REVIVING OUR DEMOCRACY

A narrative for the new political system we need

Democracy Revival Center
FrameWorks Institute
The Bloc

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Introduction

We are in confusing, challenging, even dangerous times. We're caught in endless cycles of crisis, dysfunction, corruption — and worse.

The vast majority of Americans believe something is deeply wrong with our political system. They do not feel represented. They don't believe the government will deliver, no matter what politicians promise. The frustration is real, it's reasonable, and it has been building for a long time.

Today, seventy-five percent (75%) of Americans think the political system needs "major changes" or to be "entirely reformed." And they are right.

But that frustration has not yet been channeled toward democratic renewal — and without clear direction, it will continue to fuel authoritarian alternatives. Right now, we're seeing where this leads: toward leaders who promise to cut through dysfunction by any means necessary, even if that means concentrating power, silencing dissent, and abandoning the protections needed to keep people safe.

When people stop believing the system can work for them, authoritarian promises start to sound like the only real option. We are living the costs of that right now.

This toolkit seeks to meet Americans where they are. It offers a new narrative about the political system — our electoral system and governing institutions — that can help people see that they don't have to choose between a system that wasn't working for them and acceding to the rule of a strongman. It takes their frustration seriously — not as problems to be managed, but as legitimate demands for representation and change. And it channels those frustrations toward the political reforms that can actually deliver what people are asking for.

Telling this story requires us to ***make the system visible*** — in ways we have far too often overlooked, overcomplicated, or simply ignored.

It also requires us to ***connect-the-dots***, between Americans' everyday struggles and the political system that stands in the way of the change they want to see. In fact, there is no need to choose between talking about people's day-to-day needs or talking about the systemic challenges we face. By making the political system visible as the obstacle standing between people and the things they need, we can talk about both at once.

How this toolkit was made

This toolkit synthesizes findings across multiple research streams to offer practical guidance for communicators, organizers, and advocates.

It draws primarily on research conducted as part of the FrameWorks Institute's Culture Change Project, in collaboration with the Democracy Revival Center. This includes:

- Deep mindset research on how Americans think about democracy (2023–2026);
- Monthly tracking surveys and focus groups (November 2024–August 2025); and
- Issue-specific framing research on the political system.

In addition, this toolkit draws on findings from leading comparative political scientists and pro-democracy experts that have identified effective ways for pro-democracy movements to address underlying frustrations that give rise to democratic backsliding. These experts offer new kinds of narrative approaches — referred to by one scholar as "transformative repolarization" — designed to speak directly to Americans' deep dissatisfaction with the political system that has given rise to a failing and precarious status quo.

What this toolkit is — and isn't

This toolkit is designed to translate insights from framing research into a new framework that avoids the traps that too often divide our movements or prevent Americans hungry for change from seeing us as on their side. It isn't about the immediate threats of the moment, but it can motivate resistance by helping people see the possibility of a better future.

We'll be refining this over the coming year as we conduct more research and update guidance for an ever-changing context. We know that research can only inform what works — and that what really matters is whether this resonates in coffee shops, union halls, and kitchen tables across the country. We encourage you to share what you learn with us so we can continue to make this framework stronger. Changing the political system will require all of us.

What we know — and what's next

Americans across the political spectrum want change — and yet the system has failed to deliver. The problem goes beyond any one election, and Americans know it. The problem is an outdated political system that prevents the change most Americans want to see. It's time to make the system visible — so we can channel Americans' frustration into real change.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is organized to meet you where you are:

PART 1

The context we're in

Understand the landscape — what people believe, what they want, and where the dangers lie.

PART 2

Guidance for communicators

Learn the core principles that make your messaging more effective.

PART 3

Narrative architecture

Get the step-by-step framework you can apply to any issue or audience.

PART 4

Applying recommendations for everyday communications

Examples of how to use the guide for specific issues, and a quick reference guide for language choices and rebutting everyday arguments.

