variable	Main Sample N	Main Sample %	Oversample N	Oversample %	Total N	Total %
Income						
\$0–\$24,999	183	18%	22	9%	205	16%
\$25,000–\$49,999	200	20%	41	17%	241	19%
\$50,000–\$99,999	317	31%	80	34%	397	33%
\$100,00–\$149,999	177	18%	47	20%	224	18%
\$150,000+	131	13%	47	20%	178	14%
Education						
High school diploma or less	322	32%	32	13%	354	28%
Some college or associate degree	283	28%	56	24%	339	27%
Bachelor's degree	247	25%	85	36%	332	27%
Graduate/professional degree	156	15%	64	27%	220	18%
Political Party						
Republican/closer to Republican Party	388	38%	55	23%	443	36%
Democrat/closer to Democratic Party	511	51%	130	55%	641	51%
Neither	109	11%	52	22%	161	13%
Marital Status						
Single	360	36%	78	33%	438	35%
Married	465	46%	126	53%	591	48%
Married but separated	24	2%	2	1%	26	2%
Divorced	108	11%	19	8%	127	10%
Other	51	5%	12	5%	63	5%

Table A-4: Cultural Mindsets, Attitudes, and Policies by Survey

Survey 1	Survey 2
Cultural Mindsets	
The Interpersonal Model of Society (1)	The Interpersonal Model of Society (1)
Talk/Listening as the Answer (2) ²⁵	Talk/Listening as the Answer (2)
Unity through Restoration (3)	Unity through Restoration (3)
Unity through Progress (4)	Unity through Progress (4)
Colorblind Racism (5)	Colorblind Racism (5)
Racism Is "All in Their Heads" (6) ²⁶	Racism Is "All in Their Heads" (6)
Collective Imagination (7)	Collective Imagination (7)
Conflict Entrepreneurs (8)	Conflict Entrepreneurs (8)
All Opinions Have Value (9)	All Opinions Have Value (9)
Exceptional Diversity (10)	Exceptional Diversity (10)
Diversity Is Enriching (11)	Diversity Is Enriching (11)
Like with Like (12)	Like with Like (12)
System Faith (13)	System Faith (13)
Pathologizing Black Culture (14)	Pathologizing Black Culture (14)
Structural Model of Racism (15)	System Is Rigged—General (20)
Interpersonal Model of Racism (16)	System Is Rigged—Liberal Elites (21) ²⁷
Personalism (17)	System Is Rigged—Hard Right (22) ²⁸
Institutionalism (18)	Individualism (23)
Gender Is Constructed (19)	Systemic Thinking (24)
	Gender Is a Fixed Binary (25)
Attitudes & Policies	
Pro-Immigrant Attitudes (26)	Authoritarian Aggression (28)
Affective Polarization: Social Distancing (27a)	Social Dominance (29)
Affective Polarization: Feelings Thermometer (27b)	Egalitarianism (30)
Policy Support (31)	Policy Support (31)

Appendix B

Survey Items

Cultural Mindsets

Cultural mindsets were primarily measured using batteries of items designed to capture the core assumptions or ideas of a mindset. Some cultural mindsets were measured in both surveys, whereas others were only included in one survey (see Table 3). All mindsets were measured on a seven-point scale, from *very strongly disagree* to *very strongly agree*.

The surveys included mindsets about diversity, difference, division, and unity identified in the cognitive interviews for this project. Relevant cultural mindsets identified in other work that we have identified as being part of mindset clusters were also included (see finding #7 in this report for more information).

(1) The Interpersonal Model of Society $\alpha = .89$

1. The same approaches used to settle impersonal conflicts are useful for settling conflicts among larger social and political groups.
2. Conflict resolution methods used in personal relationships—like dialogue—can also be used to address larger societal conflicts.
3. Strategies used for resolving personal disagreements are also effective for addressing disagreements between social groups.
4. Just as interpersonal disputes can be resolved through dialogue, so too can disputes between social and political groups.

