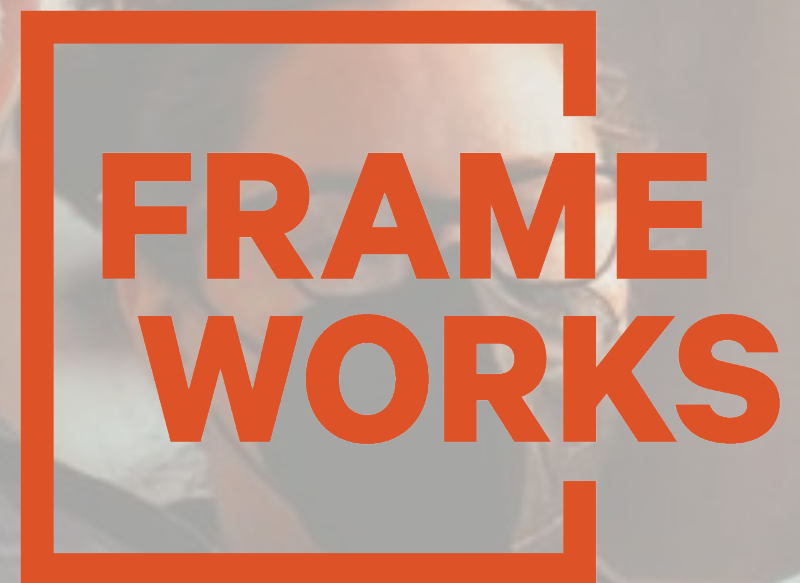


Reframing Government's Role in Health

Katy Evans, PhD, Senior Director, Health Justice Program
Nico Connolly, Principal Strategist

Health Justice Framing Forum
July 15, 2026



Here's how we'll share space today

- **We are recording today's session and will share the recording and slides with registrants.**
- To bring a question or comment to the presenters' attention, **use the Q&A function.** Note that others in the meeting will be able to see your question.
- **Presenters probably won't see the chat.** The chat is open for participants to interact with each other or respond to content in real time. FrameWorks may also post links there.
- Presenters will pause in the middle, and at the end, to hear from you and respond to questions.
- For general reactions, please feel free to use the reaction feature.



Katy Evans
Senior Director, Health Justice Program



Nico Connolly
Principal Strategist

**We can't achieve
health justice without
powerful
communication.**

FrameWorks' Health Justice Program works toward a United States in which all the systems and policies that support health and well-being serve all people, eliminating disparities and advancing justice across communities.



FrameWorks' Health Justice Program is designed to support the field (you!)



Original Research



Framing & Narrative
Strategy



Deep Reframing
Partnerships

Today's session

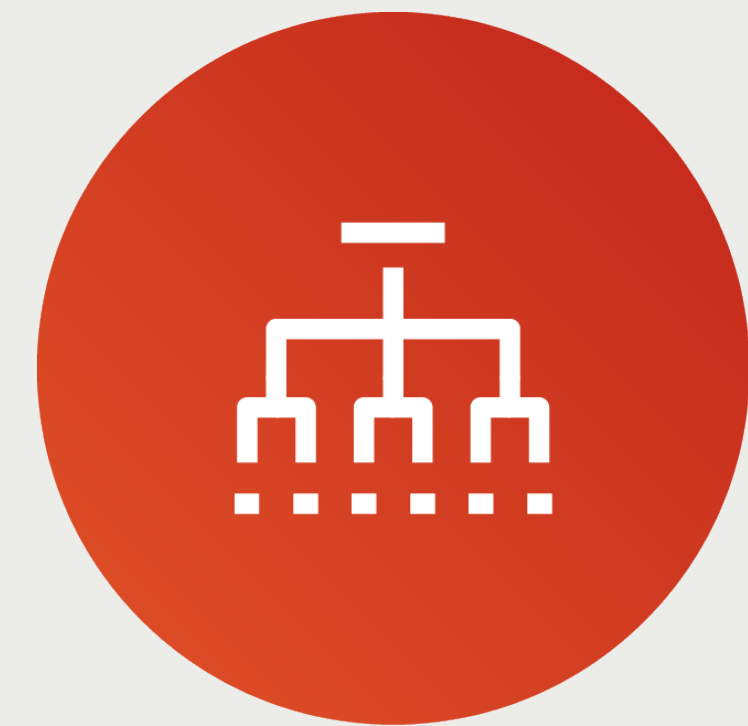
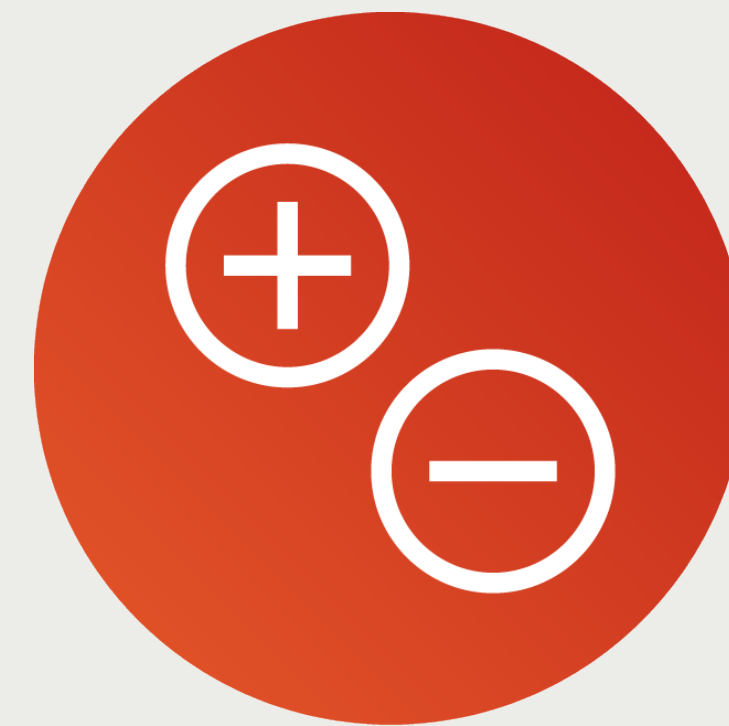
How do Americans think about government's role in health?

