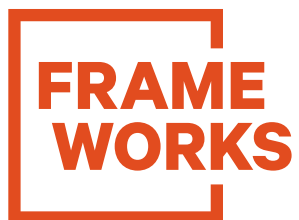FRAME
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Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter? How Do They Happen?

*Mindset Shifts: What Are They? Why Do They Matter?
How Do They Happen?* A FrameWorks Strategic Report
Sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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Contents

Introduction

Shifting how people think about social issues is critical for social and policy change. There are widely shared patterns of thinking in American culture that obstruct progressive change. For example, individualism prevents people from seeing the need for structural changes to our economic, justice, health, education, and energy systems, among others. Toxic stereotypes lead privileged groups to blame marginalized people for the problems they face and impede efforts to address sources of violence and exploitation. Misperceptions about human development across the lifespan undermine recognition of the best ways for our society to support children, families, and older adults.

There has been a recent swell of interest in mindset shifts and narrative change as a way of addressing these challenges. Advocates, activists, and funders across multiple issues have noted recent successes—most salient among them, the marriage equality campaign—and are looking for ways to shift worldviews to unlock and enable progressive change.

Yet these discussions are frequently unclear and imprecise. People use terms and concepts in different and often unspecified ways. While the participants in these discussions bring substantial expertise and experience to bear, knowledge about mindsets and narrative is divided across disciplines and dispersed among practitioners, scholars, activists, policy experts, communications experts, creatives, and organizers.

Research conducted for this report

— interviews with people from a wide range of fields who have expertise or experience working on key aspects of mindset shifts (including academics, activists and organizers, media makers, policy experts, applied communications researchers, and others)

— reviews of academic and gray literatures on relevant subjects, including examples of mindset shifts

— interviews with philanthropic leaders to better understand the current state of thinking about mindset shifts in the sector

See Appendix for a list of interview participants.

This report, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, synthesizes insights from a year of research with different experts and fields to pull together the pieces of this puzzle and put them together to reveal a bigger picture.

Without a more collective, contextual, and holistic perspective on health, it is difficult to advance health equity.

In this report, we use "mindsets" as a working term for shared ways of thinking. In the course of the discussion, we review a range of different terms and concepts, including narrative. The term "mindsets" has limitations—for example, the idea of mindset *shifts* can be counterintuitive (if minds are *set,* this suggests they aren't changeable)—and we are not suggesting it is necessarily the best one for all purposes. Yet the term does have advantages. For example, it allows for clarity in distinguishing between *changes in thinking* and *changes in discourse*, and avoids the conflation of these that sometimes leads to imprecision in methodology and practice.

This report is intended as a resource for all those working on and funding mindset shifts. The research yields clear lessons and recommendations for how advocates, activists, funders, and other practitioners can maximize the impact of their efforts to change how we think about social issues in order to change the contexts and structures that shape our experiences and realities.

The report is organized as follows:

— **Summary of lessons and recommendations.** We begin with a summary of key takeaways from the research.

— **What is the current state of knowledge about mindset shifts?** We integrate insights from interviews with a wide range of experts and philanthropic leaders and detailed literature reviews. The discussion is organized around three questions:

    — What are mindsets and mindset shifts?

    — Why do mindset shifts matter?

    — How do mindset shifts happen?

— **What are the overarching lessons that emerge from this research?** Here, we provide a fuller discussion of the research takeaways, focusing on lessons that can guide future mindset shift work.

— **How can those engaged in mindset shift work be most effective?** The report concludes with strategic advice for those working on mindset shifts, building on the lessons and thinking through what it means for advocates and funders to put them into practice.

Summary of Lessons and Recommendations

Lessons

1 A mindset shift strategy is most appropriate for broad social change efforts.

2 Mindset change depends on factors outside of strategists' control. Because of this, mindset shifts are realistic for some issues but not others.

3 Shifting mindsets is a major undertaking, but has huge benefits.

4 Shifting mindsets takes decades, not months or even years.

5 Finding and recognizing the common mindsets that run across specific policy change efforts creates opportunities for strategic partnerships.

6 Early wins are important and can catalyze a positive spiral of mindset shifts and policy change.

7 When wins stop, change can stall.

8 The social segregation of groups along class, racial, religious, and ideological lines, coupled with increasingly fragmented media, complicates efforts to shift mindsets across the whole population.

9 New or altered mindsets often emerge from discrete groups within society.

10 Mindset shift efforts must focus on changing the mindsets of the public, not policymakers.

11 Mindset shifts that spread widely are more likely to generate fundamental social change.

12 If the goal is policy change, mindset shift efforts only make sense if an issue is currently salient or can realistically be made salient through strategic work.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Start by examining key factors to assess when and whether a mindset shift strategy makes sense:

— *Issue breadth.* Mindset shift efforts make the most sense for big social issues, rather than narrow ones.

— *Availability of an alternative mindset or an expanded way of thinking.* An effective mindset shift effort requires a clearly articulated alternative way of thinking that it is trying to amplify and spread.

— *Simplicity/complexity.* Highly complex or technical policy issues are less responsive to shifts in public thinking than simpler ones.

— *Salience/potential salience.* In order for a mindset shift effort to make sense, an issue must either already be salient or be capable of becoming salient.

— *Feasibility of and commitment to working at scale over a long period.* Given that mindset shift efforts are major undertakings, advocates and funders should assess whether a sufficiently large and extended effort—through a combination of their own and others' work and support—is feasible.

— *Underlying social conditions and lived experience.* Mindset shift efforts are more likely to succeed when they respond, in some way, to tension in people's lived experience.

Recommendation #2: Begin mindset shift work by answering three strategic questions and using seven guiding principles—but be prepared to adjust.

When planning a mindset shift effort, advocates and funders should answer **three questions**:

1. What ultimate social outcome are they looking to promote?

2. How would a mindset shift enable or lead to that outcome?

3. How would funders' support contribute to this mindset shift?

There are **seven guiding principles** for those engaged in mindset shift work:

1. Be prepared to commit at scale and over the long term.

2. Invest time and resources in coordination.

3.   Use different levers and channels simultaneously.

4.   Undertake short-term policy campaigns that advance long-term goals.

5.   Measure and evaluate progress to guide decision making and strategy.

6.   Be open to adjusting strategy as you go to match changing conditions.

7.   Build attention to material power and interest into your strategy—don't treat mindsets as all that matters.

Recommendation #3: Focus mindset shift efforts on the public.

Recommendation #4: Coordinate work on mindset shifts within cross-cutting coalitions and funding groups.

What Is the Current State of Knowledge about Mindset Shifts?

To provide those working on and funding mindset shift efforts with useful insights, we synthesized existing knowledge on mindsets and related areas from across a wide range of fields and disciplines. This included academic scholarship, applied research, social change and communications practice, and philanthropy. This review looks across vast literatures and bodies of knowledge as well as extensive sets of interviews, and is thus necessarily selective and pointed, pulling out ideas with critical implications for practice rather than attempting to comprehensively document the full sweep of theoretical and empirical knowledge. We cite sources throughout to document where particular ideas come from.

