

Culture, Mindsets, and Democracy: Navigating a Changing Landscape

A narrative for the new
political system we need

June 18, 2026



FRAMEWORKS
Culture Change
Project





A *narrative* for the new political system we need



AGENDA

Today's run of show

1:00 – 1:05	Welcome & Introductions
1:05 – 1:20	How We Got Here
1:20 – 1:27	The Context We're In
1:27 – 1:35	The Big Sell: Core Principles to Communicate
1:35– 1:45	Narrative Architecture
1:45 – 2:00	Questions and Discussion
2:00	Next Steps and Close

PART 1

How We Got Here

PART 2

The Context We're In

PART 3

The Big Sell

PART 4

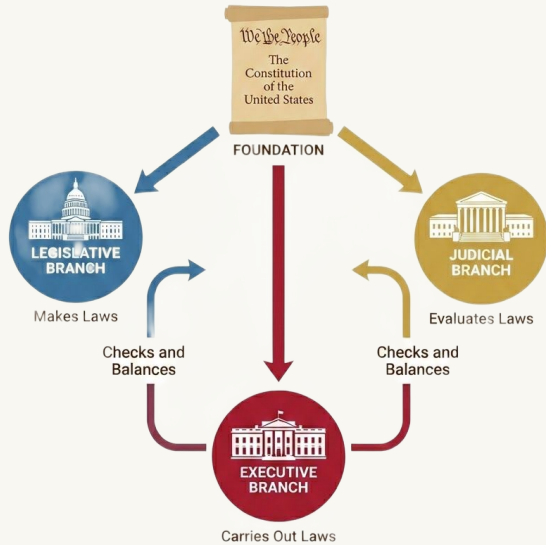
The Architecture

01

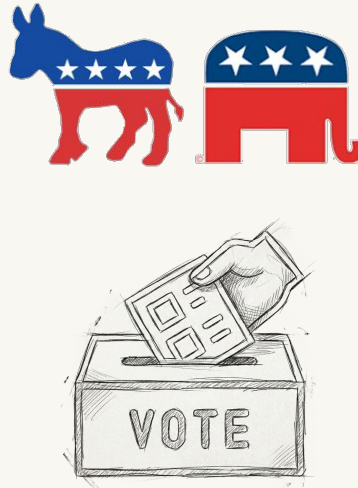
How We Got Here:
The US Political System
Is Failing Us

Our political system has three parts.

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT



ELECTORAL SYSTEM



POLITICAL CULTURE



In a democratic political system:

- We, the people, are supposed to decide. The government should deliver what most people want most of the time.
- We are supposed to each be represented equally.



**Our Outdated Political
System Was Built At A Time
When Democracy Meant
Something Very Different
than it Does Today.**

And Yet It's Basic Structure Has
Changed Very Little

The United States Has the Most Outdated Political System of Any Democracy in the World

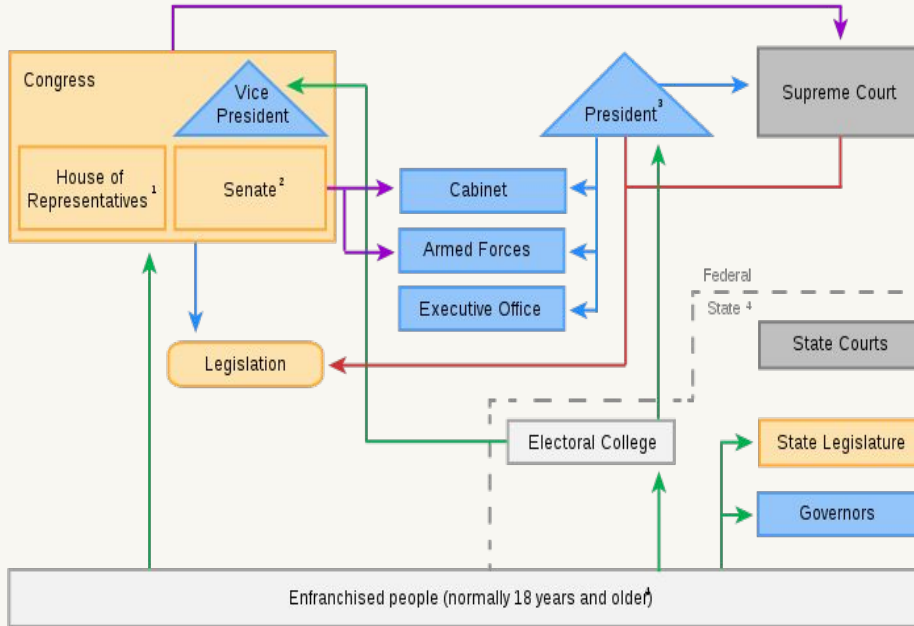
The Presidency	Only place a president can be “elected against the majority expressed at the polls.” Only presidential democracy in the world in which the president is elected via an electoral college, rather than directly by voters.
The Senate	Only democracy where legislative minorities routinely and permanently thwart legislative majorities. One of the few remaining democracies that retains a bicameral legislature with a powerful upper chamber. Only democracy with both a strong, malapportioned Senate and a legislative-minority veto (the filibuster).
The two party system	The US is one of the few established democracies with winner-take-all electoral rules that tend to produce a two-party system.
The Supreme Court	Only democracy in the world with lifetime tenure for Supreme Court justices. All other established democracies have either term limits, a mandatory retirement age, or both.
Const. Amendability	America’s frozen constitution could well be the world’s most difficult to amend.

