FRAME WORKS

On Culture: New research on democracy and the US political system

Dec 18, 2023



Friends and partners,

In the year's final edition of *On Culture*, it feels appropriate to discuss democracy. It's been an eventful year—from controversial Supreme Court decisions leading to louder calls for term limits, to more than a dozen states enacting laws that make it harder to vote. We've been in the field conducting research on the ways Americans think about the US political system—specifically, about democracy, government, and the Constitution.

We're excited to share our newest research, which identifies potential challenges and opportunities for communicating about democracy and working toward change.

By and For the People? Cultural Mindsets of Democracy and the US Political System
In this new report, FrameWorks researchers present the dominant cultural mindsets Americans use to make sense of democracy and our political system. Here are some quick takeaways:

- While many understandings of government are highly focused on the individual leaders in power, a prominent mindset that the **system is rigged** offers opportunities for communicators to tap into a more structural understanding of our political system.
- When thinking about democracy, people tend to focus narrowly on **voting**. However, we did identify the presence of other mindsets that offer fuller understandings of **popular self-government** and **representation**.
- Mindsets fluctuate between seeing the US Constitution as a **solid and stable foundation** and as a **changeable product of its time**—creating both challenges and openings for constitutional reform.

READ THE REPORT

Framing Democracy: A Quick-Start Guide
In this short guide, we zero in on democracy—specifically, how can we foster a more productive dialogue and build a greater understanding of what democracy is and how we can improve it in the US? Here's a quick look at our initial recommendations:

- Don't assume everyone understands the terms **authoritarianism** and **fascism** the same way you do.
- Appeal to the ideal of **effective representation** to make a case for change.
- Highlight forms of **democratic participation beyond voting** to expand people's understanding of democracy.
- Name **structural racism** and show how it affects our political processes.
- Offer **concrete solutions** for strengthening our democracy.

EXPLORE THE GUIDE

Lastly, I'm excited to wrap up this year with an exciting announcement:

In 2024, *On Culture* is going monthly!

We're looking forward to sharing more regular updates and analysis of what we're finding, including at least one new resource or tool each month. To make it even sweeter, our newsletter will be taken over by our brand new (but not new to FrameWorks!) Director of Research Interpretation for the Culture Change Project, Clara Blustein Lindholm.

If you're enjoying this newsletter, we invite you to share it with another friend or friends you think would find it valuable. Clara and I —along with the entire FrameWorks team—are excited for what's in store in the year ahead and are supremely grateful to be in conversation with you.

In partnership,



Carinne Wheedan, Director of Communications

UP NEXT

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 the system is rigged against? Early next year, we'll share findings from a set of experimental studies on how to effectively talk about "the system." Stay tuned!

REVISITING MINDSETS AROUND GENDER: In the next few months we will be following up on our research into how Americans think about gender, digging into new data from our culture tracking survey and other qualitative research. Stay tuned for a deeper dive into how mindsets around gender are changing and driving thinking about other issues.

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

Video Series: Fast Frames: Aging & Care

This new video series, produced in partnership with the John A. Hartford Foundation, provides quick framing tips for advocates, researchers, practitioners, and other champions in the care community. The episodes explore topics ranging from quality care, to supporting the care workforce, to talking about ageism. Shifting the conversation about aging and care is one small but important step in building the fair and just society we all want to see.

WATCH THE VIDEOS

ARTICLE: Americans' Thinking about Political Division Offers Clues for Communicating about Systemic Reform

In case you missed it, we recently published an article about the ways Americans are thinking about partisanship and how these mindsets might be leveraged to build support for systemic change. We've identified three foundational mindsets that present both challenges and opportunities for those fighting for justice within the existing system and for those looking to reform it.

READ THE ARTICLE

SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE CHANGERS

ARTICLE: Climate Change, Young Children, and the Importance of Nurturing Relationships

In their recent article, Dr. David Willis and Dr. Joan Lombardi discuss the impacts of climate change on children and families. As they explain, "It has long been understood that young children are impacted by their families and that families are impacted by the communities they live in. While children in many communities have suffered decades of environmental risks due to racism and poverty, climate change is exacerbating those conditions." Check out the article for guidance for shifting mindsets so the next generation can flourish.

RESOURCE HUB: Cycles of Trauma and the Journey to Wellbeing

The Wellbeing Project and Georgetown University recently released a new resource hub on intergenerational trauma. Communicators can access research and guidance on best practices for working toward trauma-informed social change work, along with additional resources like books, videos, and other tools for centering wellbeing as a crucial feature of change-making.



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