What opportunities and challenges do those mindsets create for communicators?

How can we communicate in ways that build support for governmental public health?

**How do Americans
think about
government's role in
health?**

Cultural Mindsets Are...



Challenging mindsets about health

Health is Healthcare

“Public health? You mean hospitals and clinics?”

Health Individualism

“Health is about the choices you make.”

Naturalism / Natural is Best

“Natural immunity is stronger. I don’t trust what’s in vaccines.”

Class Not Race

“It’s really about income, not race.”

Opportunity mindsets about health

Constrained Health Individualism

“It’s hard to be healthy when you can’t afford good food.”

Mind and Body

“Mental health is just as important as physical health.”

What Surrounds You Shapes You

“Where you grow up really does shape your health.”

Social Determinants

“Income and education affect your health as much as medicine.”

Place Matters

“Your zip code matters as much as your genetic code.”

Challenging mindsets about government

Government is Inept and Corrupt

“It’s too slow, too bureaucratic, too captured by lobbyists.”

Limited Government

“Government shouldn’t tell me what to do with my own body.”

Zero Sum Game

“If you give more to one group, you’re taking from another.”

System is Rigged

“They want to keep us sick—it’s more profitable that way.”

Opportunity mindsets about government

Government as Regulator

“That’s what the FDA, CDC, and USDA are there for.”

Government as Protector

“Government should protect us from corporate actors that don’t have our best interests at heart.”

Government is Responsible

“It’s government’s job to make sure everyone has what they need.”

Government Promotes Agency

“Give people the tools and options to make healthy choices.”

State & Local Proximity

“Local government actually knows what communities need.”

1. Can Government be Trusted ?

People want **government to help them** —————> But they worry **government can't be trusted**

2. What is Government's Role in Creating Health?

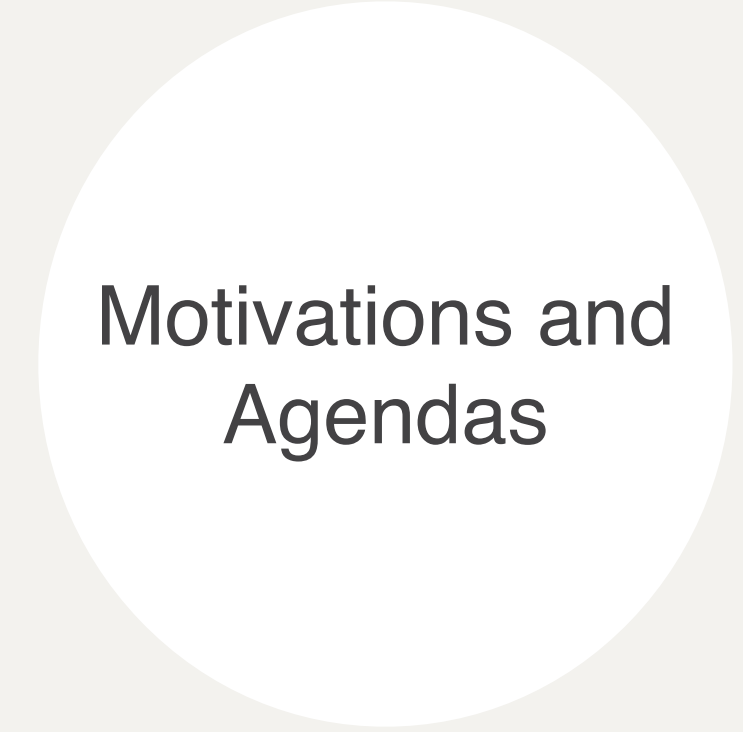
People want **government to protect them** —————> But they worry **government will try to control them**

Can Government Be Trusted?