PART

01

The context we're in

Americans are frustrated, hungry for change, and deeply skeptical of the current system. But that frustration hasn't yet been channeled toward democratic renewal — and without clear direction, it will continue to fuel authoritarian alternatives. This section maps the current moment: what people believe, what they want, and where there are opportunities we can harness for change.

Americans are deeply unhappy with the current system

By wide margins, Americans are deeply unhappy with the status quo. No matter how you describe it, Americans are frustrated with a government that is failing them:

- **Only 4%** of Americans say the political system is working extremely or very well. Nearly three-quarters (72%) say it isn't working well or at all.
- **Thirty-three percent** of Americans are somewhat or very satisfied with the nation's system of government — one of the lowest readings in the 20-year history of the survey. And **just 28%** of U.S. adults are satisfied with the way democracy is working in the country — the lowest Gallup has ever recorded.
- **Sixty-three percent** of Americans say they have little or no confidence in the future of the U.S. political system.
- Trust in government is at near all-time lows. **Just 16%** of Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do the right thing always or most of the time, among the lowest in more than 70 years.
- Most Americans are unhappy with the current party system. Since the mid-1990s, the share of Americans with unfavorable views of both parties has quadrupled. Seventy-one percent of Americans often or sometimes "wish there were more political parties to choose from in this country."

Most Americans do not feel represented

Democracy scholars tell us that an unresponsive political system, where people do not feel — and are not — really represented, is one of the key ingredients that fuels democratic backsliding. And this is what most Americans are experiencing today. More than eight-in-ten (85%) of Americans think politicians don't understand the lives of people like them. Just 14% of Americans think "government is sensitive to the interests of people like me when making decisions." And 70% of Americans say they have little or no say in how the country is run.

This is reflected in real life experiences. On issue after issue, overwhelming majorities of Americans support policies that never become law:

62% of Americans say it is the federal government's responsibility to ensure all Americans have healthcare coverage

76% of Americans support national paid family leave

75% of Americans support paid sick days for all workers

63% of Americans favor making tuition at public colleges free

66% of Americans support labor laws that would make it easier for employees to form or join a labor union

63% of Americans say tax rates on large businesses and corporations should be raised

Yet despite overwhelming support, and election after election where candidates have promised real change, these popular policies remain out of reach.

Americans share a widespread perception that the system is rigged – but what that means is up for grabs

Today, most Americans — nearly three-quarters (72%) — think the system is rigged against them. This is true for a majority of people from groups across the political spectrum and by people of all ages, races, genders, and income levels, including:

83% of Democrats or people who lean Democratic

59% of Republicans or people who lean Republican

79% of people ages 18-29

62% of people age 60+

87% of Black Americans

68% of white Americans

81% of people earning under $25,000

58% of people earning $100,000+

Research tells us that this mindset is so pervasive that it can't be ignored or argued away — but these numbers only tell part of the story. While Americans broadly agree that there are a powerful few manipulating "the system" to benefit themselves at the expense of the rest of us — what that means for most, in practice, is often fuzzy, unclear, and contested. What we know from research — and from the experience we're all facing today — is that ignoring people's justified beliefs that the system is rigged, or leaving it uncontested, opens the door for authoritarian alternatives to dominate, and allows xenophobia, racism, transphobia, and other harmful forms of bigotry to fill in gaps as a useful explanation.

There is overwhelming desire for substantial, system–wide change

By wide margins, Americans are deeply unhappy with the status quo and want to see significant, even transformational change to the political system. According to an April 2025 survey, 71% of Americans think the political system needs "major changes" or to be "entirely reformed." A September 2025 survey found that 75% of adults — including 86% of Black people and 77% of Hispanics — believe the political system needs a "complete overhaul" or "major reform." And a Pew survey from September 2025 found that 77% of Americans want major changes or complete reform — among the highest of any country in the world.

"Democracy" means a lot of different things to people — and, because of it, can be a hard term to use

Many of us have had the experience of talking with friends or colleagues about "democracy," and realizing that we're sometimes talking past each other. That's because the term "democracy" means a lot of different things — and, because of that, it can be a hard term to use by communicators. Research confirms this intuition.