The synthesis is organized using three questions: What are mindsets and mindset shifts? Why do mindset shifts matter? How do mindset shifts happen?
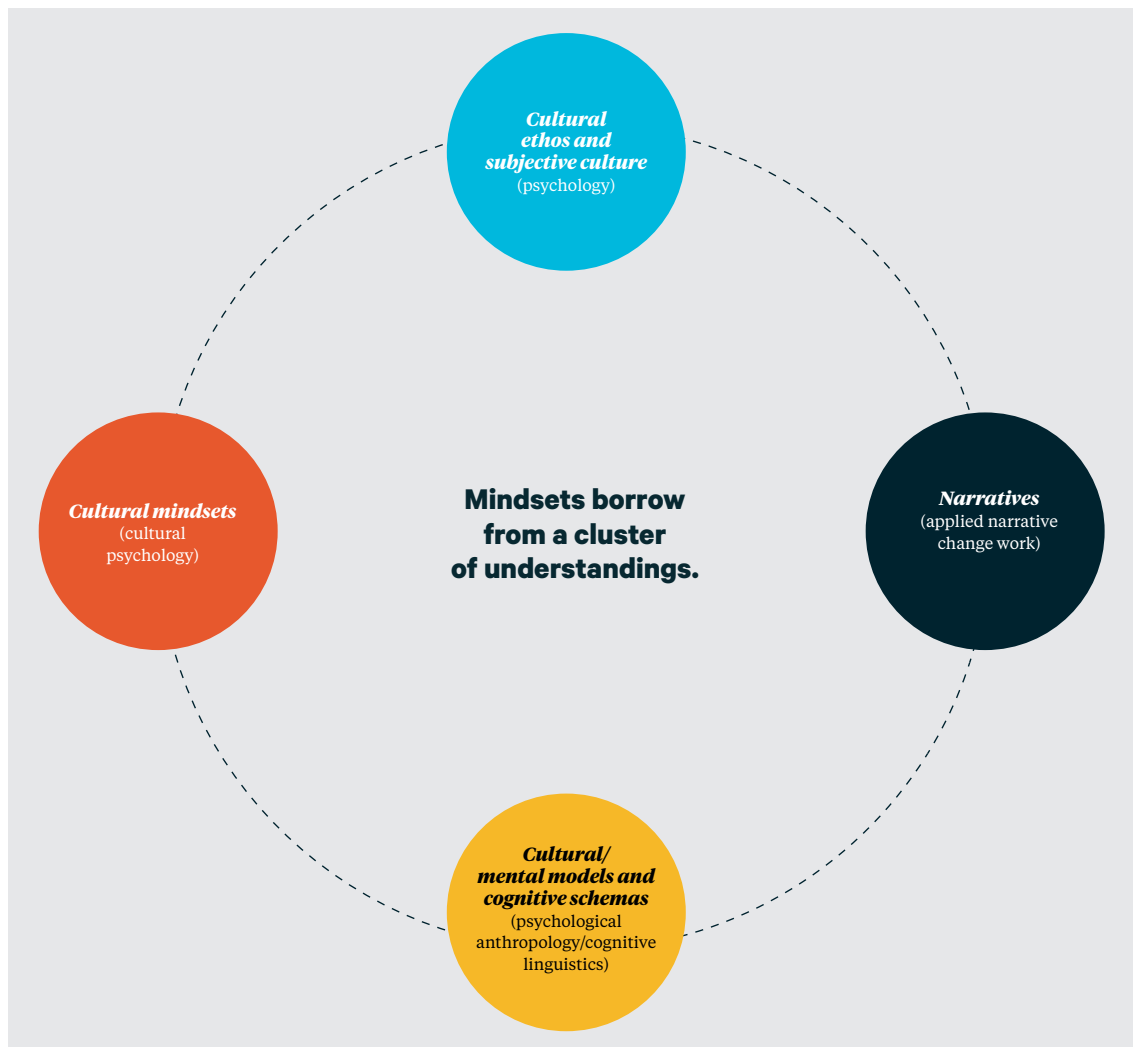
What Are Mindsets and Mindset Shifts?

The idea of mindsets is part of a concept family—a cluster of similar understandings from different fields. We list the concepts within this family below, with a brief note about their definition (source field noted in parentheses):

— *Cultural mindsets* (cultural psychology). Cultural mindsets are "a way of organizing experience." They are distinctive, culturally specific mental procedures that people go through to process information. They are applied to yield specific understandings

of information. We use cultural mindsets to make sense of a wide range of experiences in different parts of our lives.[1]

— ***Cultural/mental models and cognitive schemas*** (psychological anthropology/cognitive linguistics). Models or schemas are patterned ways of understanding the world and representing reality that we learn as members of a culture. These models are tacit, taken-for-granted ways of making sense of our experiences and communications.[2]

— ***Cultural ethos and subjective culture*** (psychology). These concepts refer to a group's characteristic way of viewing human life and their environment. They are the subjective (rather than material) part of culture, and include explicit values, implicit psychological tendencies, and a group's shared practices.[3]

— ***Narratives*** (applied narrative change work). Narrative is frequently used to mean the "stories we tell ourselves" about the world—our understandings of how the world works (e.g., the "bootstraps" narrative). As we note below, there is considerable ambiguity and lack of precision in how this term is used, as it sometimes means narratives *in discourse*, other times narrative *in mind*, and in other cases *both*.[4]

Cultural ethos and subjective culture (psychology)

Cultural mindsets (cultural psychology)

Mindsets borrow from a cluster of understandings.

Narratives (applied narrative change work)

Cultural/ mental models and cognitive schemas (psychological anthropology/cognitive linguistics)

While the above concepts have slightly different meanings and applications, they share central content. The ways of thinking that they describe are:

— **General in scope.** They are broad ways of thinking that shape understanding of whole domains and issues. They are not restricted to specific issues or subjects.

— **Part of culture.** They are part of the content of our culture. This has implications for how we learn them and how they change.

— **Durable.** They persist over long periods of time and do not change quickly.

— **Multiple.** There are *different* ways of making sense of the world—different models, schemas, mindsets, narratives, etc.—that can be active in mind or not at a given time.

— **Largely tacit.** While they can sometimes be made explicit through reflection or discussion, they largely function as taken-for-granted assumptions.

— **Simplified representations of reality.** They involve simplified ways of modeling the world that bring some aspects of the world into view while leaving others out of sight.

— **Applied to our lives.** We apply them to make sense of our experiences, interactions, and communications. They shape how we understand what is happening and the decisions we make and actions we take.

These shared components define an overarching concept. Together, they can be combined into a provisional definition of mindsets:

> **Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we make sense of the world and what we do.**

Including all of these closely related concepts within the overarching concept avoids getting into esoteric disagreements that are not practically useful for social change work. Using similarities to knit together a common construct enables us to draw on a broad repertoire of scholarship and practice in elaborating what mindset shift efforts are about.

To this working definition we propose adding one additional component—a recognition of the role of mindsets in perpetuating or providing a basis for contesting existing power relations.[5] While conceptualizations of mindsets and related concepts in anthropology, psychology, and linguistics do not tend to focus on power relations, it is vital to center power in social change work. Drawing on a long tradition within social theory, we propose including an additional element within the working definition of mindsets. Mindsets can be:

— **Mobilized to justify and contest power relations.** Mindsets can alternately be used to justify, naturalize, keep out of view, problematize, and contest aspects of the existing social order.

The relationship of mindsets to power follows from the fact that we acquire mindsets through our participation in ongoing social life. Because mindsets are a part of culture, we gain them through a process of acculturation, which happens through public discourse and socialization, through the institutions of civil society and the state (family, schools, community institutions,

the military, etc.) and through news and entertainment media.[6] Mindsets are mobilized through these discourses and institutions in ways that can perpetuate or undermine particular relations or aspects of the social order. At times, actors may be strategic in trying to activate particular, widely held ways of thinking to advance a particular political goal, though much of the time, the discourses that activate particular mindsets are an outgrowth of people's assumptions rather than strategic interventions.

We have, then, with this addition, a working definition of mindsets, which we will rely on throughout the rest of this paper:

> # Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we make sense of the world and what we do that can alternately normalize or problematize aspects of the existing social order.

We believe that, with this amendment, the definition captures what those engaged in mindset shift efforts are ultimately interested in.