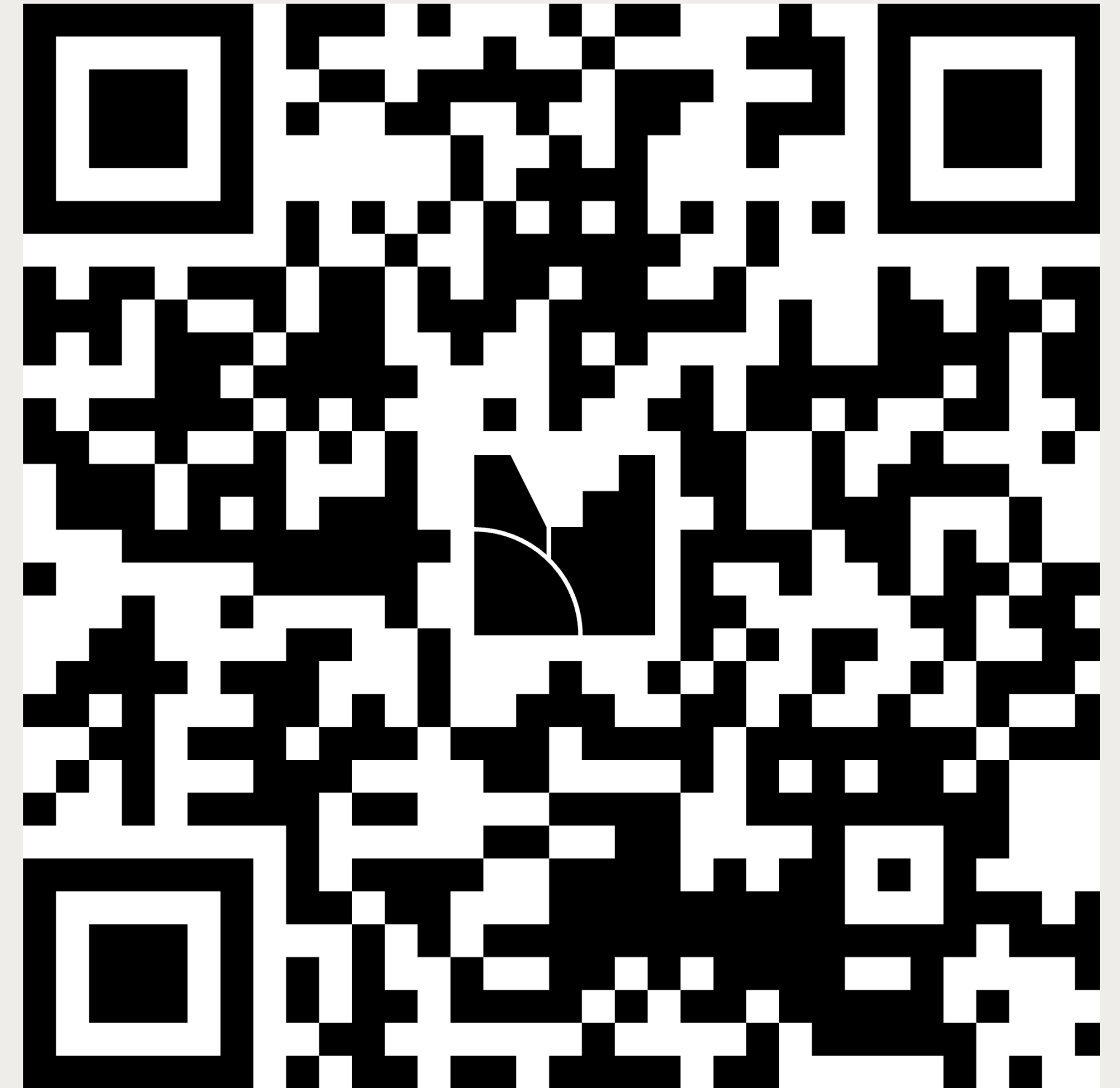
People want **government to help them**



But they worry **government can't be trusted**



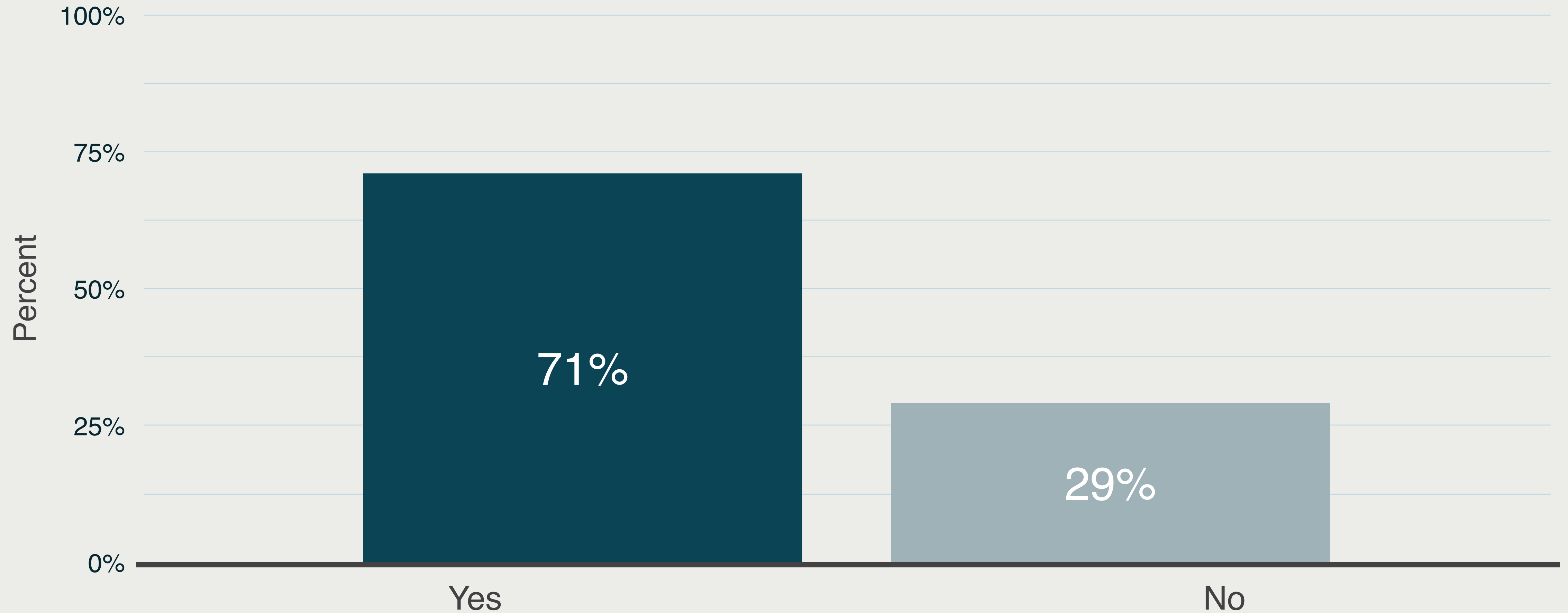