"Democracy" is a term that people understand in a number of ways. 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.

People sometimes equate democracy with a political order that protects basic civil and political rights, while sometimes they think about it as the act of voting. People sometimes think about democracy as a system in which the government does what the people want, and sometimes as representation of the people by elected leaders. Sometimes, when people use or hear the term democracy, it is simply understood as what the US does. It is when people think of democracy as synonymous with 'what the U.S. does' that calls to 'defend democracy' can be alienating because it can seem like an attempt to protect the very system that's failing them.

Each of the meanings people use — and that communicators mean when they use it — brings certain aspects of democracy into view and leaves others out of view. This can make the term itself challenging to use, even when the concepts we're trying to make visible are powerful and important.

PART

02

The big sell: Guidance for communicators

Americans are ready for change. They know the system isn't working. They feel it every day. But, too often, our communications have not channeled that dissatisfaction into support for democratic transformation — yet.

This section draws on a large body of research to offer some guidance to communicators.

Validate and affirm the desire for change

People already perceive widespread systemic dysfunction. We shouldn't hide from it or try to talk them out of it. In fact, dismissing or minimizing frustration alienates audiences who see real problems.

Communicators should respond to this hunger in a way that validates it as legitimate and rational — and use it as an opening to call for transformative, systemic change.

Activate core — and often under–appreciated — democratic values

Research consistently shows that grounding messages in shared, core values is an effective way to make them resonate with voters. This is something communicators widely understand.

But, too often, "democracy" itself is used as the value when talking about changes to our electoral system or governing institutions. This is insufficient on its own. Research tells us that "democracy" means many different things and, for most of us, is an abstract idea that can too often be misunderstood.

Rather than invoking "democracy" as a value, we should appeal to the underlying ideals that motivate and ground people's commitment to democracy, in order to generate the kind of shared orientation that appeals to values are intended to generate. For example:

> ***Popular Self-Government*** is the idea that government should be by the people, for the people. In a democracy, we have the right to govern ourselves. As a society, we believe that the power lies with the people.
>
> ***Representation*** is the idea that the government is supposed to represent us — acting in our best interests, responding to our demands, and reflecting people's experiences or identities. Research tells us that, in our current system, most people don't feel "truly" or "actually" represented.

Research tells us that grounding our communications in shared values strengthens our messages by increasing clarity, countering the fatalism that comes with so many of today's debates, and orienting us toward what we need from a new, more democratic system.

Make the political system visible

For most people, the basic structure of our political system — our electoral system and governing institutions — operates in an invisible, below-the-radar way. From education systems to housing systems to structural racism, people often fail to see the role that systems play, and instead frequently default to explanations that focus on individual behaviors or choices to explain the outcomes they are seeing in the world. This default is particularly true with our political system, where people most often — and sometimes rightly — blame the decisions or character flaws of particular leaders to make sense of the outcomes they are experiencing.

Part of how we can make the system visible — in addition to simply naming it as the problem to be solved — is to help people see that it is not just naturally occurring, but designed through our own actions. People usually take our political system for granted, as a reality that simply is, rather than seeing it as something that was made and that we could remake. Researchers sometimes call this "naturalizing." To build demand for changes to the system, we first have to bring the system into view as the reason for the problem — and then make visible the possibility that it could be different than it is today. As we'll outline in the next section, using phrases like "is designed" or "is built to" is one way to help bring this possibility into view.

One additional point to consider: Communicators sometimes talk about "democratic reforms." This can create artificial complexity and is too abstract to make change concrete for most people. Research shows that "democracy" is an abstract ideal for most people. If we want to talk about changing our institutions, we need to help people think about systems and structures, not abstractions. One simple shift we can make is using terms like political system rather than democracy to channel thinking in the right direction.

Consider framing the system as outdated and in need of an update

One way to invoke the idea that the system is designed is by referencing — even if obliquely — the historical creation of the system, the founding of the country. This is a simple way to bring design, and the possibility of redesign, to mind. When thinking about the nation's founding, people are able to recognize that the system was created, and reason that a system created so far in the past must bear the traces and flaws of this past.