This definition has room for a range of different types of mindsets and allows for variation in focus. There are foundational mindsets like individualism, which shapes thinking across social issues. There are mindsets that apply to specific social issues, like economic naturalism, which holds that the market is driven by natural forces that are outside of intentional control.[7] There definitional mindsets, like competing models of marriage as being about commitment versus exchange.[8] Some mindsets provide models of how the natural world works, like the idea that nature stands in delicate balance that, if disrupted, can lead to irreparable harm, or the competing model of nature as self-repairing and durably resilient.[9] While some of these are mindsets about social institutions, and thus directly justify or undermine the existing social order, others inform our decisions about how to organize society more indirectly (e.g., our mindsets about nature shape our responses to climate change). As we proceed, we pay close attention to how mindsets can be mobilized to contest or reinforce existing power relations and offer examples of how this plays out in practice.

To further clarify the mindset concept, it is useful to distinguish mindsets from other concepts used to talk about how people think. Below, we offer a table that briefly defines related concepts and explains how they differ from mindsets.

Table 1. Concepts that are related to, but distinct from, mindsets

Concept/term	How this differs from *mindsets*
Prototypes: The most representative member of a category—the best example of a category (e.g., a robin is the prototype of a bird, whereas penguins are less prototypical birds).	Prototypes can be understood as a specific type of mindset—a way[10] of modeling a particular category. But not all mindsets are prototypes.
Attitudes: Evaluations of specific actions, events, situations, persons/groups, etc. Often considered synonymous with opinions.	Attitudes are more narrowly focused—evaluations of specific things[11] rather than ways of thinking about many different things.
Beliefs: Statements that are accepted as true.	Beliefs are the content of a judgment—the conclusion drawn—rather[12] than ways of thinking. Mindsets can give rise to beliefs, but beliefs are not themselves mindsets. Also, beliefs are explicit, unlike mindsets, which are implicit.
Public opinion: Views expressed by the majority of the members of a given society, or aggregate/collective views of people in a society about an issue.	Like attitudes, the idea of public opinion typically applies to preferences[13] or views about specific things—they are the result of thinking rather than the understandings that shape it. Also, public opinion is explicit rather than implicit.
Emotions: (Notoriously difficult to define) Alternatively understood as feelings, evaluations, motivations, or other types of positive or negative responses to experiences.	Cognition and emotion are bound up together—emotions have a cognitive[14] component, and mindsets, as cognitive models, involve an affective component. That said, mindsets are best understood as particular ways of thinking rather than as the affective responses that accompany these.
Values: Enduring beliefs that orient decisions and judgments about conduct. Values transcend particular situations or decisions.	Values can be understood as a particular kind of mindset—mindsets[15] that concern the evaluation of actions. There are other kinds of mindsets that involve causal understandings, definitions, and other understandings that are not primarily evaluative.
Collective identity: A perception of common status or position that generally includes attachment to a set of shared attributes.	While some mindsets are connected to identities, not all mindsets[16] involve assumptions about groups and their status.
Social norms: Beliefs or expectations about what is normal and/or appropriate within a group.	Specific types of mindsets about how the social world does or should[17] work entail particular norms. Not all mindsets are normative in this way (e.g., some are definitional, others are causal, etc.). In addition, norms can be very specific (wear a seatbelt), while mindsets are broader in scope.
Ideology: A dominant set of ideas (beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, mores) that justifies existing power relations. (Note: ideology in this sense is different from political ideology[18]—a set of policy preferences on a left-right spectrum.)	Ideology in this sense is singular rather than multiple, encompassing the whole order of society rather than, as with mindsets, more specific domains (e.g., health). Ideologies can be understood as specific constellations of mindsets that justify a social order.

Frames: Like "narrative," the concept of "frames" is sometimes applied to discourse (frames in communication) and sometimes to thinking (frames in thought). Frames in thought are particular ways of perceiving a situation that bring particular considerations to the fore.	Frames in thought are not models or representations of reality, nor[19] do they involve tacit assumptions. Frames in communication are cues that may or may not correspond to and activate particular mindsets.
Worldviews: Encompassing ways of thinking that shape all aspects of how someone makes sense of the world.	Worldviews, which are closely related to mindsets, are singular—a person[20] has *a* worldview—whereas a person can move between multiple, sometimes conflicting mindsets. Moreover, worldviews are used to make sense of *all* parts of life, while mindsets apply to particular aspects of life. Worldviews can be understood as constellations or sets of mindsets that hang together.
Paradigms: Patterned ways of representing or modeling reality, especially including explicit theories about the world (e.g., scientific theories).	Paradigms are typically conceived as *explicit* theories about the world[21] rather than tacit sets of assumptions. Also, the notion of scientific paradigms assumes a single dominant paradigm at any given time that is replaced when a better paradigm arises. By contrast, there are multiple mindsets for any topic.

Mindsets exist at different levels of community and culture. Some mindsets are part of national culture and are shared across all groups within a society, crossing demographic and ideological lines. Much of the work on mindsets, cultural models, subjective culture, and narrative explores these shared ways of thinking that are available to everyone within a national society.[22] Yet national culture is only one level at which mindsets exist.

Any group that shares a common culture can have *distinctive* mindsets. For example, ethnic groups within a society, religious groups, professional communities (which could include a group of policymakers, practitioners, or experts), and local or regional communities all have specific mindsets.[23] As members of multiple cultural groups, given individuals will have access to mindsets drawn from each of these groups. For example, evangelical Christians share an understanding of the self as subject to God's will, which is similar to but distinct from other Christian sects' understandings of the self. As members of the broader culture, evangelical Christians also have access to the broadly shared, but competing, understanding of the self as sovereign.[24] Members of this religious group can thus draw upon both mindsets about the self to understand their own experience, shifting between these different mindsets at different times.

Moreover, individuals within a group may draw on the mindsets available to the group in different ways due to their different social positions, individual perspectives, and personal experiences. For example, some people may be more likely to rely on commonly available individualistic mindsets while others may be more likely to draw on recessive but commonly available mindsets that foreground context and the environment. In other words, while mindsets are shared—commonly available across a group—the way that people draw on

those mindsets is not uniform. The recognition that groups share ways of thinking should not be misunderstood as an assertion of uniformity in thinking. There are both differences and similarities in how individuals and groups make sense of the world.

Do marginalized and oppressed groups have distinctive mindsets?

The short answer—yes and no. Members of marginalized and oppressed groups have the same broadly shared mindsets as others within the societies of which they are part, but at least some members of these groups may also have distinctive mindsets.

To the extent that oppressed groups are integrated with privileged groups, living in the same places and participating in the same institutions, they will share mindsets with these privileged groups. Because we acquire mindsets through acculturation—via the broad discourses and institutions we participate in—when privileged and oppressed groups participate in the *same* discourses and institutions, they'll have access to the same ways of thinking.

However, there are often institutions and discourses *specific* to the marginalized groups, in which some members of the group participate. These dedicated spaces allow for the development of distinctive ways of thinking and acting. If members of a marginalized group participate in dominant discourses and institutions but also participate in discourses and institutions that are specific to the group, then these people will have access not only to the mindsets of the dominant culture but also mindsets that are distinctive to the group.[25] These distinctive discourses and corresponding ways of thinking often form a crucial basis for contesting dominant culture and social structures.

For example, Black churches not only played a critical role in mobilizing people during the civil rights movement, but they also allowed for the development of ideas that underpinned the movement. During the 1970s, feminist spaces like conferences, local meetings, and publications played a similar role in fostering ways of thinking that made it possible to contest dominant ways of understanding sex and gender. Today, there are social media spaces like Black and feminist Twitter that similarly enable distinctive conversations and the evolution of the mindsets that grew out of earlier eras.[26] The ideas that develop in these spaces are, unlike most mindsets, advanced explicitly, although these ways of thinking too have tacit dimensions and, as they become sedimented within a stable discourse, themselves often function implicitly.

It is important to note that these kinds of institutions and discourses are bound up with a marginalized identity and social position, but that doesn't mean that all members of a marginalized group participate in them or that they exclude people from outside that group.[27] Mindsets that grow out of these institutions are shared by the people who participate in them. So, for example, while feminist mindsets grew out of spaces that women formed in response to shared experiences of oppression, not all women share feminist mindsets, and not all people who share feminist mindsets are women.