**We want to hear from
you**



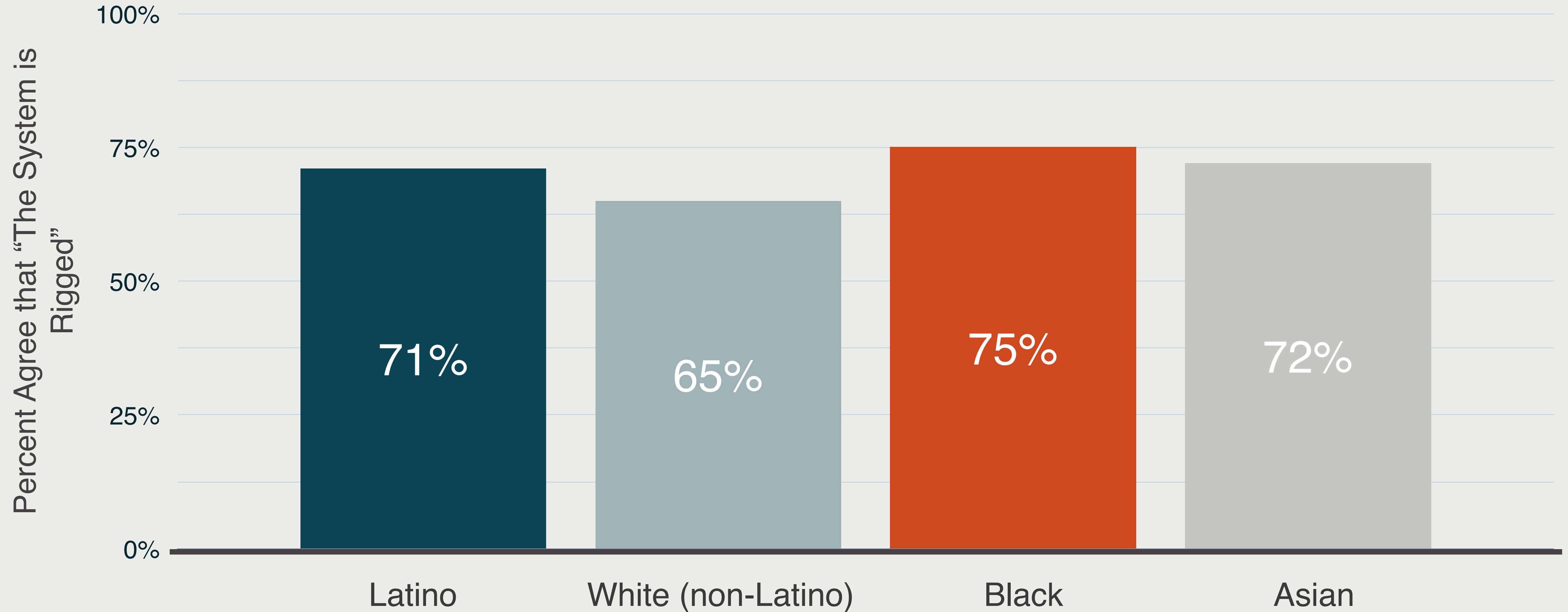
The “System is Rigged” Mindset & Frame



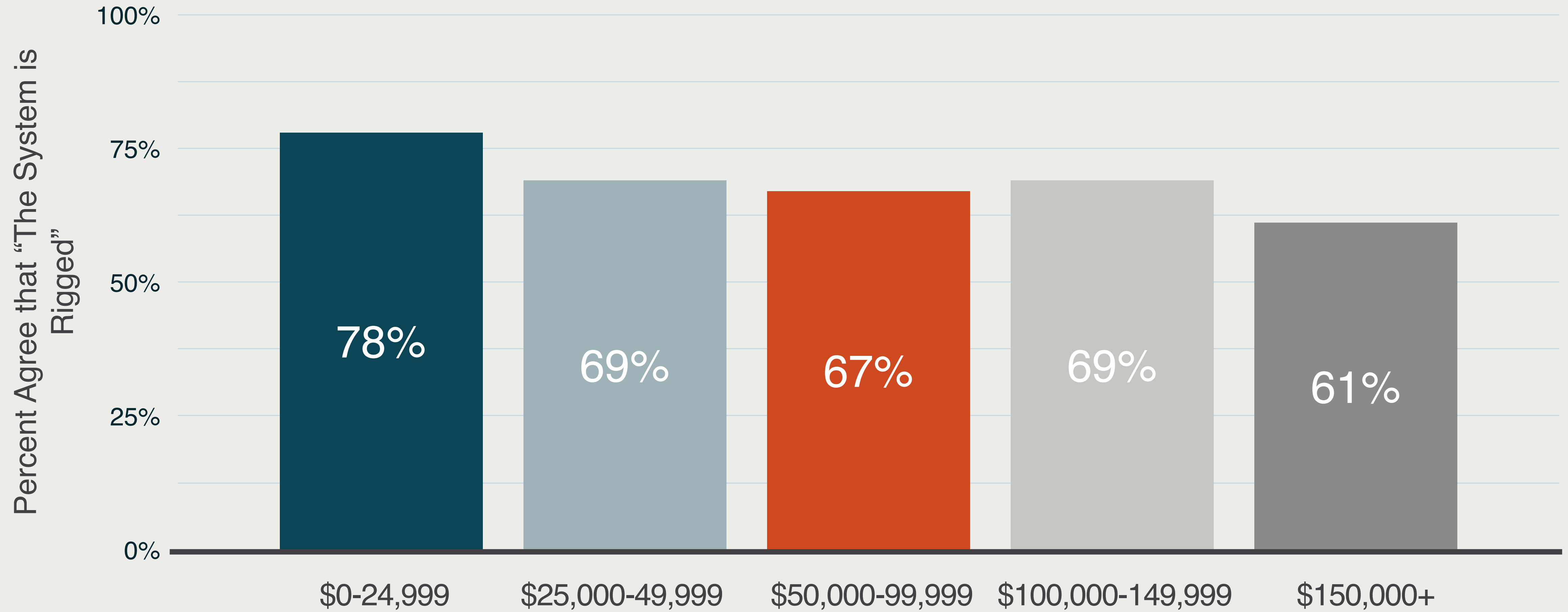
“Do you think the system is rigged in America?”