Framing the system as outdated and in need of updating is not only true — our political system is outdated. It's also one subtle framing that opens people's imagination to the possibility that the system could — and should — be designed differently.

Explain *how* the political system is failing – not just *that* it is – to help people connect the dots

Research tells us that it is not enough to tell people that a system exists, or that it is not working for them. We want to help them understand how it works, so they can see how systemic failures are creating real-life problems and can recognize what's needed to fix the system.

When we don't connect the dots for people and help them see what about the system is leading to bad outcomes, they fill in the blanks with explanations that are readily available. With the political system, this usually means falling back on the idea that the problem is that we've got the wrong leaders. This leads to a corresponding fix: we just need better leaders. Or worse: people turn to the bogus stories of the opposition, which blame marginalized groups and liberal elites, with calls for banishing them from politics and society.

To translate the shared desire for a fundamental change into support for the structural changes that would actually fix the system, we have to connect the dots. Helping people understand how and why the system is currently failing helps to see what's needed to fix it.

This "how" does not have to be — indeed, should not be — lengthy or complicated. In fact, a good explanation makes complex or abstract ideas more concrete and easier to understand. An explanation does not merely assert a relationship between a cause and its effect, but shows how one leads to the other. A well-crafted explanation sparks the satisfying sense of grasping the issue at hand. Eyes don't glaze over — they flash with "aha!"

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

Americans are overwhelmingly unhappy with the current system, and most believe the system is rigged against them. Building the kind of support necessary for change is often complicated by what researchers at the FrameWorks Institute have coined the "ambition-feasibility paradox:" Solutions that are ambitious enough to unrig the system don't seem feasible to people, while solutions that are feasible don't seem ambitious enough to solve the problem.

One way to address this problem is to design solutions that match the scale of the problem and help people imagine what we could do to make these solutions a reality. When we do this, we can build and activate support, cultivate efficacy rather than fatalism, and generate real and meaningful change.

Defending the status quo is not enough

Given widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, it's critical to position ourselves as pushing for meaningful change, and not as a defender of existing institutions. This can create a strategic bind. The threats to democracy are real and urgent. Defending free and fair elections, the rule of law — and all Americans from the arbitrary use of state power against them — critical. That's why fighting for a more democratic system is so important, because it gives us the opportunity to validate people's legitimate frustrations with the system, and harnesses those frustrations toward democracy — rather than away from it. Here's the key:

Democracy isn't what we have — it's what we're fighting to create.

PART

03

Narrative architecture

This section is your manual. It provides a four-step narrative framework that draws on the guidance from the last section and shows you how to apply it.

The framework

Effective communications about the political system should follow this sequence:

STEP 1
Start with a shared value

STEP 2
Make the political system visible

STEP 3
Bridge to people's daily lives

STEP 4
Offer solutions at scale and connect to action

STEP 1

Begin with a shared democratic value

What this step does: Grounds your message in values that most of us share and want before naming what's broken.

The value: 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.
- "The promise of self-government is simple: when we decide something together, it should actually happen."

The value: 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."

Take steps to affirm an inclusive "we"

Denying some of us equal claim to "we, the people," is core to the autocratic playbook — and anticipating and countering exclusionary rhetoric is part of what it takes to reject it.

There are many ways to do this:

- Expressly name who is included ("No matter who you are or where you come from, we all feel the pain when the political system doesn't really reflect our demands.")
- When we talk about "most of us" or "the people," use a range of messengers.
- Explicitly draw on inclusive values, like the value of diversity ("Our diversity is our strength"), and be explicit that the right to collective self government is for us all.

STEP 2

Make the political system visible — name it as the problem and describe how it's failing

This step does TWO things at once:

1. Names the political system as the site of failure.
2. Describes how it's failing using action language.

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."
- "The way the political system is built **makes it too easy** for powerful corporations to **block** what most of us want."
- "The political system doesn't **give** everyone an equal say over what happens, so some of us aren't truly represented by the government."
- "Our system **deprives** some people from having a real say in our government — and it's **standing in the way** of a government that delivers."
- "Our system has too many places where a small, powerful minority can **veto** the things that most of us want."
- "Our system **insulates** people in power from real accountability — which keeps us from getting the change we need."