Even when oppressed groups draw on mindsets that are shared across society, they may *apply* these mindsets in a different way than members of dominant groups might, due to their differences in experiences. Even when people have available to them the same set of lenses through which to look at the world, different people may pick up different lenses at different times, focus their attention on different things, and notice different aspects of the world. These differences in application are shaped in significant part by differences in experiences.

Do members of different political parties have distinctive mindsets?

While Democrats and Republicans have different policy preferences, this should not be confused with different *mindsets*. It is true that, in the past 50 years, the Democratic and Republican parties have "sorted" ideologically. In other words, people on the left or liberal end of the ideological spectrum are now Democrats, while people on the right or conservative end of the spectrum are Republicans. This represents a change from the postwar period, in which this ideological alignment did not exist.[28]

Yet political ideologies, in the sense of liberal or conservative ideas, should not be confused with mindsets. These ideologies are explicit sets of policy preferences, not the underlying assumptions that people use to reason about the world. So the fact that the political parties have distinct ideological commitments does not mean that they have different mindsets.

That said, it is likely true that, out of the commonly available sets of mindsets that Americans can draw upon—the ways of thinking that are embedded within a generally shared American culture—different mindsets are more salient or prominent for Republicans and Democrats. For example, individualism is a mindset that is shared across American society, but Republicans are likely to apply individualistic thinking more consistently, with greater conviction, and across a wider range of issues than Democrats.
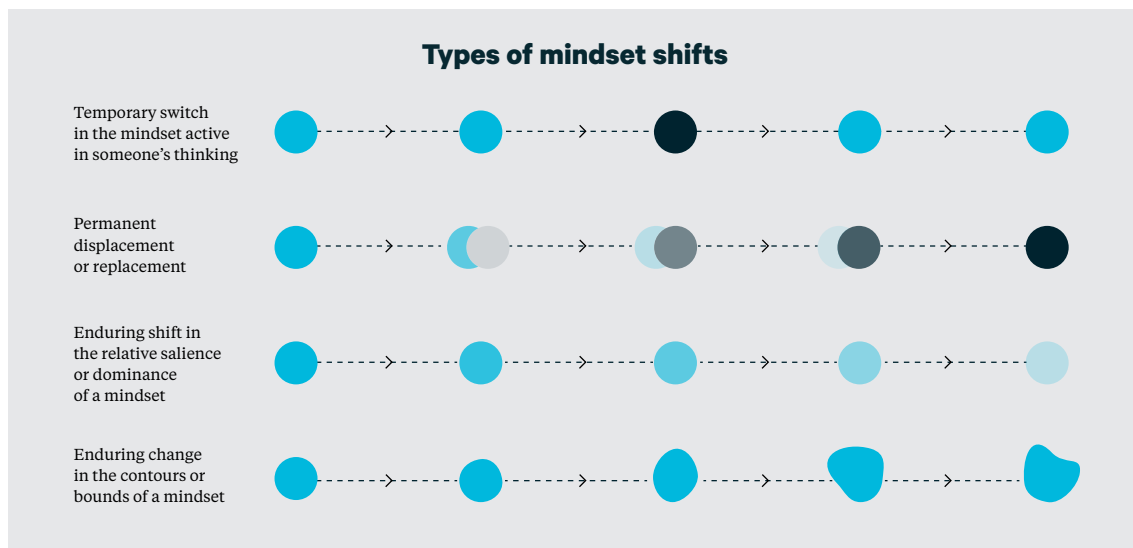
Moreover, while people don't have specific mindsets *by virtue* of their party membership, in the United States today membership in political parties overlaps to a significant degree with membership in cultural subgroups that *do* have distinctive mindsets. Increasingly, party membership is divided along regional, religious, and racial lines, and these groups or segments do have specific mindsets.[29] Being acculturated within these groups or the segments of them that share distinctive cultural institutions means acquiring these distinctive mindsets, although people within these groups still may draw on these mindsets to different degrees.

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The frequently perceived sense of *cultural* difference between Democrats and Republicans stems from the overlap in these other group memberships. In practice, members of parties will often share specific mindsets with each other but not with members of the other party, even though party membership isn't the *source* of the mindset.

While it is important to attend to differences in groups' mindsets and properly trace the sources of differences in thinking, it is also important to emphasize that subgroups within American society *share* mindsets at another level. While there are cultural differences that entail differences in mindsets, shared national culture provides common mindsets as well. Recognizing this is vital for understanding the potential of mindset shifts to lead to social change.

What does it mean for mindsets to "shift"?

There are a number of different ways that we can conceptualize a mindset shift:

Types of mindset shifts

Temporary switch in the mindset active in someone's thinking

Permanent displacement or replacement

Enduring shift in the relative salience or dominance of a mindset

Enduring change in the contours or bounds of a mindset

— A ***temporary switch*** in the mindset that is active in someone's thinking. For example, at a given moment, an individual might shift from applying an individualistic mindset to a more ecological mindset that already exists within the culture and that they thus have access to.

— A ***permanent displacement or replacement*** of a mindset by another mindset (either new or previously recessive ones). This is analogous to a "paradigm shift" in science (e.g., from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian physics). For example, in the early 20th century, there were competing mindsets about smoking, which alternatively modeled smoking as healthful and restorative or harmful (and often, immoral).[30] Today, the former understandings have been almost totally displaced.

— An ***enduring shift in the relative salience or dominance*** of a mindset within a culture. For example, mindsets about the economy that treat markets as a naturally occurring phenomenon have become more dominant over the past 50 years, while the mindset that economies are designed and must be actively shaped has become more recessive.[31]

— An ***enduring change in the contours or bounds*** of a mindset. For example, the bounds of existing understandings of marriage have shifted and stretched as same-sex marriage came to be understood as part of the concept of marriage. In other words, the contours of at least one mindset about marriage shifted to encompass same-sex marriage.

These types of shifts are not mutually exclusive and frequently occur together or in sequence. For example, if the contours of an existing mindset change sufficiently, it can reasonably be considered a "new" mindset that has displaced the old one. The point is not to suggest the need for precise categorization, but rather to acknowledge that there are different types of mindset shifts, and that attending to these differences is necessary to clearly articulate a strategy for a mindset shift effort.

People engaged in mindset shift efforts generally have in mind enduring or lasting changes in thinking, so for the purposes of this paper, we will use the term "mindset shift" to refer to all of these types of shifts other than the temporary shift described above.

Why Do Mindset Shifts Matter?

In discussions of mindset shifts, it is natural to focus on *how* to shift mindsets, since this speaks most directly to the work of those engaged in mindset shift efforts. Yet going right to the *how* misses an important step. Before conceptualizing how to shift mindsets it is important to understand *why* we want to shift them—what are the *goals* of mindset shift efforts? We need to understand why mindsets matter in order to assess when efforts to shift them make sense, how these efforts should be targeted, and how they fit with other methods of social change.

As part of a social change effort, shifting mindsets isn't an end in itself. Mindset shifts matter only insofar as they enable other changes in the world. As we discuss below, mindset shifts can help to enable different forms of social change—behavior change, policy change, institutional change, and structural change. In this section, we trace the specific relationships between mindset shifts and forms of social change.

It is important to first highlight two general points:

1. Mindset change is generally not *sufficient* alone to produce social change. In some cases, it is a necessary precursor to or part of change, but it rarely produces social change without other things happening.

2. Mindset change is in dynamic interaction with other forms of change—it can both *enable* changes in behavior, policy, institutions, and structures, and *result from* these changes.

Broadly speaking, mindsets matter because they shape our behavior and decisions. In turn, shifting mindsets can lead to different personal and political behavior and decisions.