(2) Talk/Listening as the Answer $\alpha = .87$

1. If people just sat down and talked to each other, there would be less division between them.
2. Most interpersonal conflicts can be settled through open conversation.
3. Open dialogue is the key to resolving most interpersonal disagreements.
4. Talking things out is the most effective way to handle division between people.

(3) Unity through Restoration $\alpha = .88$

1. To be more unified as a country, we need to go back to a past where everyone knew their place.
2. Addressing our country's issues means going back to a time when things weren't so complicated.
3. If we want national unity, we should look back to times when people were less sensitive about their identities.
4. We would be more unified if we went back to a time when things were simpler.
5. Our country needs to return to a time when there was a greater sense of safety and unity.

(4) Unity through Progress $\alpha = .85$

1. To achieve unity as a nation, we need to work toward equalizing conditions for different groups.
2. If we want to be more unified, we must work to give all groups an equal chance to succeed.
3. Our country would not be so divided if all groups in society were more equal.
4. Our country is divided because certain groups have more power than others.

(5) Colorblind Racism $\alpha = .85$

1. Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.
2. Talking about race only divides us.
3. If we just stopped focusing on race, we wouldn't be so divided.

(6) Racism Is "All in Their Heads" $\alpha = .93$

1. There's no racial oppression in our society—only people who imagine they're oppressed because of their race.
2. Many people claim to be racially oppressed, when in reality, they are not.
3. Claims of racial oppression are often based on individual perceptions rather than actual societal issues.
4. People who claim racial oppression usually have a "victim" mindset.

(7) Collective Imagination $\alpha = .92$

1. There's no oppression in our society—only people who imagine they're oppressed.
2. Many people claim to be oppressed when, in reality, they are not.
3. Claims of oppression are often based on perceptions, rather than actual societal issues.

4. People who claim to be oppressed usually have a “victim” mindset.
5. The only reason our society is divided is because we keep telling ourselves it is.
6. Our society is divided mainly because we believe it is.

(8) Conflict Entrepreneurs $\alpha = .89$

1. America would be more united if influential figures stopped encouraging division.
2. Influential people create division in our country for their own benefit.
3. Certain people with influence promote division in our nation for personal gain.
4. To maintain their power, influential figures create social division.
5. To achieve unity as a nation, we need to stop listening to influential people that try to divide us.

(9) All Opinions Have Value $\alpha = .87$

1. It's important to respect all opinions, even if you don't agree.
2. All points of view have value and need to be considered.
3. If we don't consider every side of an issue, we're not being fair.
4. It is not right to form judgments without listening to all views and perspectives.

(10) Exceptional Diversity $\alpha = .90$

1. America is exceptional because of its racial and religious diversity.
2. Our racial and religious diversity gives the United States an edge over other countries.
3. Our nation's strength comes from the wide range of cultures and backgrounds within it.
4. America's racial and religious diversity makes it the best country in the world.
5. Racial and religious diversity is what makes America unique.

(11) Diversity Is Enriching $\alpha = .95$

1. Engaging with people of different backgrounds and beliefs is good for all of us.
2. A population with diverse backgrounds strengthens our society.
3. Our society thrives when we are exposed to people of different backgrounds and viewpoints.
4. Connecting with people from diverse backgrounds helps us learn from each other.
5. Personal growth is fostered by engaging with people of different backgrounds and beliefs.
6. Getting to know people from different backgrounds and beliefs supports growth and learning.

(12) Like with Like $\alpha = .82$

1. Living in a diverse place means that others' values will be pushed on you.
2. Living among people with different backgrounds means your values won't be respected.
3. To feel respected, people need to live in a place where their values are shared by everyone.
4. If my values aren't reflected in public policies, then it means my values aren't respected.
5. For my values to be respected, they need to be shared by everyone in my community.

(13) System Faith $\alpha = .77$

1. If people are dissatisfied with how things are going, they should engage with the existing systems to create change.
2. If we want to fix our problems in society, people need to be more engaged with the systems that are already in place.
3. Effective problem-solving in society requires active participation in our political system.
4. Our problems won't be solved until everyone gets involved in our political system.