The verbs show how it works

- When you say the system "**stands in the way**," "**blocks**," or "**makes it too easy** for powerful interests to block" — you're already describing how it fails.
- When you say the system "**gives** some people more power than others," or "**deprives** some of us from real representation," and connect it to flawed outcomes, you're describing how the system is falling short.
- When you say the system "**insulates** people in power" or "**protects** leaders from real accountability," you're capturing what's wrong with the system.
- You're not explaining individual reforms. You're making the reason for the system's failure to deliver what people want visible.

Avoid personalization

Even when you name the system, people will try to translate it back to individual leaders.

How to prevent this: If you're trying to get people to focus on the system, do it intentionally. There are a few ways to do this:

REDIRECT FROM PERSONALITIES TO STRUCTURE EXPRESSLY

- "The problem isn't just that we have bad people in office — the problem is a system that can't **deliver** what people want and need."
- "It's not just about who's in office — it's about the system that **remains** no matter who wins."

REINFORCE SYSTEMIC THINKING BY CUEING "DESIGN"

- "The system is **built** to make it easy for corporations to …"
- "Our system was **designed** when only white male property owners could vote — and the rules they **baked** into our outdated institutions still **determine** who gets heard today."
- "Our political system was designed centuries ago to concentrate power in elite hands — and those rules still **shape** who has power today."
- "The way the system is set up, …"

USE PROBLEMS WITH SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONS AS EXAMPLES

- "The Supreme Court, for example, **makes it too easy** for corporations and big banks to **block** rules that would make day-to-day life more affordable — and that most Americans are calling for."
- "The two-party system, for example, **creates** incentives for politicians to divide us and **prevents** us from having real representation in our government."

The key

Start your communications by focusing on the system overall, and use specific mechanisms as examples. The key here is to describe the system overall and how it functions — and to make the system itself visible.

STEP 3

Bridge to people's daily lives

What this step does: Connects abstract system failure to concrete experiences people have every day.

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

Sample language

- "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 doesn't answer to you."
- "That's why your rent keeps **rising**, healthcare costs keep **going up**, and nothing ever seems to change no matter who you vote for."
- "You feel the effects of this outdated system every day — in higher costs, longer waits, and politicians who seem to know nothing about the problems you face."

Specific examples

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

- "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 when we need one."

WAGES

- "It's why wages **stay flat** while CEO pay **skyrockets** — the system **makes it easy** for corporations to **protect** their own profits at the expense of the rest of us."

STEP 4

Offer institutional solutions at the scale of the problem — and connect it to real action

What this step does: Provide a topline framing for solutions, connect it all back to shared values, and make sure you provide institutional solutions ambitious enough to fix the problem you've identified. This is important to provide enough grounding in specifics so it feels concrete and can open up the possibility of real change.

Part A: Vision

Frame the solution as updating the system so it better realizes our values.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- "It's time to **update** this outdated system, so "we, the people" can **govern** ourselves."
- "We need to **make** real changes to our political system so it actually **represents** and **responds** to all of us."

Part B: Name specific solutions

You should name concrete institutional changes. Choose ones that are bold enough to solve real problems.

SAMPLE SOLUTIONS

- "We can start by **taking** power away from the Supreme Court and **putting** the Constitution back in our hands."
- "We can start by **breaking up** the two-party system and **replacing** it with one that gives us more choices and real representation in government."
- "We can start by **updating** how we elect representatives so the system actually reflects what people want."
- "We can start by **getting** big money out of politics so politicians answer to us, not their donors."

Part C: Tell people specifically what THEY can do.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- "**Join** or **support** organizations working on these changes — like [specific organization in your area]."
- "**Contact** your representatives this week and **demand** they support [specific reform]."
- "**Support** candidates who commit to changing the political system, not just promising change we all know the system can't deliver."