While shifts in mindsets can lead to changes in personal behavior, policymaking, and institutions and social structures, the ways in which mindset shifts contribute to change in these areas differ. For each of these parts of our personal and collective life, there are, in fact, multiple pathways by which mindset shifts can contribute to change. Below, we discuss the specific ways that mindset shifts can lead to change in these areas.

Behavior Change

Changes in mindsets can lead to changes in both personal and political behavior. For example, if members of a community come to think of health as something that is shaped by environments and contexts, they may be more likely to advocate for policies and programs that create healthy environments, or to volunteer to help build a playground or improve green space in their own neighborhood.
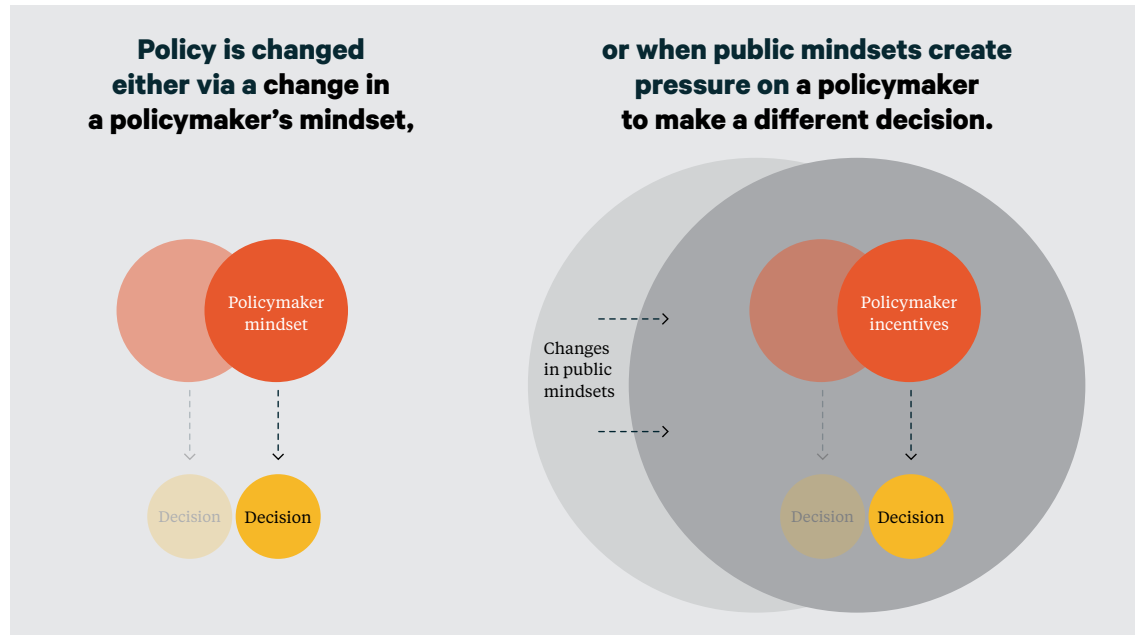
Mindset shifts can lead to behavior change through at least two distinct pathways:

1. ***Through changed attitudes.*** Changes in general understandings can lead to changes in attitudes toward particular actions. In the example above, a shift toward more ecological thinking can lead to a more positive attitude toward advocating for or directly contributing to the construction of healthy environments. In this case, the mindset shift leads to a change in behavioral intention (*I should help build healthy environments*), which leads to a change in behavior.[32]

2. ***Through changes in social norms.*** If changes in a community's mindsets involve shifts in perceived social norms, this can shift behavior even for those who do not directly rely on the new mindset. In the above example, a shift toward more ecological thinking within a community might lead to shifts in community norms, such that community members feel that they are expected to contribute to the creation of healthy environments. In this case, even if some people do not draw on the more ecological mindset to conclude they should act differently, they will nonetheless feel social pressure to conform to the new norm.[33] In this case, the collective shift in mindset does not directly act on the individual's own understanding, but rather acts indirectly through social pressure.

It is important to note that changes in mindset are only one route to behavior change. Behaviors can change for other reasons as well—for example, through nudges or changes in incentives.

Policy Change

Mindset shifts can affect policy, though the relationship is not deterministic. A mindset shift can make a policy change more likely, but translating this shift into policy change generally requires one or more forms of strategic action (e.g., lobbying, grassroots mobilization, and issue campaigns).

Policy is changed either via a change in a policymaker's mindset, or when public mindsets create pressure on a policymaker to make a different decision.

Policymaker mindset

Decision | Decision

Changes in public mindsets

Policymaker incentives

Decision | Decision

1. ***Changes in policymakers' mindsets can lead them to make different decisions.***
   If there is a shift in the assumptions and understandings that a particular policymaking community relies upon, this can lead to different decisions by policymakers. There are two types of mindset shifts that can potentially affect policymakers' decisions:

   — Shifts in thinking about the issues at stake in policymaking. If policymakers come to rely on different sets of assumptions about an issue, they may arrive at different personal policy preferences. To the extent that their public-facing positions are driven by their personal opinions (rather than electoral incentives), these changes in thinking about the issues themselves will lead to changes in the policies they support and are open to enacting.

   — Shifts in thinking about political institutions, norms, and policymaking itself. If policymakers come to have a different understanding of the institutions they are participating in and their own role, this can potentially lead to shifts in policymaking via shifts in their behavior. (For example, within Congress, changes in norms around "hardball" politics, like threatening not to raise the debt ceiling to get concessions from the opposing party, have effects on policymaking.)

This pathway to policy change is grounded in the relationships between mindsets and behavior discussed above—just with respect to policymakers' behavior in their public role, rather than people's behavior in their personal lives.

2.	***Changes in public mindsets can create pressures on policymakers that lead them to make different decisions***. If there are significant shifts in the public's mindsets, this can lead to changes in public opinion. This can place real or perceived pressure on policymakers to change policy. For elected officials (and, indirectly, appointed executive officials), there is an electoral incentive to be responsive to public will. For courts, the pressure to be responsive to shifts in public thinking is about the legitimacy of the court and concern about having an opinion overturned by subsequent legislation.[34]

A careful assessment of relevant literatures (especially political science) suggests that the first pathway is less viable as a focus for strategic action than it may initially seem, while the second is viable but not wholly predictable.

It is undoubtedly true that policymakers' own deep assumptions about issues shape policymaking, but their mindsets about issues generally stem from the broader culture and thus match the general public's. For example, mindsets about the family shaped the range of welfare state programs created after the Second World War in Europe. In Southern Europe's Catholic countries, policymakers took for granted that the family would perform certain tasks for itself, such as providing childcare, so in these countries, policymakers did *not* provide daycare or maternity-leave programs because they assumed that families would not need them.[35]

As this example illustrates, policymakers' mindsets about social issues derive from the broader culture they share with members of the general public. While there may be, at some level, a "culture" that is shared by policymakers, their thinking about the major social issues of the day—such as health, the environment, the economy, peace and conflict—will be fundamentally informed by the deep assumptions they, along with other members of their society, were socialized and acculturated into.

Because policymakers' mindsets around the big social issues at stake in policymaking derive from and rely on the broader culture of which they are part, their mindsets cannot generally be shifted without also shifting public mindsets. To return to the example above, a targeted attempt in Southern Europe to shift policymakers' mindsets about the family without simultaneously shifting mindsets within the broader public would have been doomed to failure. Policymakers' mindsets about the family are shaped by and reinforced through their interactions with people throughout all aspects of their lives. Trying to shift their thinking about this in isolation from their friends, family, and the communities in which they live would leave powerful countercurrents in place that would inevitably thwart such an effort.

While mindsets around social issues are necessarily shaped by the broader culture, policymakers' mindsets about the political institutions that they work in and their own roles can, more reasonably, be understood to be part of a distinct policymaker culture. Shifts in policymakers' deep understandings of their role will inevitably shape their policymaking.