The Political System's Structural Failures

Gives outsized power in government to an anti-democratic faction.

Blocks the multiracial, working-class majority from popular control.

Maintains an Unequal and Precarious Status Quo

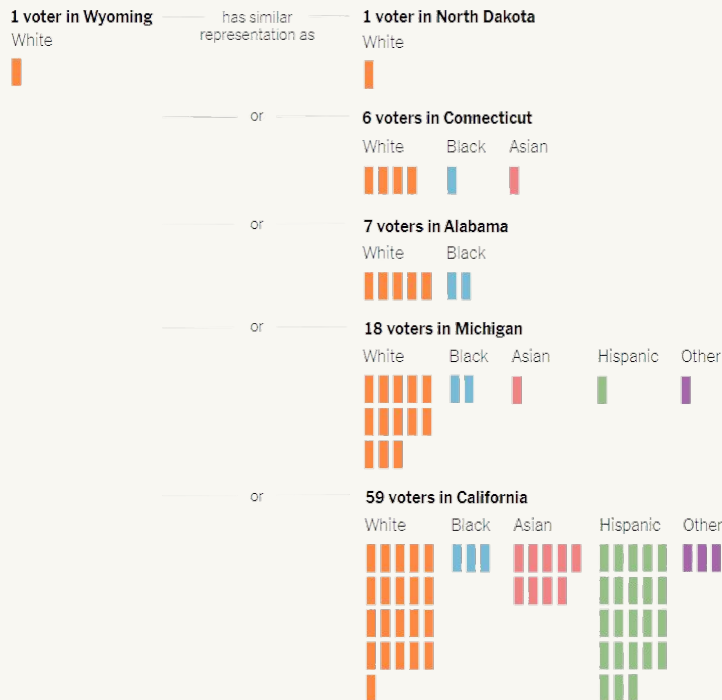


WHY THIS MATTERS

The more veto points there are in a political system, the harder it is to alter the political status quo.

The Political System Does Not Give Equal Weight to Our Votes

Senate Representation by State



Note: Figures are based on the population of citizens aged 18 and older. Examples are based on ethnic makeup of each state. Pacific Islanders included among Asian voters. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey By Ashley Wu

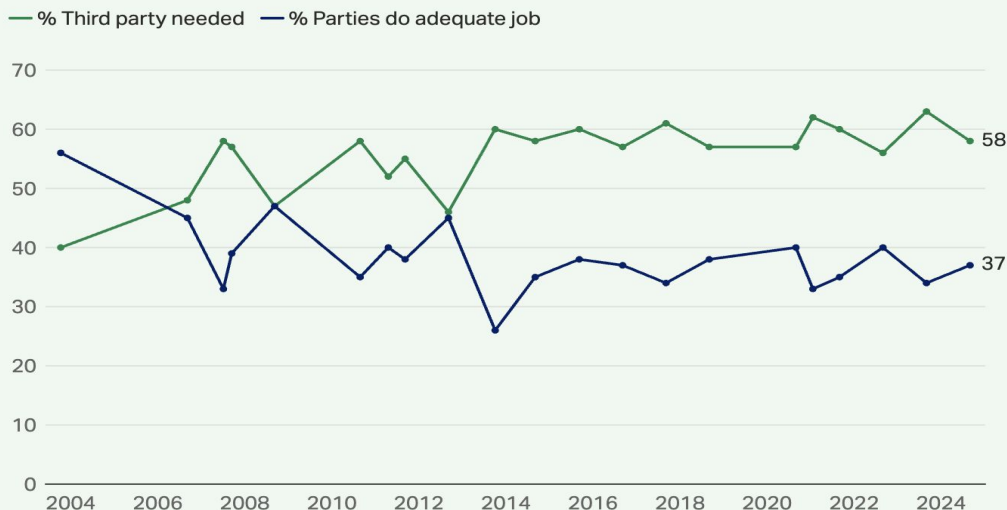
If the Senate Were Structured More Fairly, Americans Would Be Living in A Different World Than We Have Today.

