

Quick-Start Guide: Tapping into Americans' Desire for Change

Americans want transformational change to our political system. The way we talk about that system and those changes can lead people to reach for democratic—or authoritarian—solutions.

This quick-start guide outlines findings from the FrameWorks Institute's real-time research on:

1. how people are thinking about the political system;
 2. challenges and opportunities this thinking poses to communicators; and
 3. how we can talk about systems change to lead people toward democratic—and away from authoritarian—solutions.
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How People Are Thinking about the U.S. Political System

FrameWorks research conducted in August 2025 shows that 71 percent of Americans—including a majority of Democrats and Republicans—say that our political system needs either major changes or to be completely reformed.

This desire for change is grounded in basic assumptions about American society:

1. People see our political and economic systems as rigged to work for the powerful, not themselves. The idea that the system is rigged is strongly held across political affiliation and demographic groups.
2. People sometimes see our political system as outdated. When people think about the Constitution, they sometimes see it as written in and shaped by historical conditions that no longer suit our society today.

Challenges and Openings for Advocates, Organizers, and Storytellers

The fact that Americans see that our systems are rigged and are open to radical changes is, in itself, an important opportunity. But people aren't exactly sure *how* the system is rigged or *how* it should be changed, which creates an opening for authoritarian appeals in two ways:

1. The lack of clarity about how the system is rigged, or designed in the first place, makes it hard for people to identify fixes. And without ideas about systemic fixes, letting a strongman tear down the system can seem like the only option for real change.
2. People focus overwhelmingly on individual leaders and their character when thinking about problems with, and fixes for, our government. This opens space for the idea that what we need is the right, heroic leader who can push through change through strength of will.

Together, these challenges can make it seem like only a strongman can change the systems people are so unhappy with. This illuminates an urgent task for those of us who want to see our democracy strengthened, not weakened: we need to acknowledge people's desire for fundamental change and offer a vision of and path toward fundamental *democratic* change.

The good news is that our research shows that people's desire for change does *not* necessarily entail support for authoritarianism. While 71% of Americans might want major changes to our political system, the majority of both Democrats (96%) and Republicans (63%) *oppose* strengthening executive power (making it easier for presidents to do what they want without interference).

Meanwhile, our research shows an appetite for changes that could democratize the system. For instance:

- 79% support term limits for the Supreme Court, including 90% of Democrats and 67% of Republicans.
- 66% support changing presidential elections so the winner of the popular vote wins, including 82% of Democrats and 45% of Republicans.
- 65% support changes that would make it possible to have more political parties, including 77% of Democrats and 43% of Republicans.
- 50% support updating the Constitution to meet the needs of today, with an additional 16% saying they neither support or oppose updates. 57% of Democrats and 42% of Republicans support updating the Constitution.

How to Talk about Systemic Change

We cannot cede the U.S. public's desire for change to authoritarians. We need effective ways of talking about democratic alternatives. Here's a place to start:

1. **Open with an appeal to what we want from our political system.**

Something like:

"We need a system of government that serves the public interest, not corporations."

"Our government should do what the people say they want."

2. **Validate people's sense that the system isn't working the way it should.**

Something like:

"But right now, the ultra-wealthy have more influence than the rest of us."

"But our current system makes it hard to pass popular reforms."

3. **Show people the underlying issues undermining our democracy.**

Something like:

"That's because the way we elect our representatives is...."

"Our system is filled with hurdles like the filibuster...."

4. **Offer solutions that would directly address the issue(s) identified.**

"It doesn't have to be this way. We can...."

"To make our system more responsive to the people, we must..."

Note on Talking about Solutions

Communicating about solutions to a rigged system is complicated by the ambition-feasibility paradox: solutions that are ambitious enough to unrig the system don't seem feasible, and solutions that are feasible don't seem ambitious enough to unrig the system. We can address this paradox by making sure the solutions we offer match the size and scale of the problems we're describing. More information can be found in the January 2025 report, *Filling in the Blanks: Contesting What "the System is Rigged" Means*.