Yet even here, mindsets may play less of a role than we might expect. In many cases, changes in policymakers' orientation to their own role is driven by changes in incentives rather than changes in mindsets about their role.

Consider the recent changes in how the US Congress functions, such as the decline in bipartisan cooperation and the increased use of "hardball" tactics to advance party objectives—for example, around court appointments (e.g., blocking Merrick Garland and the Brett Kavanaugh appointment).[36] These shifts in members' behavior are often attributed to changes in members' norms and mindsets—especially Republican members.[37] While these changes certainly involve shifts in institutional norms, these norm changes are better explained by a shift in incentives than by changes in how members understand their role or the institution. As Frances Lee's work has documented, the past 20 years have seen the rise of "insecure majorities" in Congress, in which the minority party has a realistic chance of taking back power in the next election—something that was not true for decades prior. This change has created an incentive to obstruct rather than compromise, and to block majority actions in the current Congress with the hope of being able to make decisions in the next Congress.[38] Changes in understanding that have accompanied this shift can be best understood as post hoc conformity to incentivized behavior, rather than as the source of the behavior.

> **Activists and advocates must target the broader culture and the general public (of which policymakers are a part) rather than trying to shift policymakers' mindsets on their own.**

There may be cases where it is possible to try to shift policymakers' mindsets in isolation from the broader public's, but the above discussion suggests this is the exception rather than the rule. Strategically, this means that activists and advocates must target the broader culture and the general public (of which policymakers are a part) rather than trying to shift policymakers' mindsets on their own.

Advocates can influence policymakers in all sorts of ways other than by trying to shift their mindsets. An inside game is, of course, a viable strategy to change policy. The point is that in such efforts, advocates must convince policymakers that specific policies realize their existing commitments, leverage existing mindsets to convince them to shift particular policy commitments, convince them that adopting a policy is politically advantageous, or otherwise persuade them without shifting their mindsets in a durable way.

Scholarship has found that policymakers at federal and state levels, and across all branches of government, are responsive to changes in public opinion.

The second pathway described above—changing public mindsets in order to influence policymaking—is central for those working on mindset shifts. The good news is that this route is feasible, if not easy, to travel. Political science has found a consistent relationship between changes in public opinion and policymaking. Scholarship has found that policymakers at federal and state levels, and across all branches of government, are responsive to changes in public opinion.[39] The exact mechanisms by which changes in public opinion influence policymaking are not entirely clear. However, there are some factors that have been shown to increase the degree to which policymaking is responsive to public opinion:[40]

1. *Issue salience.* The more prominent an issue is within public discourse and the more concerned the public is about it, the more likely it is that changes in public opinion on the issue will affect policymaking.

2. *Issue simplicity.* Policymaking is more responsive on simple issues than on complicated ones. Policymaking is more responsive when the public can easily grasp the core of an issue, and less responsive when the issue is highly technical and requires substantial expertise to understand.[41]

3. *Size of change in public opinion.* Larger changes in public opinion are more likely to result in policy change.

4. *Domestic.* Policymaking is more responsive to public opinion for domestic than foreign policy issues.

5. *Proximity to elections.* Policymaking is more responsive when the shift in public opinion happens close to an election.

6. *Opinion movement among higher-income people.* Shifts in the opinions of higher-income people seem to have a greater effect on policymakers than shifts in the opinions of the rest of population.

7. *Interest group support.* Shifts in public opinion are more likely to lead to shifts in policy when interest groups are pushing for these policy changes as well.

It is important to emphasize that responsiveness to public opinion is not the same as congruence. In other words, while policymaking responds to shifts in public opinion, this does not mean that policies necessarily align neatly with the majority's position.

The fact that 51 percent of Americans support a policy does not ensure that it will be enacted. But if support for the policy increases to 75 percent, this shift in public opinion will make it more likely that the policy will be put in place. In other words:

— Majority support for a policy does not guarantee enactment.

— Increases in support for a policy make its enactment more likely.

— How much increases in public support affect the likelihood of enactment depends on the above factors.

Even when changes in public opinion make policy change more likely, they do not automatically yield new policy or guarantee change. Instead, they create an environment that is more conducive to it. Additional work is needed to take advantage of these shifts. This might involve, for example, grassroots or grasstops campaigns that put pressure on key legislators or officials. It might involve advocates lobbying to convince elected officials that changing their position is politically wise. For court cases, this might involve submitting amicus briefs.[42]

As we discuss below, understanding the factors that increase responsiveness can help advocates and funders develop effective strategies around an issue. If an issue is not salient, for example, this might counsel for raising issue salience as the first goal of any campaign. If an issue is extremely technical and complicated, advocates either will need a strategy for translating complexity into simple and accessible terms, so that public opinion is both meaningful and potentially powerful, or must come up with a strategy that does not center on mindset shifts. We return below to critical implications, but it is important to highlight that the factors that influence policy responsiveness are useful in formulating the strategy for mindset shift efforts.

Institutional and Structural Change

As we discuss above, many existing mindsets justify and perpetuate the existing social order. Mindsets that have broad social currency frequently legitimize status quo institutions and social structures. For example, traditional mindsets about gender perpetuate existing power dynamics and a division of labor in which women are assumed to be responsible for the bulk of domestic and emotional labor. Similarly, dominant understandings of the economy in the US naturalize our current systems of economic power and inequality by making them seem both inevitable and acceptable. Widespread individualism perpetuates the social order in a more indirect way by blaming bad outcomes on individuals' choices and obscuring their roots in our collective institutions and choices.

When these mindsets begin to shift, it not only creates space for changes to particular policies, but opens the door to more thoroughgoing challenges to established institutions and social structures. If the mindsets that reinforce and perpetuate existing power relations weaken in favor of other ways of looking at the world, this can lead to a wholesale reconsideration of institutions and structures. A shift toward more egalitarian understandings of gender could, for example, lead not only to a fundamental reorganization of family life but to

a reconsideration of whole sectors of the economy (e.g., a reassessment of the value of care work). Relatedly, if the contours of existing mindsets stretch or morph in significant ways, it creates opportunities for fundamental revisions to institutions and structures. For example, dominant mindsets around marriage have stretched to include same-sex couples within the institution of marriage. Mindset shifts can change fundamental expectations about social relationships that destabilize the status quo.

Changes in thinking and social and material changes influence one another in an ongoing, iterative way.

While shifts in mindsets are *part* of institutional and structural change, it is difficult to say to what extent changes in people's assumptions and expectations *drive* deep social change and to what extent they track or follow change. In practice, these factors are in dynamic relationship—changes in thinking and social and material changes influence one another in an ongoing, iterative way. While mindset shift work inevitably centers on ideas, it is important to recognize that this is only one part of the work of social change. Otherwise, there is a danger of falling prey to a wholly idea-driven theory of social change—the notion that ideas alone are what shape the world.

Contesting ways of thinking that legitimize the status quo is absolutely *part* of what is required for institutional and structural change to happen. Disruptive politics that contest existing power relations challenges mindsets that make the status quo seem natural or good. It is simply important to acknowledge that challenging mindsets is not *all* that is required for social change. Contesting the social order also requires leveraging sources of social power to force change (e.g., workers' movements not only look to shift mindsets around labor, they leverage the collective power of workers through strikes and other practices).

Moreover, even when aspects of mindsets that justify the status quo change, core parts of the mindsets may endure and continue to reinforce the received social order in revised form. For example, through the civil rights movement, it became unacceptable to talk about race as an *explicit* basis of discrimination in the United States, yet aspects of explicitly racist mindsets endured, transmuting into purportedly race-neutral talk (e.g., racially coded talk about the "culture of poverty" in "urban" communities).[43]

Relatedly, when formal power relations change quickly but old mindsets endure, these changes are unlikely to last. We see throughout history that when there are sudden major changes in law that attempt to rearrange power within a society, dominant groups typically manage to retain significant privilege and power. Sudden sweeping changes in the distribution of power are hard to maintain, as we see from the restoration of the aristocracy after the French Revolution to Jim Crow, though—critically—over time the egalitarian push of the Revolution and Reconstruction both proved powerful.[44]

Mindset shifts are thus an integral *part* of institutional and structural change. While mindset shifts may not suffice to achieve this type of change on their own, they play a powerful role in opening space for the contestation of the existing social order.