(14) Pathologizing Black Culture $\alpha = .82$

1. Black inner city communities would do better if they took responsibility for their lives rather than relying on welfare.
2. The reason why low-income urban communities are low income is because they don't value hard work.
3. If low-income families want to do better, they should stop having children that they cannot afford.

(15) Structural Model of Racism $\alpha = .88$

1. Racism is present in our laws, policies, and institutions.
2. Our laws and policies work together to disadvantage Black people.
3. Racial discrimination is primarily the result of how our society is set up.
4. Our institutions have historically worked together to advantage white people.

(16) Interpersonal Model of Racism $\alpha = .83$

1. Discriminatory laws and policies exist because of racist politicians.
2. If we get rid of racist leaders and politicians, our laws and policies will become less biased.
3. If our leaders were less biased, we wouldn't have racist policies.

(17) Personalism $\alpha = .75$

1. How well our government works depends on the character of our leaders.
2. When government doesn't work well, it's because bad people are in charge.
3. If we replaced our current leaders with better people, the government would work well.

(18) Institutionalism $\alpha = .79$

1. When government doesn't work well, it's because the political system is poorly designed.
2. If we made fundamental changes to the US Constitution, our government could work much better.
3. If we changed major aspects of our political system, our government would work much better.

(19) Gender Is Constructed $\alpha = .81$

1. Upbringing influences men and women's behavior far more than biology does.
2. Differences between men and women are the result of what society expects and encourages.
3. During upbringing, some personality traits are encouraged more in girls than in boys.
4. Personality differences between girls and boys are primarily the result of upbringing.
5. Boys and girls behave in different ways because society treats them differently.

(20) System Is Rigged—General $\alpha = .91$

1. Our system is rigged against ordinary Americans.
2. In our country, the system is rigged against most people.
3. The way things work in this country leaves most people without a say over their own lives.
4. In our society, the system is rigged so that most people don't have a say over how they live and work.

(21) System Is Rigged—Liberal Elites $\alpha = .93$

1. In our society, liberal elites manipulate the system to undermine American values.
2. Liberal politicians are rigging the system to steal votes.
3. The woke left is stacking the deck against ordinary Americans.

(22) System Is Rigged—Hard Right $\alpha = .93$

1. The hard right is manipulating the system to undermine our collective values.
2. Right-wing politicians are rigging the system to steal votes.
3. Extremist narratives from the hard right threaten our democracy.
4. The hard right is spreading conspiracy theories to manipulate our democracy.

(23) Individualism $\alpha = .88$

1. What happens to an individual in their life is primarily the result of the choices they make.
2. How well people do in life is mostly determined by how much willpower and drive they have.
3. If someone works hard enough, they'll succeed in life.
4. How we do in life is our own responsibility and no one else's.

(24) Systemic Thinking $\alpha = .72$

1. How people do in life is our whole society's responsibility.
2. How successful people are in life is determined by how our society is structured.
3. The opportunities available in our communities shape our outcomes in life.

(25) Gender Is a Fixed Binary $\alpha = .92$

1. Everyone belongs in one of two gender categories: man or woman.
2. In nature there are two genders, no exceptions.
3. All children are either girls or boys.

Attitudes and Policies

Attitudes were primarily measured using batteries of items, whereas policy support was measured using single items. Each set of attitudes was only measured in one survey, while policy support was measured in both (see Table 3). Attitudes were measured on a seven-point scale, from *very strongly disagree* to *very strongly agree*, unless otherwise noted. Policy support was measured on a seven-point scale, from *strongly oppose* to *strongly favor*.

(26) Pro-immigrant Attitudes $\alpha = .94$

1. Immigrants make our country a better place to live.
2. The cultural life of our country is better because of immigrants.
3. Immigrants make us feel part of a bigger world.
4. Immigrants should have the same opportunities as those of us who were born in the United States.

(27a) Affective Polarization: Social Distancing $\alpha = .85^{29}$

Five-point Likert scale: "Very uncomfortable"; "Somewhat uncomfortable"; "Neutral"; "Somewhat comfortable"; "Very comfortable"

1. Attending a social event with people who strongly disagree with your political views.
2. Having a discussion about political issues with someone who holds opposing views.
3. Developing a close friendship with someone who actively supports a political party different from your own.
4. Living next door to someone who is an active supporter of a political party you strongly oppose.
5. Your child marrying someone from a political party different from your own.