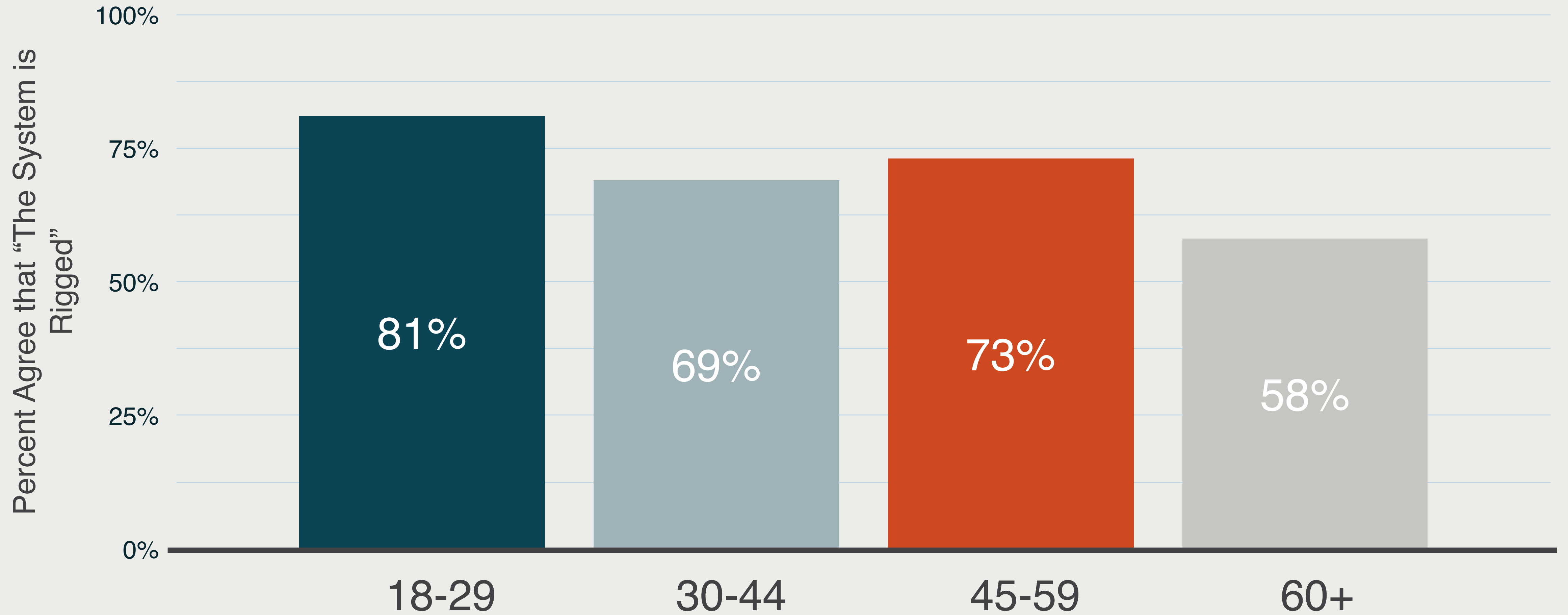
This Mindset is Shared Across Racial Groups...



Income...



Age...

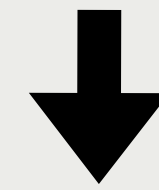


Reframe: Position government as an institution that can help rebalance systems when it is accountable to the public it serves.

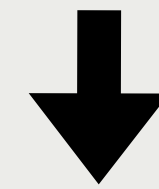
Why: Anti-corporate skepticism creates a pathway into support for government action.

The Story to Tell

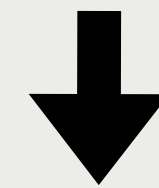
The system is rigged.



Powerful interests benefit.



Ordinary people are left behind.



***Government is an institution that can
rebalance the system***

How to Tell It

Example: Medicaid

- **Start with the system.**
- **Name who benefits.**
- **Explain who gets left out.**
- **Show how government helps rebalance it.**

Our health insurance system is rigged to protect insurance industry profits at the expense of people's health and well-being. For decades, there were no fair options for people who were locked out or priced out of private health insurance. Medicaid is one way we came together, through government, to help rebalance a health care system that wasn't working fairly. By expanding access to essential health insurance, it creates positive ripple effects that benefit us all.

Let's chat

Any questions, comments, or other reactions?