Between 1961 and 2019, with even somewhat more equal voter power in the US Senate:

- **Financial regulation** would have had **5 more Senate votes** in its favor.
- **Pro-worker labor policy** would have had **5 more Senate votes** in its favor.
- **Civil rights** would have had nearly **6 more votes**.
- **Gun control policy** would have **7 more Senate votes**.
- **Abortion rights** would have **7 more votes**.

Fails to Represent the Diversity of Our Views

In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job of representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?

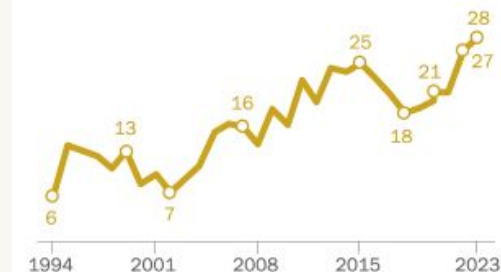


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GALLUP

Since the mid-1990s, the share of Americans with unfavorable views of both parties has more than quadrupled

% who have an **unfavorable view** of both the Republican and Democratic parties



Note: Based on those who rated both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Source: Yearly averages of survey data from Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (2020-2023) and Pew Research Center phone surveys of U.S. adults (1994-2019).

"Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Winner-Take-All Electoral System Allows a Minority Faction to Win Nearly All Power In Our Government

WINNER-TAKE-ALL

30%

of Americans is enough to win nearly all the power in our government.

PART 1

How We Got Here

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Architecture

02

**The Context
We're In**

Research Base and Methods

Cognitive interviews

On democracy, the political system, and the Constitution.

Cultural Mindset Tracking Survey

Quarterly, nationally representative, with oversamples for race and age.

Topical surveys

Political system change, constitutional crisis

Quarterly focus groups

How the public is making sense of the moment.

People are deeply unhappy with the current system.

4%

say the political system is working extremely or very well.

Pew

63%

have little or no confidence in the future of the U.S. political system.

Pew

25%

believe the people's role in the democratic process is working well.

Gallup / Kettering

People see the system as rigged.

70%

of Americans say the system is rigged.

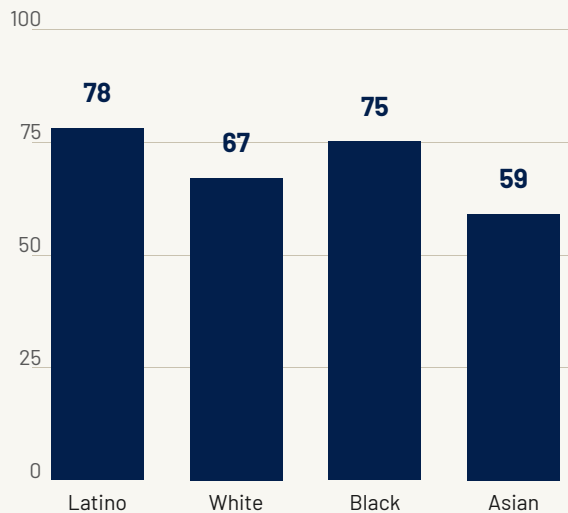
WHY IT MATTERS

Research tells us that this mindset is so pervasive that it can't be ignored or argued away.

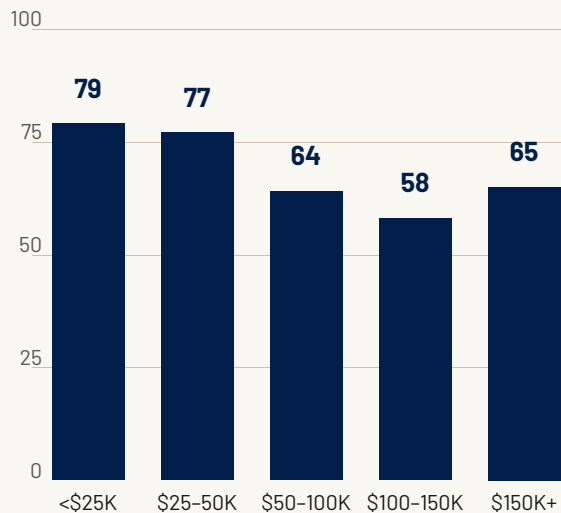
People across race, age, and income agree.

Percent who agree the system is rigged.

