On Culture: The Year Ahead

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FRAMEWORKS Culture Change Project

NOVEMBER 2025



Friends and partners,

This past year has reinforced how deep our challenges are. We've seen the power of a set of mindsets—cultivated intentionally over time—to be activated and weaponized against groups of people and wielded to advance authoritarian ends.

As we look at the year ahead, we remain committed to monitoring the mindsets that shape thinking across issues, and to using this work to help you navigate our volatile environment in ways that lay the groundwork for enduring change. We plan to dig deeper into some of the biggest cultural contests of the moment, including:

1. **Democracy.**
   2025 was a turbulent year. It's clear that democracy isn't just an issue for people who work on it explicitly—it's for all of us. Next year, we will continue to investigate how Americans are thinking about democracy and our political system, and we'll get insights into your hands as quickly as we can about what this thinking means for your strategy and communications.

2. **Gender.**
   Our research shows that the way people think about gender shapes how they think about other issues, from health to the economy. From bans on "gender ideology" to tradwife influencers and the manosphere, regressive understandings of gender are at the center of attempts to re-entrench historical hierarchies and block efforts to advance justice. Our research indicates that we all need to be combatting these regressive mindsets and addressing gender in our strategies and communications. In 2026, we'll continue looking into patterns in thinking about gender and strategies we can use to navigate them to build a more just world.

3. **Unity and division.**
   Americans long for a more unified country, but we know that people have more than one way of understanding "unity." If we're not careful, messaging around "our divided country" or "the importance of unity in this moment" can end up strengthening regressive ways of thinking, and can even strengthen authoritarian attitudes. So how should we talk about the importance of coming together as a country? We have some initial ideas but next year we'll be developing and testing effective ways of framing unity and division.

We'll be sharing brand new research and resources with you in January. Until then, I hope the weeks ahead offer moments of rest and renewal.

In solidarity,



Clara Blustein Lindholm

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

OP-ED: HOW TO KEEP MESSAGING ON TRACK WHEN EVERY DAY IS A CRISIS | CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

In his new piece in The Chronicle of Philanthropy, FrameWorks CEO Nat Kendall-Taylor argues that we don't have to ignore the communication needs of the present in order to advance long-term culture and narrative change. Threading the needle is not simple, but it's doable and critically important. Check out the article for three strategies for navigating the tension between the "now" work and the "later" work: align around the mindsets that need to shift; hold *your* narrative ground in volatile times; and coordinate to reinforce and strengthen messages.

OP-ED: THE EXECUTIVE ORDER NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT | THE CONTRARIAN

Decisions about language are never neutral: they shape how people understand community, civic participation, and national identity. In her latest piece in The Contrarian, FrameWorks senior advisor Julie Sweetland brings attention to a little-noticed executive order declaring English the official language of the United States—an order that, aside from its technical implications, reflects and reinforces familiar patterns in public thinking about belonging, unity, and whom government is "for." Take a look at the article for ways to push back against stifling rhetoric and laws that seek to enforce English-only environments.

UP NEXT!

CLAIMING CONTESTED VALUES: HOW FAIRNESS, FREEDOM AND STABILITY CAN HELP BUILD DEMAND FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE | JANUARY 2026

Amid growing efforts to undermine DEI and restrict civil society, this brief explores how the contested values of fairness, freedom, and stability can help progressive organizations and movements build support for transformative, structural change. It looks at how to communicate these widely shared yet politically charged values in ways that strengthen systemic thinking and counter individualistic assumptions. By showing how these values shape cultural mindsets across issues, the research offers practical guidance for how to appeal to values more intentionally within broader framing strategies.

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 means for our lives. By examining the implicit assumptions that shape thinking about AI, we will 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

250 YEARS SINCE ITS FOUNDING, AMERICA NEEDS A DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE | BARATUNDE THURSTON for ATMOS
In this piece, Emmy-nominated storyteller Baratunde Thurston argues that it's time to expand the founding story of the United States. He asks: "If the story of independence, rooted in the myths of separation and domination, no longer holds, what remains?"

DECADES LATER, JUSTICE STILL TORTURED: A CONVERSATION WITH CNN'S OMAR JIMENEZ | MOMENTUM: A RACE FORWARD PODCAST
This episode of Momentum, hosted by Race Forward Chief of Staff Karla Bruce, examines the enduring policy failures and systemic harms of over-policing. Guest Omar Jimenez, Emmy Award–winning CNN anchor and news correspondent, discusses findings from his investigative podcast Tortured Justice, which exposes decades of police violence and coerced confessions in Chicago. Throughout the episode, Omar and Karla explore how unchecked police authority, prosecutorial discretion, and political protection enabled abuse, and what structural reforms are needed to prevent it from recurring.

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