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

- "**Build** coalitions across our differences to demand real change to our political system"
- "**Organize** your neighbors to fight for a system that really represents us."

PART

04

Applying these recommendations to everyday communications

The four-step architecture can work the same way no matter what issue you're discussing. Whether you're talking about healthcare, housing, wages, or more, the structure can remain consistent:

Step 1: Start with a shared value

Step 2: Make the political system visible

Step 3: Bridge to people's daily lives

Step 4: Offer solutions at scale and connect to action

What changes is the content you plug into each step. The examples below show how this works across issues. Use these as models, not scripts. Adapt the language to your context, audience, and campaign.

Putting it all together

Here's how the four steps flow in a complete message:

Step 1 (Value)

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

Step 2 (System 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."

Step 3 (Bridge to daily life)

- "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."

Step 4 (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 or protest]. The political system was built by real people — and it's real people just like us, coming together, who can change it."

Applying this narrative framework to real-life problems

The architecture works the same way no matter what issue you're discussing. Here's how you could use it for the kitchen table issues most Americans are facing:

Healthcare

- **Step 1:** "In a democracy, the government is supposed to do what the people want most of the time."
- **Step 2:** "But, for decades, our political system has failed to really represent what most of us want. It gives too much power to pharmaceutical companies and insurance executives, and too little power to the rest of us.
- **Step 3:** "You feel this every time you skip a doctor's appointment because you can't afford the copay, or ration your prescriptions to make them last."
- **Step 4:** "We can update this system — by replacing the two party system and changing how we elect representatives so we can finally hold them accountable to what "we, the people" want. Join the campaign for [specific reform in your area]."

Housing

- **Step 1:** "The promise of self-government is simple: when we decide something together, it should actually happen."
- **Step 2:** "But our system deprives some of us from having an equal say in our government — and it's standing in the way of a government that delivers."
- **Step 3:** "That's why your rent keeps rising. Why there's never enough affordable housing. It's why developers get tax breaks while you struggle to pay rent."
- **Step 4:** "We can change our political system so it works for all of us. We can start by changing how we elect representatives, so none of our votes count for more than anyone else's. Join [organization] so we can build a new system that can really represent us and can deliver the change our families need."

Wages and the economy

- **Step 1:** "In a democracy, the government is supposed to respond to what Americans want and need."
- **Step 2:** "But, for decades, our political system has failed to deliver for working people. It was designed to let corporations and billionaires block the change that working people are demanding."

- **Step 3:** "That's why we struggle to afford basic necessities while CEO pay skyrockets, and why you work hard every day but still can't get ahead.
- **Step 4:** "It's time to change our political system so it works for us, instead of working for them. We can start by taking power away from the Supreme Court, which makes it too easy for corporations and big banks to block rules that would make day-to-day life more affordable. When we act together and come together in numbers, we can change the system so it gives us a real say."

Adapting for your context

When applying this framework, ask yourself:

1. **What daily frustration does my audience experience that connects to this issue?**

   Be specific. "Healthcare costs" is abstract. "Choosing between your prescription and your grocery bill" is felt.

2. **How has the political system, or which institutions, prevented the kind of real change that would address your audiences' problem?**

   Name the specific ways the system was responsible. Use verbs.

3. **What changes to the political system would actually address it — and open the door to more?**

   Bring solutions back to changing the political system in ways that are big enough to make a real difference, and connect them to shared values — making the system more democratic, responsive, and just. Changes in leadership alone aren't enough.

The bridge is key

Notice what Step 3 does in each example. It takes the claim that "the system is failing" and makes it felt.

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. They fill in the blanks with whatever explanations are most available: bad leaders, the wrong party, or — worse — scapegoating narratives that blame "others" instead of the system failing all of us.

The bridge works by:

- **Naming the concrete experiences people have every day** (rationing prescriptions, rent going up, wages staying flat)
- **Connecting those experiences back to the system and showing how they stem from the way the system works or is designed.** ("the political system makes it easy for corporations to stand in the way," "the two-party system makes it in politicians' interests to divide us")

Connecting people's real-world experiences back to the political system is key to reflecting what most Americans already know — if our political system truly represented us and the government did what most Americans are calling for, our economy would look much different than it does today.