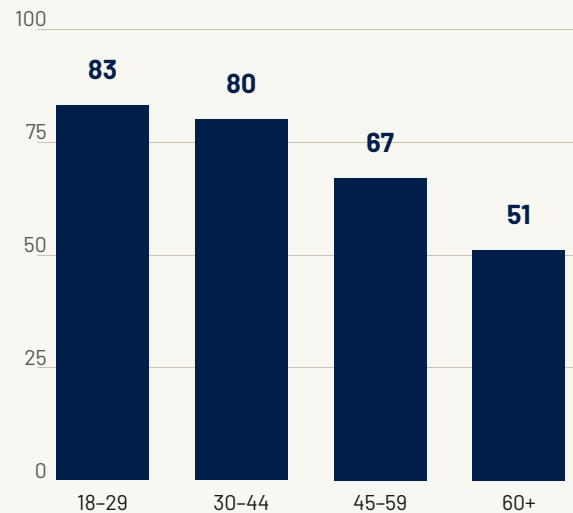
By race



By income



By age



The Basic Mindset

Slots to be Filled

What Isn't Filled in?



People in Power

Who is Rigging the System?

Corporations, Politicians, Coastal
Elites, Media

What do "they" do?



"The System"

What System?

Economy, Government, Healthcare,
Immigration System

How does it work?



**"Regular" People
Get a Raw Deal**

At Whose Expense?

White Middle Class, The 99%, Native-
born Americans, People of Color

How does this happen?

Most people don't feel represented.

An unresponsive system is one of the key ingredients of democratic backsliding.

85%

believe politicians don't care what people like them think

Pew

53%

feel that the interest of people like them are not represented by the US government

AP-NORC

Overwhelming desire to change the system.

71%

of research participants say our political system needs major changes or to be completely reformed.

Public support for specific reforms is high.

Without a large-scale campaign, there's already broad support

79% support establishing term limits for Supreme Court justices.

90% of Democrats · 67% of Republicans

66% support changing how we elect presidents so the candidate with the most votes wins.

82% of Democrats · 45% of Republicans

65% support changing the electoral system so more parties can be represented in Congress and state legislatures.

77% of Democrats · 43% of Republicans

83% oppose making it easier for presidents to do what they want without interference.

96% of Democrats · 63% of Republicans

Political and economic systems – seen as connected.

"There are so many issues right now. Economics, cost of living, cost of food. But let's not forget our civil rights and the democracy. It's all a big ball of wax... they're all a part of the problem."

Research participant – Latino man, Democrat, age 69. FrameWorks, 2026.

People already feel that kitchen-table struggles and the political system are the same fight. The narrative just has to name the connection.

A word about the word "democracy."

Research has identified five distinct ways of thinking about democracy, and most people rely on all of them at one point or another, sometimes toggling back-and-forth between them in a single conversation

- **A set of rights** *Protecting civil and political liberties*
- **The act of voting** *Show up, cast a ballot.*
- **Government by and for the people** *Responsive to the popular will.*
- **Representation** *Elected leaders standing in for us.*
- **Whatever the U.S. does** *Synonym for the status quo.*

It's when people think of democracy as synonymous with 'what the US does' that calls to 'defend democracy' can be alienating because it seems like an attempt to protect the system that is failing them.

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The Big Sell:

Basic Communications
Principles to Ground Our
Story

Validate and affirm the desire for change.