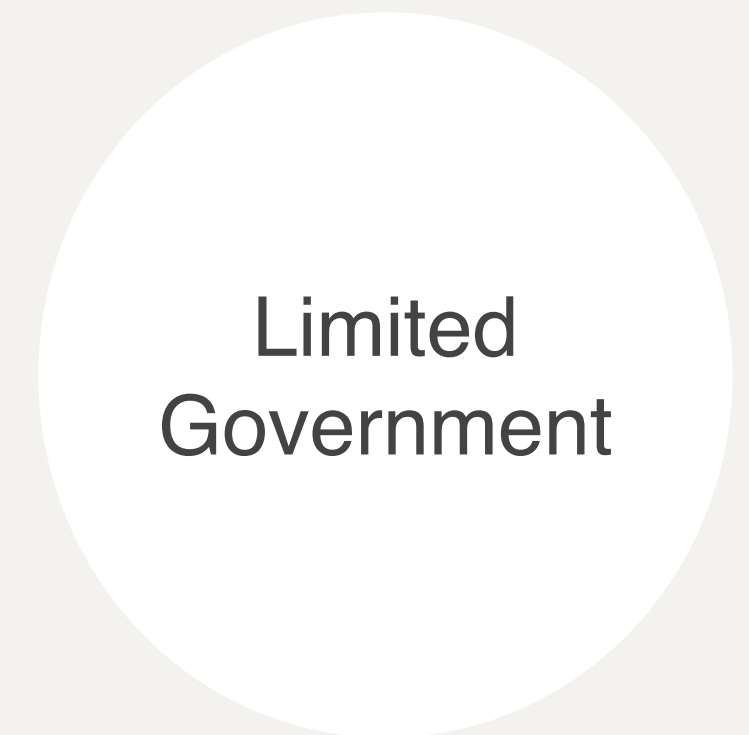
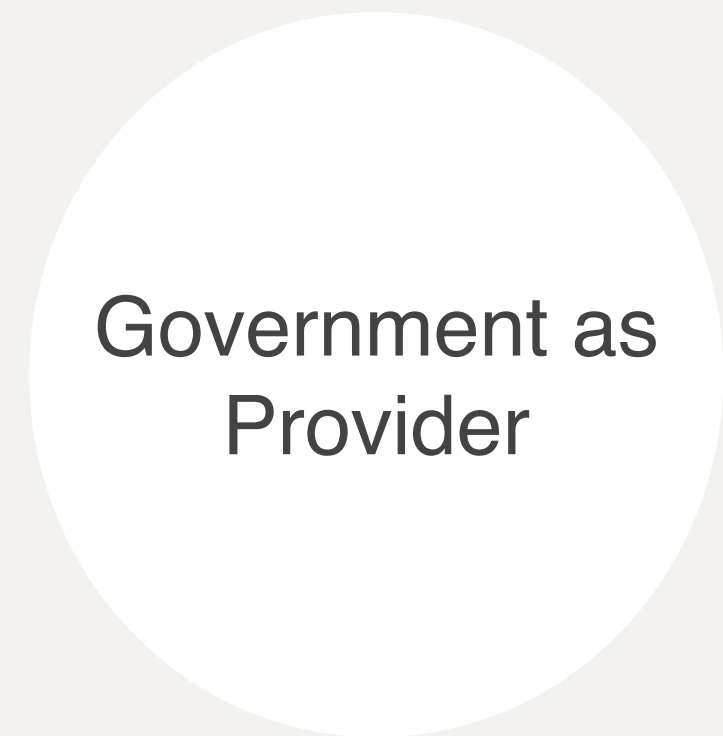


What is Government's Role in Creating Health ?

People want **government to protect them**



But they worry **government will try to control them**



**We want to hear from
you**

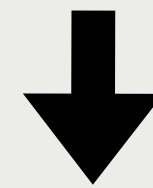


Reframe: Acknowledge past harms

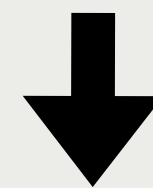
Why: Trust is shaped by history and how we show up in relationship now.

The Story to Tell

Past harms



Current inequities



Collective action

How to Tell It

Example: Neighborhood Design

- **Acknowledge past harms.**
- **Explain current inequities**
- **Offer a collective path forward.**

Health patterns, like high asthma rates, are not random. They come from policy choices we've made over time. Discriminatory redlining practices devalued Black neighborhoods. Officials then chose to put highways and incinerators in these areas. Pollution affects people's hearts and lungs. This history of systemic racism helps to explain the health disparities we see today. Together, we can address these inequities by investing in these neighborhoods and advancing policies that ensure cleaner air for everyone.