How Do Mindset Shifts Happen?

Mindset shifts happen as the result of a confluence of factors. Their many moving parts make mindset shift efforts complicated and tricky. In this section, we review the factors that can contribute to mindset shifts.

It is important to highlight that this section includes a mix of intentional strategies and unintentional circumstances. While strategic action can contribute to shifts, the way that mindset shifts progress is, to some degree, unpredictable and depends on factors outside of advocates' and activists' control. Effective strategy requires recognizing when there are—and when there are not—real opportunities to shift mindsets.

The Environment—Social, Political, Economic, Media, and Scientific

Mindset shifts happen in context. Different aspects of the environment make mindset shifts more or less likely, and affect mindsets in different ways.

— ***Underlying social and economic realities.*** Mindsets are ways of making sense of the world. Mindset shifts become more likely when social and economic changes undermine existing ways of thinking, and they become less likely when people's economic or social interests actively conflict with possible new mindsets.

Dramatic events can pose an opportunity for activists by suddenly highlighting the inadequacy of an existing mindset or bringing to the fore simmering tensions.

If underlying social or economic realities shift in ways that make existing ways of thinking no longer make sense—if the mindsets people are relying on become less capable of making sense of their lives—this can lead to changes in thinking.[45] For example, in the 1970s, existing ways of thinking about the economy stopped explaining economic realities—they failed to address stagnation and inflation. This opened space for the introduction of neoliberal ideas, which have, over time, crystallized into widely shared mindsets (e.g., about the harmful effects of taxes).[46] More recently, these newer mindsets have themselves proven incapable of making sense of economic reality, opening space for attempts to displace these ways of thinking, such as Occupy Wall Street, which tried to advance alternative ways of thinking about the economy.

These changes in social or economic realities sometimes come to attention through particular historical events—the Great Recession, for instance, in the example used above. Dramatic events can pose an opportunity for activists by suddenly highlighting the inadequacy of an existing mindset or bringing to the fore simmering tensions[47]—the way that the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi sparked the Arab Spring, for example.

People's applications of mindsets are inevitably shaped by their interests. If people's own economic or social interests are in conflict with a mindset that activists are trying to elevate, this can be a barrier. Arguably one of the reasons why mindset shifts around marriage and LGBTQ people happened in the case of same-sex marriage is that allowing same-sex couples to marry did not actually harm anyone else's interests.[48] By contrast, mindset shifts around race involve a perceived loss in social status for many white people, and egalitarian mindset shifts around both race and gender involve white people and men losing power over people of color and women as well as losing the benefit of their exploited labor. These interests do not prohibit mindset shifts but serve as inertial drag on them.

— ***Political polarization and the homogenization of social networks.*** Social and political networks mediate mindset shifts by affecting the diffusion of new ways of thinking. It is thus important to reflect on two key trends: increased polarization and increased homogeneity in social networks.

   — While political scientists continue to debate whether or not the American public is becoming more ideologically polarized,[49] there is no question that Congress has become more polarized and that the public has experienced *affective* polarization. In other words, Democrats and Republicans in Congress have moved apart ideologically, and even if the public's policy preferences have not moved further apart, Democrats and Republicans in the electorate have developed strong dislike—even "loathing"— for candidates and members of the other party.[50] This has led to greater levels of implicit bias against members of the other party.[51]

   Research has shown that in a polarized environment, partisan cues are especially powerful. When the parties are ideologically opposed, people base their opinions to a large extent on what their party's leaders say.[52] Because people are forming opinions based on party leaders, they are less susceptible to being convinced otherwise. In this kind of environment, shifting mindsets is likely harder, at least for strong partisans, because people are less likely to seriously consider new ideas.

   — There is also evidence that social segregation in the United States along class, racial, religious, and ideological lines has increased in recent decades.[53] This has led to greater homogeneity in the social networks within which people are likely to discuss social and political issues.[54] People's social networks affect the diffusion of ideas, and homogeneity in social networks makes it less likely that people are exposed to ideas that challenge their dominant ways of thinking and, even when they are, less likely that they will be moved by these ideas.[55]

— ***Media environment.*** The media environment influences how ideas are disseminated—who they reach, how they are framed, and, in turn, how they are received. American news media

are fragmented to a significant extent along ideological lines. Liberals and conservatives are seeing, hearing, and reading different messages about the same events and, to a significant degree, are getting stories about entirely different subjects.

This trend is driven by multiple factors, including:

— the decision of media to target ideologically narrow segments of the public because this is lucrative for advertising

— audience members selecting media that reinforce their own beliefs and relying on ideologically homogenous online social networks for information (so called "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles")[56]

— search engines and news aggregators that filter out ideologically diverse content.[57]

Together, these factors have produced a trend in which people are exposed primarily to ideas that reinforce their existing beliefs. This threatens to undercut the possibility of mindset shifts.