Language quick reference:Words and phrases to use and avoid

Use

SYSTEM LANGUAGE

- "Political system" (not "democracy" as shorthand)
- "The system stands in the way…" / "gives some people more power than others" / "makes it too easy for powerful corporations to block…" / "keeps people in power from having to respond"
- "Update/modernize the system" (not "protect democracy")

VALUES

- "The government is supposed to do what most people want most of the time"
- "The government should represent all of us"
- "The people should decide"

SOLUTION FRAMING

- "Update this outdated system"
- "When we come together in numbers, we can force change"

Avoid

OLD PHRASE	NEW FRAMING	WHY
"Democracy is broken"	"Our outdated political system was designed to let powerful interests block what most people want"	Avoids fatalism; shows fixable design
"Reform democracy"	"Update the political system"	Forward-looking, specific, makes structure visible
"Greedy elites" alone	"Corporate interests who exploit a system that makes it easy to stand in the way of what we want and need"	Structural, not just moral

Checking your message

Before sending any communication, ask:

- Does it name the political system — not just "the government" or "politicians"?
- Does it connect to something people feel in daily life?
- Does it offer political system solutions — not just changes in leaders?
- Does it use "we" and "working people" in ways that build an inclusive sense of the people?
- Does it include a collective action?

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"Navigating Public Thinking about Democracy: April 2025 Briefing Key Takeaways." FrameWorks Institute, 11 Apr. 2025, www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2025/04/KeyTakeaways_April2025_NavigatingPublicThinkingAboutDemocracy.pdf.

"Navigating Public Thinking about Democracy: June 2025 Briefing Key Takeaways." FrameWorks Institute, 18 June 2025, www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2025/07/Navigating-Public-Thinking-about-Democracy-June-2025-Briefing-Key-Takeaways.pdf.

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"Why Most Americans Think the System is Rigged." FrameWorks Institute, 11 Dec. 2024, www.frameworksinstitute.org/resources/why-most-americans-think-the-system-is-rigged/.

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Pew Research Center

“People Around the World Want Political Change, but Many Doubt It Can Happen.” Pew Research Center, 15 Sept. 2025, available at www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/09/15/people-around-the-world-want-political-change-but-many-doubt-it-can-happen/.

“Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, But People Around the World Are Critical of How It’s Working.” Pew Research Center, 28 Feb. 2024, available at www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/representative-democracy-remains-a-popular-ideal-but-people-around-the-world-are-critical-of-how-its-working/.

“Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier.” Pew Research Center, 6 Dec. 2022, available at www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/social-media-seen-as-mostly-good-for-democracy-across-many-nations-but-u-s-is-a-major-outlier/.

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Lührmann, Anna. “Disrupting the Autocratization Sequence: Towards Democratic Resilience.” Democratization, vol. 28, no. 5, 2021, pp. 1017-1039. Taylor & Francis, doi:10.1080/13510347.2021.1928080.

About us

Democracy Revival Center

The Democracy Revival Center is dedicated to fixing the cracks in the foundation of our political system. We train a new generation of organizers and campaigners — a New Founding generation; translate scholarship into strategy; incubate bold new projects; and support a growing network of leaders tell a new story about how our political system has failed us — and what it will take for a revival.

FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute supports the framing and narrative strategy of movements working to advance justice and democracy. We collaborate closely with partners to conduct in-depth research, unearthing the mindsets people use to think about social issues and identifying narratives and frames capable of shifting taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. And we support partners in using this research to build demand for structural change.

The Bloc

The Bloc builds infrastructure for the popular era and the attention economy. We work with base-building groups, advocacy campaigns, policy makers, content creators, and coalitions to move their priorities and narratives through mainstream media, political forums, and digital platforms. Our goal is to ensure that multi-racial, working class voices don't just speak coherently, they break through the noise, shape public debate, and build power.

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