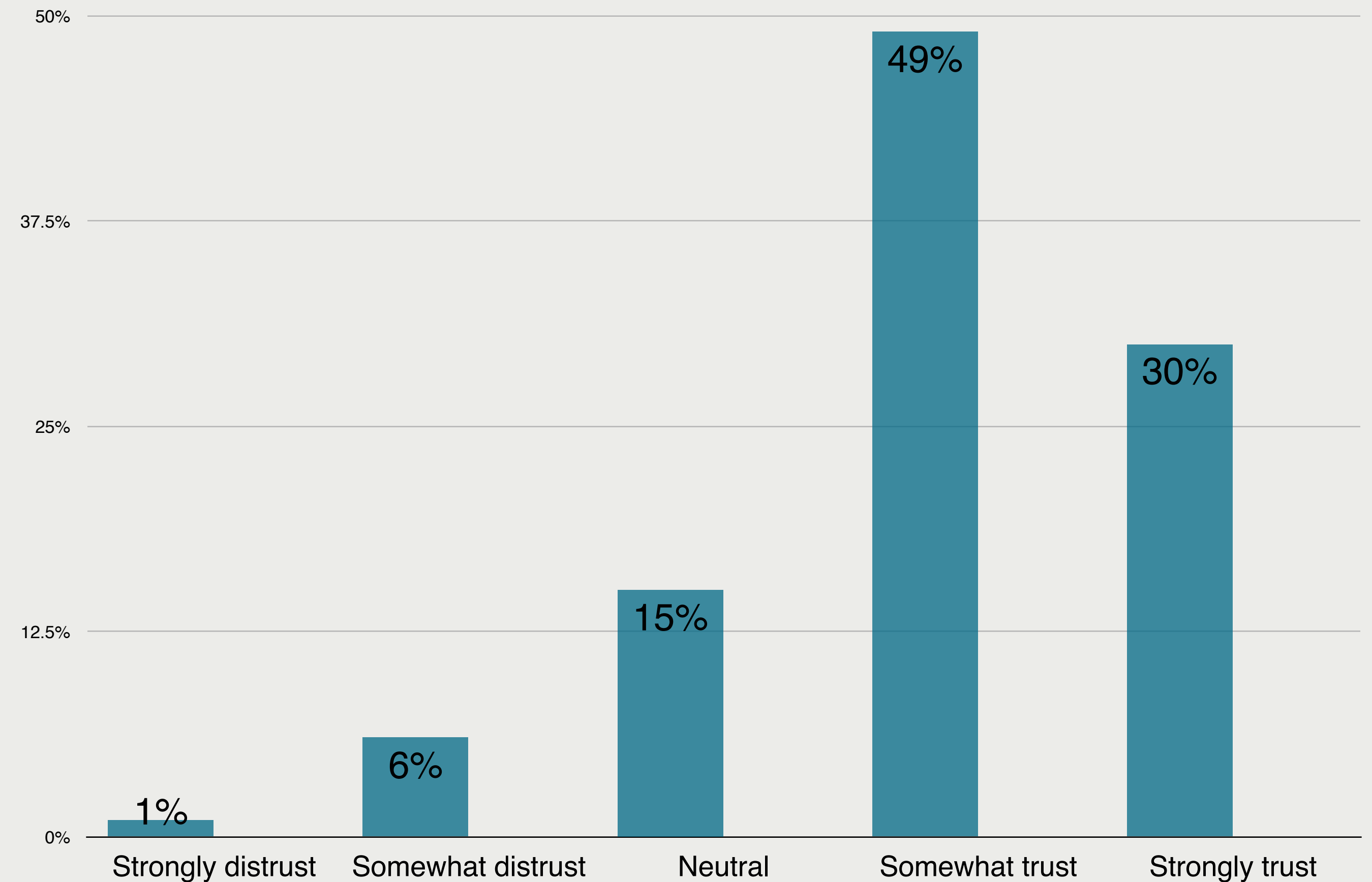
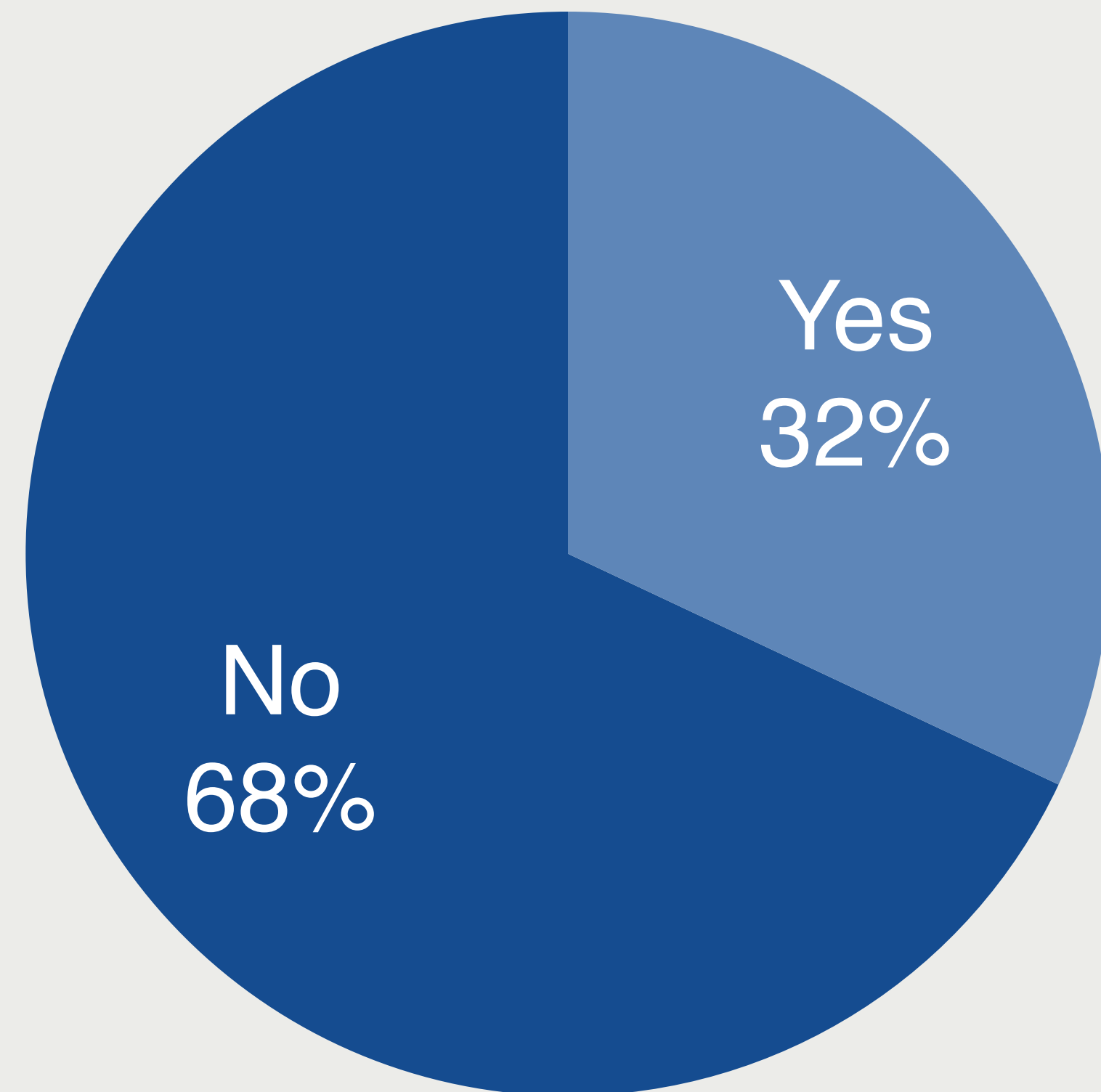
Reframe: Talk about government as a local enabler of the conditions that keep communities healthy.

