On Culture: Communicating about Democracy Under Threat

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FRAMEWORKS Culture Change Project

APRIL 2025

NEWSLETTER

On Culture



Friends and partners,

The idea that “it can’t happen here” is deeply ingrained in American culture.

American exceptionalism—the notion that America stands apart from other countries, exceptional in our achievements and our values—often extends to the idea that our democracy is unquestionably the best in the world. Our research shows that when people think in these terms, they assume that democracy = the US and the US = democracy.

We’re now facing an erosion of our freedom of speech, the suspension of due process, a slew of anti-Constitutional actions, and

other attempts to weaken our democracy. **We need to build public resistance to the rise of authoritarianism in the United States.**

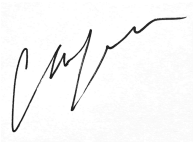
An important part of this is building a deeper understanding of—and commitment to uphold—concepts that feel really abstract to most people, like the rule of law and separation of powers.

To do so, we need to connect these concepts to people's everyday lives and concerns. While they may sound abstract, things like the separation of powers *do* have real effects on our lives. Most of us are just not given enough practice in connecting these ideas to the things we experience and care about. I share some ideas for how to do that in this month's *On Culture* blog post.

TAKE ME TO THE BLOG

Our research—and recent polling data—shows that people have deep concerns with what's going on in our country. As communicators, we have an opportunity to make sure that concern does not stop at a particularly unpopular person or policy but is also channeled toward the systems and institutions that are necessary to protect and strengthen our democracy.

In solidarity,



Clara Blustein Lindholm

SAVE THE DATE: BRIEFING ON MINDSETS AROUND THE US CONSTITUTION ON MAY 22

Last month, we held the first of our monthly briefings on *Navigating Public Thinking about Democracy*. In this month's briefing, we will share findings on how Americans think about the Constitution and what that means for those of us working to counter authoritarian threats and strengthen our democracy in the midst of Constitutional crisis. This briefing series is exclusively for *On Culture* subscribers. Formal invitation forthcoming!

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

HOW DO AMERICANS THINK ABOUT PLURALISM?
Understanding the ways that people think about diversity, difference, division, and unity is crucial for better navigating a divisive political landscape. These issues are at the heart of pluralism—creating a society that values difference and fosters belonging for everyone. Gaining a clearer picture of how people think about these issues can help advocates and activists advance a pluralistic vision of the future without reinforcing ideas that suppress differences or delegitimize the experiences of marginalized groups.

TAKE ME TO THE RESOURCE

UP NEXT!

NEW VIDEO SERIES: MINDSETS AND MOVEMENTS | COMING SOON
In the next installment of *Fast Frames*, we're exploring three of the most dominant mindsets in American culture: *Individualism*, *Otherism*, and *Fatalism*. These mindsets often block efforts to build demand for more just and inclusive systems. In each episode, we'll take a look at what the mindset is, how it works, and how we can use our communications to open up more productive and expansive ways of thinking about solving social problems.

FRAMING THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF AI | COMING SOON
Despite the increasing prominence of artificial intelligence in public life and discourse, there remains a lack of understanding about how AI works and what it might mean for our lives. By examining the deep assumptions that shape thinking about AI, we will identify and share strategies for deepening understanding of AI technologies, the social implications of their use, and how they can be used on behalf of the public interest.

SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE CHANGERS

JUST NARRATIVES FOR MULTIRACIAL SOLIDARITY | RACE FORWARD

As part of the largest multiracial racial justice conference in the country, from November 13–15 Race Forward will kick-off the 2025 Cultural Week of Action with *Just Narratives*, an anchor event focused on building narrative and cultural power to advance a just, multiracial democracy. The interactive event is intended for people and organizations across movements who are committed to building collective narrative power for racial justice.

SIGN-ON STATEMENT: FREEDOM TO GIVE | COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS

The Council on Foundations has invited all charitable giving institutions to sign onto a public statement on the importance of the freedom of expression, the freedom to give, and the freedom to invest in communities. The statement comes as philanthropies face the threat of governmental attacks on the ability to carry out their missions.

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