HOW TO DO IT

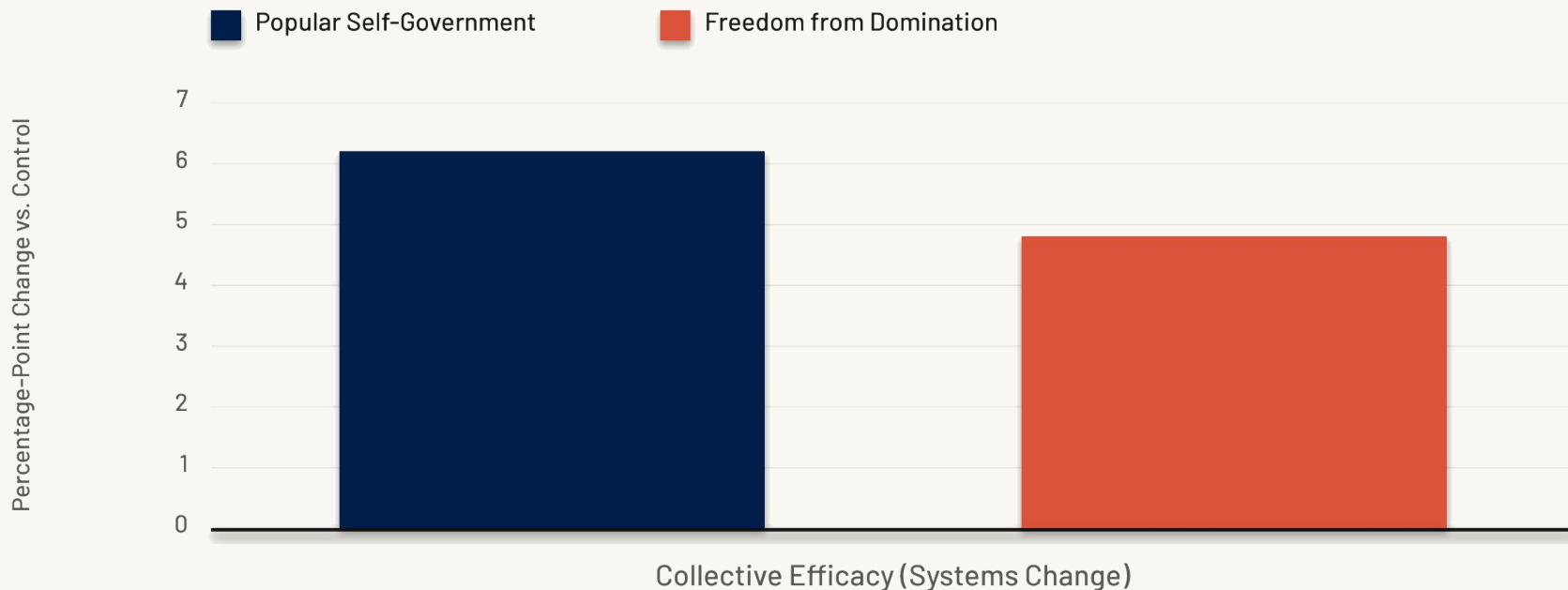
- Acknowledge and affirm people's desire for change.
- Position yourself as a proponent of change, not a defender of the status quo.
- Point to a new system as a third path — we don't have to choose between a system that isn't working and placing ourselves at the whim of an autocrat.

Activate core – and often underappreciated – democratic values.

APPEAL TO THE ANIMATING IDEALS BEHIND DEMOCRACY

- Popular Self-Government: We, the people, have a right to govern ourselves.
- Freedom from Domination: We shouldn't have to live according to the whims of powerful people.
- Real Representation: We deserve a government that truly represents us.

Democratic ideals build a sense that we can change systems for the better.



Make the political system visible.

HOW TO DO IT

- Situate leaders within the system — it's not only about leaders.
- Highlight system design to bring systems out of the background.
- Talk about the political system — not just “democracy.”
- When criticizing leaders, highlight how the system has enabled bad actions or prevented good ones.

Make the political system visible: Countering “personalism”

“Better leaders. Some better leaders with more common sense. [...] I think it starts at the top.”

Black woman, Republican, age 50 · research participant



“We the people, we're going to elect The Rock to the office. He is very well liked by the majority of the nation. And he's going to help mend the social divide...”

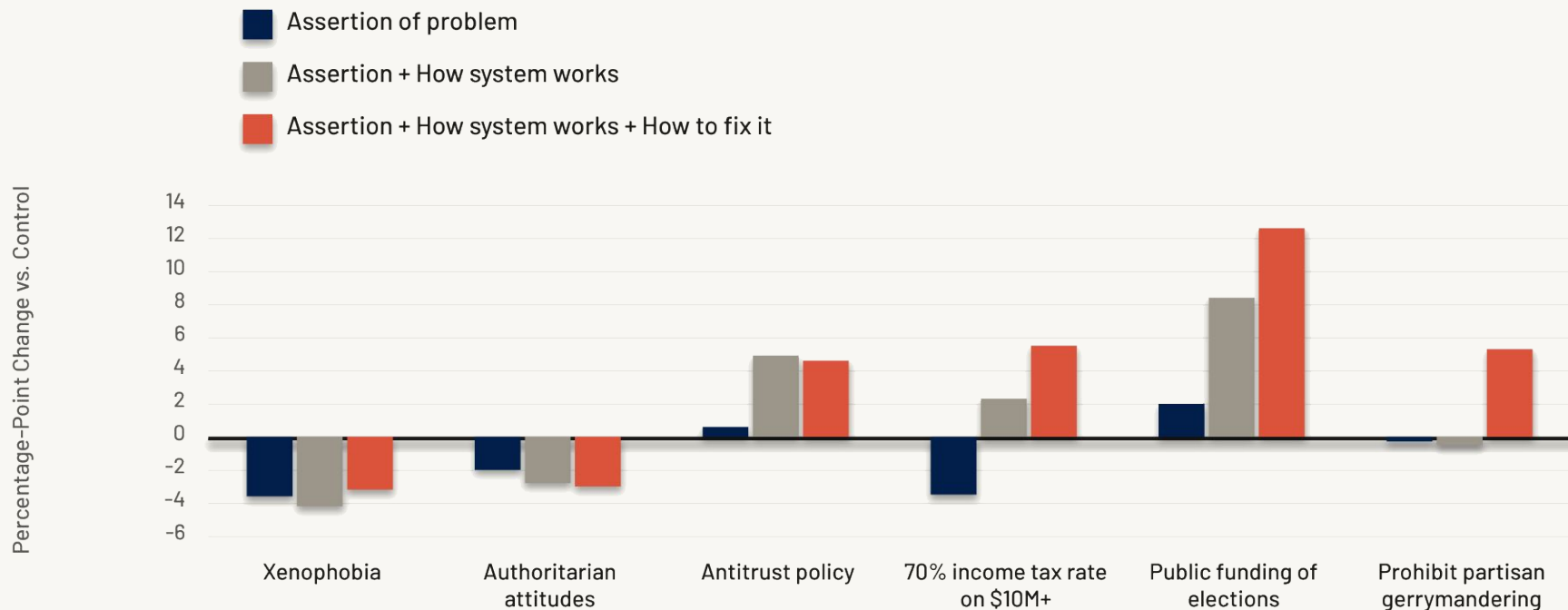
Latino man, Democrat, age 28 · focus group, January 2024

