On Culture: Protests as Democracy

Mon, Jun 23, 2025 at 4:04 PM



Friends and partners,

In the past few weeks, demonstrations in Los Angeles and across the country have drawn national attention. Protestors are expressing their outrage over executive overreach—from treatment of immigrants to disregard for constitutional checks and balances. Meanwhile, other voices are attempting to frame the protests as illegitimate.

Why are mass demonstrations—a cornerstone of democratic participation—sometimes considered un-American or undemocratic?

This month, I'm sharing how findings from our Culture Change

Project can help us understand this thinking and what we can do to counter it.

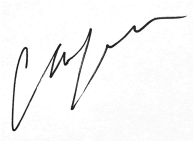
TAKE ME TO THE BLOG

Our research has uncovered something important and surprising. Despite the frequency and visibility of mass protests in recent years, many Americans still don't think of this kind of collective action as a form of democratic participation. In fact, when Americans think about democracy it's almost exclusively in terms of voting. Voting isn't just viewed as a form of democratic engagement—it's often seen as the *only* form.

The mindset that "democracy = voting" has real consequences—one of which is that other features of a healthy democracy, like protesting, are obscured. They might even be seen as unnecessary (because the people have already voted), ineffective (because voting is seen as the only way for the people to express their will), or potentially even undemocratic (because they are pushing back against leaders who have been elected by a majority vote).

The role of communicators is crucial right now. Together, we have a real opportunity to help expand people's understanding of what democratic participation looks like and why protest is not only acceptable, but an imperative feature of a thriving democratic society.

In solidarity,



Clara Blustein Lindholm

RSVP NOW FOR SUMMER BRIEFINGS!

This summer, we'll be continuing our monthly briefing series on *Navigating Public Thinking about Democracy*. On the third Wednesday of each month, we'll share insights from real-time research on how Americans are—or aren't—thinking about things like democracy, authoritarianism, the rule of law, executive overreach, and more. We'll also share emerging strategies

for framing conversations in ways that help counter authoritarian threats and strengthen our democracy. We'd love for you to join us:

- **Wednesday. July 16 from 1–2pm ET**
- **Wednesday, August 20 from 1–2pm ET**
- **Wednesday, September 17 from 1–2pm ET**

SIGN ME UP

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

MAKING THE CASE FOR MEDICAID: 6 TIPS FOR SPEAKING OUT
Written with Berkeley Media Studies Group, this article outlines six research-backed recommendations for effectively talking about Medicaid in a moment of heightened threat. Although the piece focuses on Medicaid, much of it applies to cuts aimed at SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other planks in the foundation of our nation's health. Harmonized framing is one of our most powerful forms of action and this resource includes insights to help you speak with clarity and power in this moment.

READ THE ARTICLE

NEW RESEARCH: HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN SOLVING HOMELESSNESS
People with lived experience of homelessness make important contributions to the nonprofit sector. Yet, the stereotypes surrounding homelessness remain pervasive and make it difficult to recognize the importance of including the expertise of people with lived experience. Supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, this new resource provides recommendations for combating negative stereotypes and increasing support for including those with lived experience in decision-making across the nonprofit sector.

TAKE ME TO THE BRIEF

UP NEXT!

NEW VIDEO SERIES: MINDSETS AND MOVEMENTS | JULY 2025!
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 implicit 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

STANDING UP FOR WELCOMING: FOUR PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR LOCAL LEADERS | WELCOMING AMERICA
Welcoming America recently released a toolkit for leaders to prepare for and respond to rapidly changing state and federal landscapes. The resource breaks down four practical actions to help counter fear and division, respond to attacks against immigrants, and build infrastructure for long-term support to help our communities thrive. Check it out!

JOB OPPORTUNITY | COLOR OF CHANGE
Our friends at Color of Change are hiring! Color of Change is a national organization working on criminal justice, economic justice, voter freedom, big tech, and culture change with the goal of creating a less hostile world for Black people in America. They're looking for a director of individual

giving to join their development team and help support their racial justice work. Read the full job description to learn more about this opportunity.

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