On Culture: Who’s the villain of this story?

Mon, Feb 24, 2025 at 11:01 AM



Friends and partners,

As we witness mass firings within the federal government, rising corruption, attempts to redefine citizenship, and increasing inflation, conversations about America’s rigged systems are alive and well.

Many are trying to find ways to speak to the widespread sentiment that our systems are rigged. In doing so, it’s natural to want to point to a “bad guy” or focus on the individuals doing the rigging. And in some cases, it’s absolutely necessary to name a villain in the story. But research from the Culture Change Project shows that when we talk about rigged systems, naming a villain isn’t as straightforward as

it seems.

TAKE ME TO THE BLOG

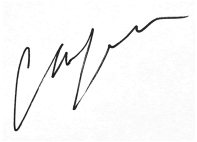
In this month's blog post, my colleague Drew Volmert explains that focusing on individual villains tends to lead people to individualistic solutions—like the notion that the fix for all our problems lies in getting rid of this one, bad person. And if we name a villain *as a substitute* for providing a clear explanation of *how* the system is being rigged, people may fill in with their own explanations that are often rooted in racist, xenophobic, or antisemitic narratives.

Check out the blog post for an explanation of these three tips for talking about villains:

1. Focus more on *how* the system is rigged than *who* is rigging it.
2. If identifying villains is essential, point to groups, rather than individuals.
3. When naming villains, always provide a clear explanation of *how* they're rigging the system.

It's not that we shouldn't name villains—but when we do, we need to frame carefully. In being clear about how the rigging works, we help people better understand what it will take to *un*rig the system.

In partnership,



Clara Blustein Lindholm
Director of Research Interpretation, Culture Change Project

UP NEXT!

HOW DO AMERICANS THINK ABOUT PLURALISM? I NEXT MONTH
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.

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

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

TALKING ABOUT RIGGED SYSTEMS

Last month, we shared two new resources to help progressive communicators understand and engage *System is Rigged* thinking. The full report, "Filling in the Blanks: Contesting What 'the System is Rigged' Means," features a description of the mindset, an examination of the opportunities and dangers it poses, and an outline of how to have productive, justice-centered conversations about rigged systems. "Talking about Rigged Systems: A Quick-Start Guide" outlines core framing strategies to decrease authoritarian and exclusionary attitudes, increase a sense of collective efficacy, and build support for progressive systems change.

TAKE ME TO THE REPORT

JUMP TO THE QUICK-START GUIDE

4 INSIGHTS FOR NAVIGATING THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON IMMIGRATION

Immigrants are under attack in the United States, but the fight is not over. In the first article of our multi-part series on framing immigration, we dive into the anti-immigrant rhetoric shaping the restrictive and life-threatening

policies being implemented across the country. By understanding the mindsets that make this rhetoric resonate, we can find opportunities to foster a more inclusive vision of American identity.

SHOW ME THE 4 INSIGHTS

SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE CHANGERS

EMBRACE COLOR-BRAVERY IN 2025 I EMBRACERACE
Our friends at EmbraceRace are working to create a world in which diversity is celebrated and racial injustices are confronted head-on. In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, they launched a fundraising campaign to remind us that Dr. King's vision of a "color-brave" community is an urgent call to action. Donating and sharing their resources will help equip caregivers and educators to raise thoughtful, brave children, and build an increasingly color-brave and justice seeking society.

"VISION AND EXPERIMENTALISM AND URGENCY": ELIZABETH WILKINS AND FELICIA WONG IN CONVERSATION I ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE
At a time in which many progressive communicators are questioning what the path forward looks like, it's important to learn from those who have been organizing and fighting for decades to build a more inclusive future. This conversation with the new and outgoing CEOs of the Roosevelt Institute features insights into their experiences fighting corporate power, understanding the risk of government underreach, and building a more inclusive and democratic society.

Copyright © 2025, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

FrameWorks Institute
1333 H St NW Suite 700 West
Washington, DC 20005

unsubscribe from all emails | update subscription preferences