Connect the dots to help people see how the political system is failing.

HOW TO DO IT

- Fill in the blanks — talk about who shapes systems, how they work, and how people are affected.
- Talk about how systems work — and how they can be changed to better realize our values.
- Use verbs to show how it works — the system stands in the way; blocks / makes it too easy for powerful interests to block change; insulates people in power / protects leaders from accountability.

Connecting the dots prevents scapegoating and authoritarian attitudes – and boosts support for reforms.

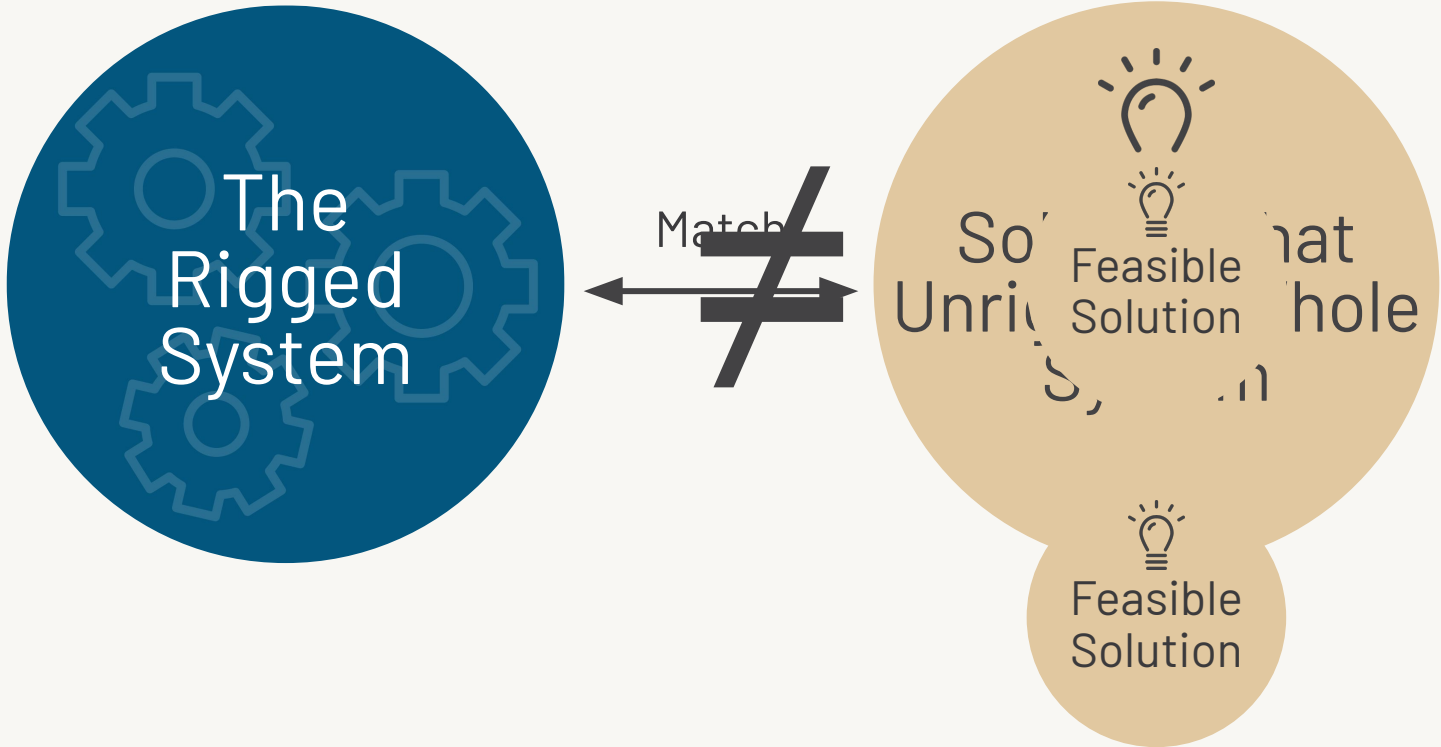


Match the scale of the problem to the scale of the solution.

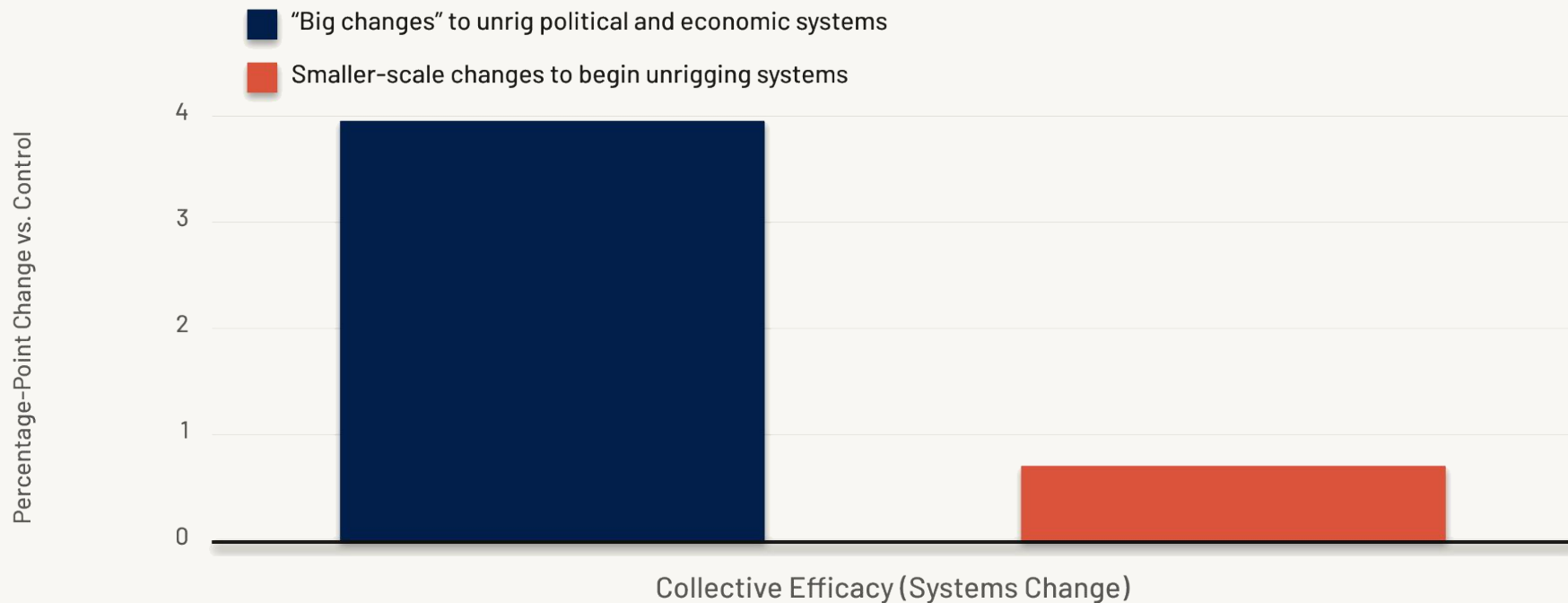
IT'S VITAL TO OFFER SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

- Name what is being rigged and how.
- Show how power through numbers makes change possible.
- Offer solutions at the scale of the rigged system.

Ambition-Feasibility Paradox



Proposing major systemic changes builds a belief that we can change systems.



Explain how the political system shapes people's daily experiences.

HOW TO DO IT

- Trace everyday economic struggles — like low wages and the high cost of living — to the political system's failures to realize democratic ideals.
- Draw connections between an unresponsive system and people's experience of being subject to the whim of those in power.
- Explain how the political system, in blocking popular policies, fails to address people's everyday needs.