(27b) Affective Polarization: Feelings Thermometer

Participants were asked to rate their feelings toward Democrats and Republicans on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represented very cold or unfavorable feelings, 5 indicated neutral feelings, and 10 signified very warm or favorable feelings.

(28) Authoritarianism Aggression $\alpha = .92$

1. The facts on crime and the recent public disorders show we have to crack down harder on troublemakers, if we are going to preserve law and order.
2. The way things are going in this country, it's going to take a lot of "strong medicine" to straighten out the troublemakers and criminals.
3. The situation in our country is getting so serious, we need powerful leaders who will crack down on radical, immoral behavior.
4. What our country really needs is a tough, harsh dose of law and order.
5. Strong, tough government is what we need to get our country back on track.

(29) Social Dominance $\alpha = .84$

1. An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.
2. To achieve unity as a nation, we must accept that some groups will not have as much power as others.
3. Greater equality between groups in society won't bring us together.
4. Our country is so divided because we keep trying to make groups equal.

(30) Egalitarianism $\alpha = .70^{50}$

1. It is a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom. (reversed)
2. It would be good if all groups could be equal.
3. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.
4. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.

(31) Policy Support

1. Do you support or oppose changing our electoral system so that political parties other than Democrats and Republicans can win seats in Congress?
2. Do you support or oppose term limits for the Supreme Court?
3. Do you support or oppose abolishing the Electoral College so that the president is selected based solely on the popular vote?
4. Do you support or oppose proposals for a universal basic income that pays all Americans \$1,000 per month?
5. Do you support or oppose creating “baby bonds” that give all children a small investment account that they can access when they are 18?
6. Do you support or oppose expanding legal pathways to US citizenship for people who are undocumented?
7. Do you support or oppose increased funding for food and shelter programs to assist refugees and people seeking asylum in the United States?
8. Do you support or oppose enforcing stricter and more rigorous criteria for obtaining US citizenship?
9. Do you support or oppose increasing funding and resources for border security?
10. Do you support or oppose immediate deportation of all undocumented people?
11. Do you support or oppose using race and ethnicity as a factor in college admissions decisions?
12. Do you support or oppose proposals for the US government to make cash payments to Black Americans who are descendants of slaves?
13. Do you support or oppose changing the national school curriculum to teach US history with more emphasis on slavery and racism?

Appendix C

Correlation Tables for Mindset Clusters (Finding #7)

The tables on the following pages provide correlation tables to demonstrate the relationships between mindsets discussed in finding #7. For brief summaries of the mindsets discussed in the tables that are not described in this report, see [The State of American Culture, 2023–2024](#) (p. 20).

For the correlation tables, results can be interpreted as follows:

- **Blue: Positive, statistically significant correlation**
- **Red: Negative, statistically significant correlation**
- * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$
- 0.10–0.29 = small correlation; 0.30–0.49 = moderate correlation; and 0.50+ = large correlation

Table C-1: Correlations with Naturalistic, Exclusionary, Individualistic Mindsets

	Individualism	Pathologizing Black Culture	Gender Is Binary	Unity through Restoration	Colorblind Racism	Collective Imagination
Pathologizing Black Culture	0.55**					
Gender Is a Fixed Binary	0.47**	0.45**				
Unity through Restoration	0.55**	0.57**	0.53**			
Colorblind Racism	0.53**	0.57**	0.48**	0.62**		
Collective Imagination	0.55**	0.65**	0.47**	0.60**	0.64**	
Like with Like	0.33**	0.44**	0.28**	0.50**	0.43**	0.45**

Table C-2: Correlations of Mindsets with Attitudes

	Social Dominance	Authoritarian Aggression	Egalitarianism	Pro-immigrant Attitudes
Unity through Restoration	0.56**	0.66**	-0.27**	-0.29**
Colorblind Racism	0.57**	0.55**	-0.30**	-0.27**
Collective Imagination	0.63**	0.56**	-0.43**	-0.28**
Like with Like	0.47**	0.40**	-0.29**	-0.07*