Why: People are more comfortable with government when they experience it as a local protector than as a distant controller.

Trust is strong when people are aware

Findings from FrameWorks' Health Justice Mindset Survey - Fall 2025

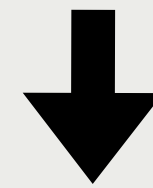
Have you heard anything about your local health department and what it does?



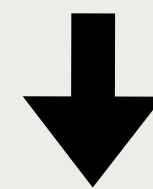
Trust in local health departments

The Story to Tell

*Familiar, everyday experience of
conditions that support health*



*Public health work that
creates those conditions*



The entire community benefits

How to Tell It

Example: Clean drinking water

- **Use a value to express why this matters**
- **Draw attention to an everyday experience of public health**
- **Show the public health work that makes it possible**
- **End with collective benefits**

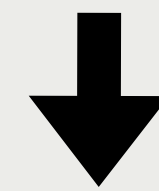
Communities are strongest when everyone can count on the basics that keep people healthy, like clean drinking water. That's why the River Valley Health Department works with local water utilities to monitor water quality and address problems before they become threats. By helping ensure everyone can count on safe drinking water, we're creating the conditions that help our whole community stay healthy.

The principle travels beyond local public health

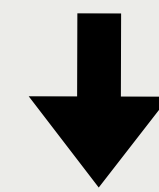
- People can best understand government's role when they can see that it connects to something they value.
- Starting where people experience protection locally helps make that role concrete.
- Then we can “zoom out” to bring systems into view.

The Story to Tell

Familiar, everyday experience of conditions that supports health



Public health work that creates those conditions



The entire community benefits

“Zoom Out” Here

How to Tell It

Example: Vaccine Access

- **Use a value to express why this matters**
- **Draw attention to an everyday experience of public health**
- **Show the public health work that makes it possible**
- **End with collective benefits**

Communities thrive when children have the opportunity to grow, learn, and simply be kids. Pediatricians, schools, pharmacies, and local public health agencies work together to make routine immunizations easy to access and answer families' questions. Behind those everyday experiences is a much larger public health system. State and federal agencies support the research, funding, safety monitoring, and coordination that help local communities make immunizations available, affordable, and ready when families need them. When every part of that system works together, children can stay focused on growing and learning, schools experience fewer disruptions, and communities are better prepared to keep everyone healthy.

Quick Tips: Stay on the Productive Side of the Tensions

Focus on....

Leading with shared values and community well-being

Depicting public health as practical, local, and ongoing

Concrete examples of government creating, protecting, or restoring fair, healthy conditions

Systems, conditions, and everyday experiences

Steer clear of...

Leading with the program, agency, or initiative
“Our department's drinking water program...”

Exclusively telling stories of government public health in moments of crisis
“Public health shows up when something goes wrong...”

Leading with government authority, mandates, or enforcement
“New regulations require...”

Technical language, excessive data, long lists, or institutional processes
“Phase II of our strategic plan includes...”

Let's chat

Any questions, comments, or other reactions?

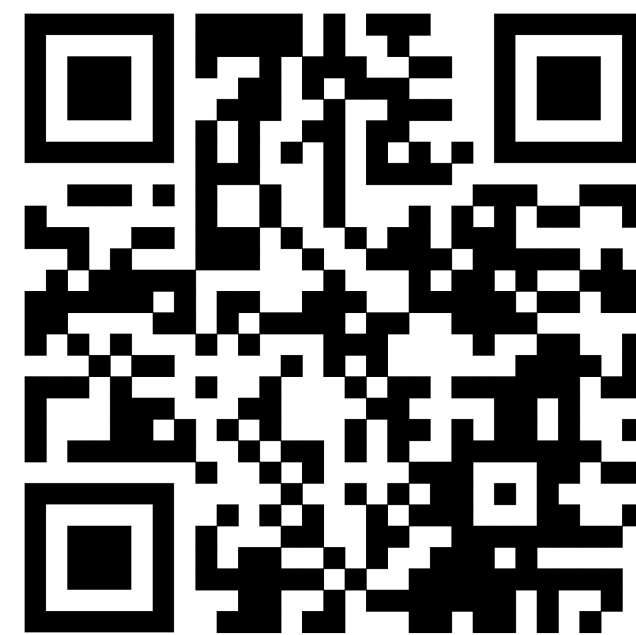


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Health Justice Framing Forum
Wednesday, September 16
1pm ET/10am PT

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