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04

Narrative

Architecture:

Putting the Principles
Together

OVERVIEW

The narrative architecture.

Effective communications about the political system should follow this sequence.

01 VALUE

Begin with a shared democratic value.

Grounds your message in values most of us share — before naming what's broken.

02 VISIBLE

Make the political system visible.

Names the political system as the site of failure, using action language.

03 BRIDGE

Bridge to people's daily lives.

Connects abstract system failure to concrete, everyday experiences.

04 SOLUTIONS

Offer institutional solutions at scale.

Match the scale of the problem — and connect it to real action.

01
VALUE

02
VISIBLE

03
BRIDGE

04
SOLUTIONS

STEP 01 OF 04

Begin with a shared democratic value.

Grounds your message in values that most of us share and want before naming what's broken.

POPULAR SELF-GOVERNMENT

In a democracy, the government is supposed to do what most of us want most of the time.

In a democracy, the power lies with the people, and we have the right to govern ourselves.

When we decide something together, it should actually happen.

REAL REPRESENTATION

In a democracy, the government is supposed to respond to our demands.

In a democracy, the government is supposed to respond to our demands. But, today, most of us don't feel represented.

STEP 01 OF 04 (cont.)

Take steps to affirm an inclusive “we.”

Denying some of us equal claim to “we, the people” is core to the autocratic playbook.

EXPRESSLY NAME WHO IS INCLUDED

No matter who we are or where you come from, we all feel the pain when the political system doesn't reflect our demands.

USE A RANGE OF MESSENGERS

When we talk about “most of us” or “the people,” use a range of messengers.

DRAW ON INCLUSIVE VALUES

Our diversity is our strength. Be explicit that the right to collective self-government is for us all.

STEP 02 OF 04

Make the political system visible.

This step does two things at once.

1 NAMES THE SITE OF FAILURE

2 DESCRIBES HOW IT'S FAILING

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

Our system was designed to give some people more say than others – and it's the reason it's failing to do what most of us want it to today.

STEP 02 OF 04 (cont.)

The verbs do the work.

HOW IT BLOCKS

stands in the way · blocks · makes it too easy for powerful interests to block

WHO GETS POWER

gives some people more power than others · deprives some of us of real representation

WHO IT PROTECTS

insulates people in power · protects leaders from real accountability



VALUE



VISIBLE



BRIDGE



SOLUTIONS

STEP 02 OF 04 (cont.)

Cue that it's designed.

Phrases like “is designed” and “is built to” cue that the system was made — and could be remade.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE:

Our system was designed when only wealthy white male property owners could vote — and the rules they baked into our outdated institutions still determine who gets heard today.

VARIATIONS

The system is built to make it easy for corporations to ...

Our political system was designed centuries ago to concentrate power in elite hands.

01
VALUE

02
VISIBLE

03
BRIDGE

04
SOLUTIONS

STEP 03 OF 04

Bridge to people's daily lives.

Name the concrete stakes first, then connect back to the political system.

PRESCRIPTIONS

That's why prescription drugs cost hundreds of dollars even though most Americans support reforms to lower prices.

HOUSING

It's why housing keeps getting more expensive while developers get tax breaks.

HEALTHCARE

It's why you're one medical emergency away from bankruptcy even though most of us want all Americans to be able to see a doctor.

WAGES

It's why wages stay flat while CEO pay skyrockets – the system makes it easy for corporations to protect their own profits.

This is the step communicators often skip – and it's an important one. Without it, people hear your critique, but can't connect it to their own lives.



VALUE



VISIBLE



BRIDGE



SOLUTIONS

Offer solutions at scale of crisis and connect it to real action.

VISION

It's time to update this outdated system, so 'we, the people' can govern ourselves.

SPECIFICS

Take power away from the Supreme Court. Break up the two-party system. Get big money out of politics so politicians answer to us, not their donors.

ACTION

Join organizations working on these changes. Contact your representatives. Support candidates who commit to changing the political system.



VALUE



VISIBLE



BRIDGE



SOLUTIONS

Putting it all together.

01 VALUE

In a democracy, the government is supposed to respond to our demands.

02 VISIBLE

But our political system makes it easy for people in power to avoid any real accountability — which keeps us from getting the change we need.

03 BRIDGE

Every time you wait for a prescription to be filled, for your kid's school to get funding, or for the bus that never comes — you're seeing a system that works for them, but doesn't answer to you.

04 SOLUTIONS

It's time to update this outdated system. That means things like breaking up the two-party system and replacing it with one that really represents us, and taking power from the Supreme Court and putting it back in our hands. Big changes like these can only happen when we come together in numbers and demand it. Join [organization].