Table C-3: Correlations with Designed, Inclusionary, and Systemic Mindsets

	Systemic Thinking	Structural Model of Racism	Gender Is Constructed	Unity through Progress	Diversity Is Enriching	Exceptional Diversity
Gender Is Constructed	[no data] ³¹	0.45**				
Unity through Progress	0.52**	0.61**	0.54**			
Diversity Is Enriching	0.37**	0.41**	0.40**	0.53**		
Exceptional Diversity	0.24**	0.21**	0.28**	0.29**	0.55**	
Interpersonal Model of Society	0.30**	0.16**	0.29**	0.30**	0.46**	0.39**

Table C-4: Correlations of Mindsets with Attitudes

	Social Dominance	Authoritarian Aggression	Egalitarianism	Pro-immigrant Attitudes
Unity through Progress	-0.36**	-0.16**	0.59**	0.37**
Diversity Is Enriching	-0.30**	-0.19**	0.50**	0.53**
Exceptional Diversity	-0.13**	-0.03	0.27**	0.42**
Interpersonal Model of Society	-0.07*	0.06	0.27**	0.29**

Table C-5: Correlations of Pluralism Mindsets with Mindsets from Both Clusters³²

	Naturalistic, Exclusionary, Individualistic Cluster			Designed, Inclusionary, Systemic Cluster		
	Individualism	Pathologizing Black Culture	Gender Is a Fixed Binary	Systemic Thinking	Structural Model of Racism	Gender Is Constructed
Conflict Entrepreneurs	0.07	0.06	0.00	0.15**	0.12**	0.19**
All Opinions Have Value	0.23**	0.04	0.05	0.18**	0.13**	0.20**
System Faith	0.12**	0.05	-0.09**	0.24**	0.16**	0.29**
System Is Rigged	-0.08*	0.05	0.00	0.28**	[no data]	[no data]

Table C-6: Correlations of Mindsets with Attitudes³³

	Social Dominance	Authoritarian Aggression	Egalitarianism	Pro-immigrant Attitudes
Conflict Entrepreneurs	-0.05	0.14**	0.24**	0.17**
All Opinions Have Value	-0.04	0.21**	0.32**	0.18**
System Faith	-0.03	0.08*	0.21**	0.28**
System Is Rigged	0.07	0.08*	0.11**	[no data]

Endnotes

1. For a discussion of the differences between mindsets, beliefs, attitudes, and other concepts, see FrameWorks Institute (2020). *Mindset shifts: What are they? Why do they matter? How do they happen?* (A FrameWorks Strategic Report). FrameWorks Institute.
2. For a helpful discussion of segmentation, see Sanderson, B. (2021). *To segment or not to segment? When to use audience segmentation in campaigns*. Public Interest Research Centre. <https://publicinterest.org.uk/segmentation/>
3. See Kendall-Taylor, N., & Bales, S. (2009). *Like Mars to Venus: The separate and sketchy worlds of budgets and taxes*. FrameWorks Institute.
4. For readability, quotes have been lightly edited to remove some instances of verbal filler (for example, “uh,” “like”). We have left some instances of this talk where it indicated a pause in thought or uncertainty about how to continue. Edits are very minor and were done carefully to avoid affecting meaning.
5. Ripley, A. (2021). *High conflict: Why we get trapped and how we get out*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
6. For a discussion of American exceptionalism as a cultural mindset, see Lindland, E., Volmert, A., & Downs, L. (2020). *Communicating about peace and peacebuilding: Challenges, opportunities, and emerging recommendations*. FrameWorks Institute.
7. On this mindset, see Baran, M., Kendall-Taylor, N., Lindland, E., O’Neil, M., & Haydon, A. (2014). *Getting to “we”: Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of immigration and immigration reform*. Frameworks Institute. https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/immigration_mtg.pdf
8. See Volmert, A., Lyew, D., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, K. (2023). *The terrain of spatial justice: Cultural mindsets of race and place in the United States*. FrameWorks Institute.
9. For extensive discussion of mindsets around race and racism, see Volmert, A., Lyew, D., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, K. (2023).
10. On the *Exceptional Diversity* mindset, differences between Democrats (mean endorsement = 73.7) and Republicans (mean = 64.5) are significant ($p < .001$, $d = .44$); On *Diversity Is Enriching*, Democrats (mean endorsement = 83.4) and Republicans (mean = 71.3) are significant ($p < .001$, $d = .66$).
11. See Volmert, A., Lyew, D., John, J., Vierra, K., & Moyer, K. (2023). pp. 37–38.
12. See Bonilla-Silva, E. (2022). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of inequality in America* (6th ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
13. Effect sizes (Cohen’s d) were interpreted as follows: small ($d = 0.2$), medium ($d = 0.5$), large ($d = 0.8$), and very large ($d = 1+$); Cohen, J. (1988). Edition. *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Differences between Democrats and Republicans are significant and large for the *Collective Imagination* mindset ($p < .001$, $d = .92$), and significant and moderate for the *Colorblind Racism* mindset ($p < .001$, $d = .71$).
14. Differences between white and Black participants are significant but small for the *Colorblind Racism* mindset ($p < .001$, $d = .32$), while differences between these groups are significant and medium-sized for the *Collective Imagination* mindset ($p < .001$, $d = .66$).

