On Culture: How do Americans think about our political system?

Oct 31, 2023



Friends and partners,

The recent debacle over the House speakership—and the dialogue surrounding it—are emblematic of larger frustrations Americans are having with our political system.

Our cynicism about party politics isn't exactly new. But new research from the Culture Change Project is showing that it might be a bit more complicated than it appears.

This new research—which will be released in full in December—explores Americans' deep, taken-for-granted ways of thinking about our government, the Constitution, and democracy. Participants in this research raised issues around political parties and division time and time again. This month, we're sharing insights from those conversations, and what the dialogue around partisanship might signal about how we should be communicating about our larger political system.

READ THE ARTICLE

In sum, we found that people:

- view party politics as a force that undermines rather than promotes our democracy;
- see our political system as rigged, and see parties as a mechanism for that rigging;
- understand government to be a set of unprincipled individual actors; and
- view these unprincipled individuals as a "them" working in opposition to "us" (the people).

This focus on bad, individual actors is echoed in recent polling data from Pew Research. When asked to name the biggest problem with the political system today, people's top answer (by far) was "politicians."

As researchers and communicators, we're not interested in getting people to think that politicians are free from blame. We are interested in understanding how these mindsets come into play in discourse about our political system, and the different ways of cueing them in order to build support for broad systemic solutions.

Essentially—it's not that politicians or parties aren't the problem. It's that when we think of solutions, getting new people into office can't be the only answer. What are the systems and structures in place that allowed us to reach our current political environment in the first place?

Below, you can find more information about our upcoming research on democracy and the political system. We look forward to continuing this conversation with you!

In partnership,



Carinne Wheedan, Director of Communications

UP NEXT

DEMOCRACY: In December we will be releasing a full research report with the results of a qualitative study of Americans' thinking about democracy, government, and the political system. This research is a complement to recent polling data, helping us understand not just what people's opinions are but what lies beneath them.

CLAIMING THE SYSTEM-IS-RIGGED NARRATIVE: How can we communicate about our political and economic systems being rigged in ways that fuel systemic action without activating fatalist or racist thinking about who is rigging them and why? Early next year, we'll share findings from a set of experimental studies on how to effectively talk about "the system." Stay tuned!

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

BRIEF: Navigating Cultural Mindsets of Race and Place in the United States

Structural racism shapes where and how Americans live. Spatial justice is the distribution of power and resources within and between places that is needed to establish racial equity, but it is often undercut by dominant cultural mindsets that blame oppressed groups for their living conditions. Our recent research tracks how existing mindsets about race and place can prevent the pursuit of spatial justice, while others can facilitate this pursuit. Take a look at this brief to learn more about these mindsets and their implications for communicating about race and place.

READ THE BRIEF

EXPLORE THE FULL REPORT

ARTICLE (NEWSWEEK): Why Do Americans Mistrust Science?

In an age in which nearly 1 in 4 Americans have little to no trust in science, FrameWorks CEO Nat Kendall-Taylor discusses how we can use framing to build this trust and help our audiences combat misinformation. While some of our deeply-entrenched mindsets about science can erode this trust, others provide promising avenues for addressing pervasive mistrust. By tapping into the power of awe, leaning into scientific pragmatism, and moving away from an over-reliance on 'science says', we can start to shift mindsets in ways that fortify trust in science as a tool for problem-solving and progress.

READ THE ARTICLE

SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE CHANGERS

PODCAST: A Question of Care

In a new podcast, Robert Espinoza—Executive Vice President of Policy at PHI—explores urgent questions about the caregiving system in the United States. This season is focused on caregiving related to aging, featuring episodes about racism in the care system, the effects of COVID-19 on nursing homes, and what we can do to combat ageism. Listen now to learn more.

PODCAST: We Can Do Hard Things. Episode 246: The Answer to Caregiving Burnout with Ai-jen Poo

Ai-jen Poo, President of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Executive Director of Caring Across Generations, was recently featured on Glennon Doyle's podcast, "We Can Do Hard Things." In the episode, Poo discusses what it takes to right the systemic failures of the care system and how we can engage in care work without doing so at our own expense. Listen now on all streaming platforms.

PODCAST: Work for Humans. How to Change Minds: The Impact of Framing on Thoughts and Behaviors with Nat Kendall-Taylor

In a recent episode of "Work for Humans," a podcast aimed at addressing the challenges facing business leaders across sectors, Nat Kendall-Taylor discusses the science of framing and how it can be utilized to help non-profits better communicate and facilitate social change. Listen on your favorite streaming platform to hear more about cultural mindsets, disseminating information more effectively, and the importance of mobilization strategy when it comes to introducing new ideas.



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