15. When we compare Democrat and Republican levels of endorsement of each mindset, we find significant and large differences (*Unity through Restoration* mindset: $p < .001$, $d = .82$; *Unity through Progress* mindset: $p < .001$, $d = .90$).
16. Differences between white and Black participants are significant and medium-sized for the *Unity through Progress* mindset ($p < .001$, $d = .58$); differences between white and Black participants are significant but small for the *Unity through Restoration* mindset ($p = .013$, $d = .25$).
17. See Volmert, A., & Sterling, S. (2024, September). *By and for the people? Cultural mindsets of democracy and the US political system—and what they mean for structural change*. FrameWorks Institute and Democracy Revival Center.
18. FrameWorks Institute. (2023). *By and for the people? Cultural mindsets of democracy and the US political system: A Culture change project report*. FrameWorks Institute.
19. For more on clusters, see FrameWorks Institute. (2024). *The state of American Culture, 2023–2024*. FrameWorks Institute.
20. Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research (observations)*. Aldine; Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage.
21. Quinn, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Finding culture in talk: A collection of methods*. Palgrave Macmillan.
22. Marsh, H. W., Wen, Z., & Hau, K. T. (2004). Structural equation models of latent interactions: evaluation of alternative estimation strategies and indicator construction. *Psychological Methods*, 9(3), 275.
23. Bentler, P. M. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(2), 238.
24. Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Erlbaum.
25. This formulation is a specific application of the *Interpersonal Model of Society*.
26. This formulation is a specific application of the *Collective Imagination* mindset.
27. This formulation is a specific application of the *System Is Rigged* mindset.
28. This formulation is a different specific application of the *System Is Rigged* mindset.
29. Adapted from: Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405–431.
30. Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Park, C. J., & Perry, J. C. (2017). Development and validation of the critical consciousness scale. *Youth & Society*, 49(4), 461–483.
31. The *Systemic Thinking* mindset was not in the same survey as the *Gender Is Constructed* mindset and *Structural Model of Racism*, so we have no data for these relationships. We know these mindsets are positively correlated from other research.
32. The *System Is Rigged* mindset and the *Structural Model of Racism* and *Gender Is Constructed* mindsets were in different surveys, so we have no data on the relationships between them.
33. The *System Is Rigged* mindset and the measures of pro-immigrant attitudes were in different surveys, so we have no data on the relationships between them.

About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org



Which Unity? Whose Diversity?

Cultural Mindsets around
Pluralism in the United States

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the FrameWorks Institute.

Volmert, A., French Brennan, S., Vierra, K., Hestres, L., & Miller, T. L. (2024). *Which unity? Whose diversity? Cultural mindsets around pluralism in the United States*. FrameWorks Institute.

Designed by Constructive · © FrameWorks Institute 2024

This report was supported by New Pluralists, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.