— ***Scientific/expert paradigms.*** Changes in expert thinking or scientific advances can change the knowledge environment and prompt changes in mindsets. To take a familiar historical example, the decline of magical thinking in the modern period can be traced in significant part to the rise of new scientific ways of understanding the world that diffused into popular culture.[58] To return to a more recent example used above, the rise of a scientific consensus about the harmful effects of tobacco use changed the context of social and political discussions about smoking, which contributed to mindset shifts around tobacco. Similarly, scientific work on the harmful effects of pollution put pressure on existing mindsets about the imperviousness of the natural environment.
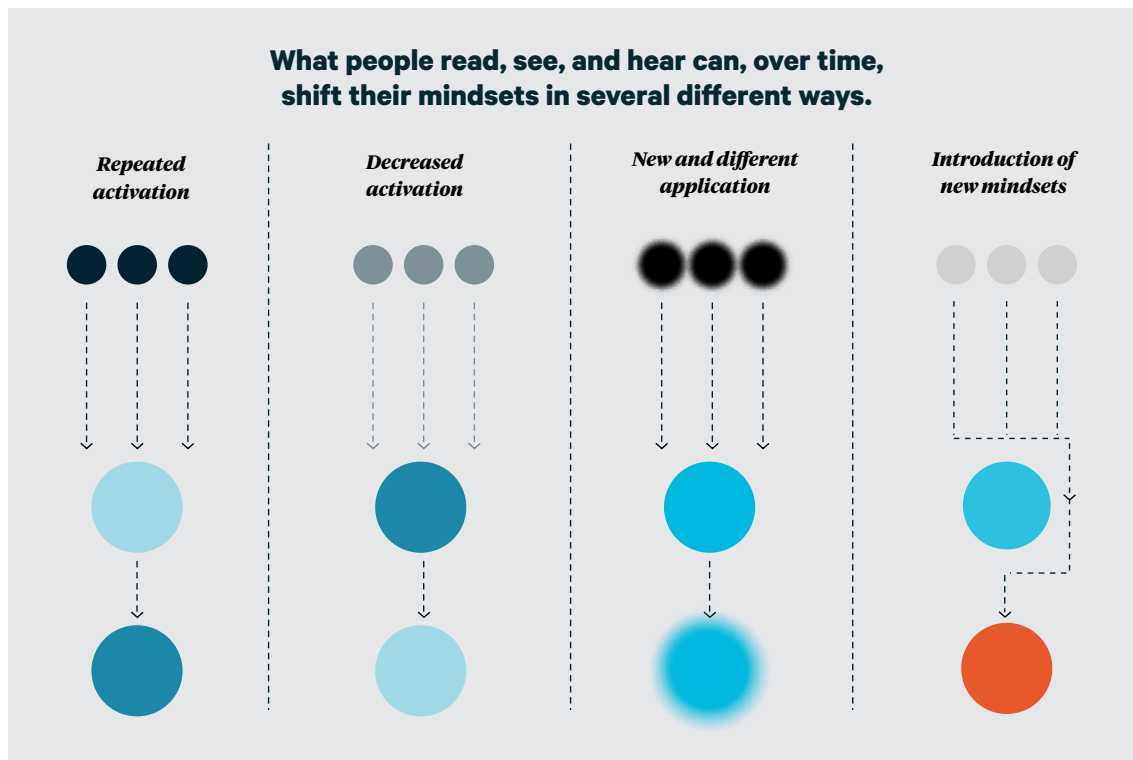
While scientific knowledge can shape widely shared mindsets, the diffusion of this knowledge happens through popular media. For example, environmentalist mindsets in current American culture likely arose through a fusion of popularized science (via channels such as Rachel Carson's work) with older conservationist thinking.[59] In addition, while scientific knowledge can affect mindsets, shifts in the scientific consensus do not automatically translate into wholesale mindset shifts. While environmentalist mindsets have gained greater traction in American culture, extractive, resource-based thinking about the environment remains widespread.[60]
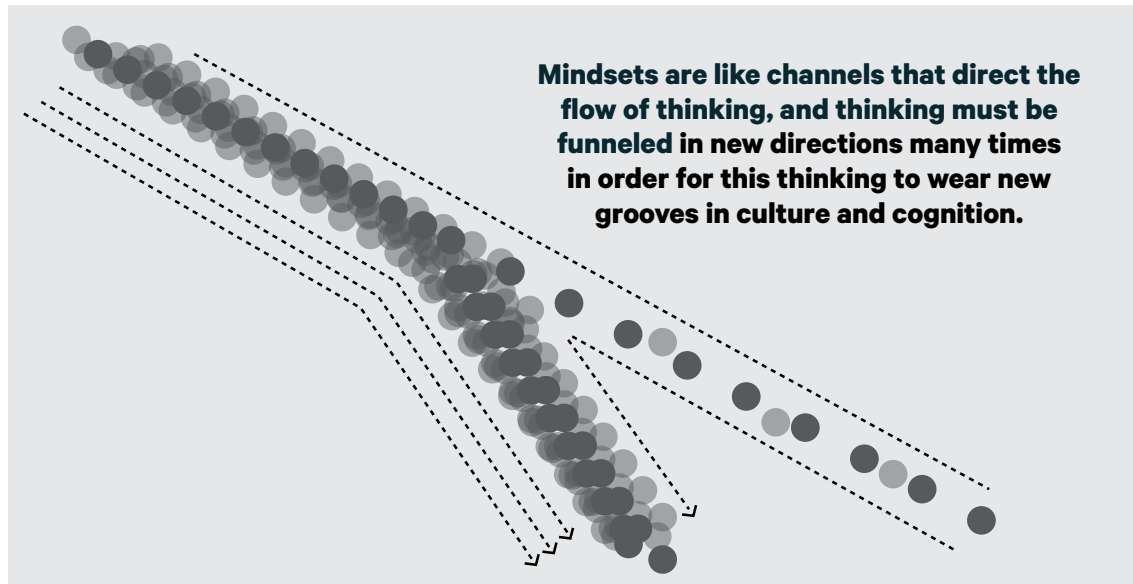
Communication

What people read, see, and hear can, over time, shift their mindsets in several different ways. These effects reflect and align with the different types of mindset shifts discussed earlier.

1. ***Repeated activation.*** The repeated activation of an existing but recessive mindset can make it more salient. In other words, when communications lead people to draw on a particular mindset again and again, this brings the mindset to the fore of people's thinking, making it more accessible and thus more likely to be used in the future.

2. ***Decreased activation.*** A decrease in the activation of a mindset can lead to a decrease in its salience. When a mindset is not activated as frequently, it moves to the background of people's thinking and, over time, becomes less accessible. To use an example, pro-abortion advocates attempt to limit how frequently unproductive mindsets are activated by using the term "anti-choice" rather than adopting their opponents' preferred "pro-life" language. Given that these opponents will continue using the "pro-life" frame, pro-abortion advocates cannot on their own prevent the activation of mindsets that make people more amenable to abortion restrictions, but they try to limit how frequently they are activated.

3. ***New and different application.*** Shifts in how existing mindsets are applied can lead to stretching of their boundaries. This is arguably what happened with existing models of marriage during the marriage equality campaign. The campaign did not introduce a new mindset about marriage, but rather stretched this mindset to include LGBTQ people by applying it to their partnerships.[61]

4. ***Introduction of new mindsets.*** The introduction of new models into public discourse—for example, explanatory metaphors that provide a new way of reasoning about an issue—can potentially introduce new mindsets. For example, the notion of "trickle down" economics provided a new way of modeling how economies work that justified cutting taxes.[62] This category most typically applies when ideas from expert or scientific discourses are translated into non-expert terms.

What people read, see, and hear can, over time, shift their mindsets in several different ways.

Repeated activation *Decreased activation* *New and different application* *Introduction of new mindsets*

Across these different types of shifts, a common point holds—repetition matters. Communications can only lead to major mindset shifts through repeated activation (#1 above), consistent exposure to a new and different application of a mindset (#3 above), or heavy doses of a new way of thinking (#4 above).

Mindsets are like channels that direct the flow of thinking, and thinking must be funneled in new directions many times in order for this thinking to wear new grooves in culture and cognition.

Lasswell's classic model of communication—**Who** says **what** in **which channel** to **whom** with **what effect**?—is useful for thinking about communications strategies designed to shift mindsets.[63] In a mindset shift effort, the last two questions are quickly answered: The effect we're interested in is a mindset shift, and the "whom" is whatever group's mindset those engaged in mindset shift work are interested in shifting. The other component questions of the model warrant greater discussion. We take them in turn, starting at the beginning.

Who? The communication's source. The sources of messages shape how they are received. Most members of the public form their opinions, in significant part, based on what aligned opinion leaders (e.g., elites from their political party) say.[64] Shifts in what opinion leaders say can lead to corresponding shifts in the opinions of people who trust them. The focus on "social influencers" and "thought leaders" among professional advocates reflects this reality.[65]

While opinion shifts are not the same as mindset shifts, source cues likely make people more receptive to applications of existing mindsets (#1 above), including novel applications of these mindsets (#3 above). Moreover, when novel metaphors or explanatory frameworks (#4 above) are introduced by trusted sources, they will, undoubtedly, be more likely to be picked up and internalized by aligned members of the public than if these are introduced by unaligned sources.

What? The communication's content. Communications' content can take many forms. Many social change advocates focus on stories, highlighting their power in connecting with people and motivating engagement and action. Others talk more broadly about narratives. While this concept is contested and often used in ambiguous ways, it typically refers to the broader

patterns or structures of meaning-making that circulate within the culture and lead us to put different elements of a situation together in a familiar arc (e.g., common character types and ways of relating problems and solutions). Beyond narrative, we can speak of different ways of framing an issue. Like narrative, framing means different things in different contexts and to different people, but, broadly speaking, it involves choices about how to package an issue— choices about which features to emphasize, how to connect particular aspects of the issue, ways of explaining it, or which commitments to invoke as a way of understanding it.

Particular stories, narratives, or frames activate particular mindsets. For example, when a speaker tells a bootstraps story—as we frequently see in stories about great athletes or businessmen who overcame the odds to succeed—this is likely to activate individualistic thinking and background more systemic mindsets.[66] By contrast, communications that foreground systemic factors and explain how outcomes that we tend to assume are caused by individual choices and actions are shaped by context, this is likely to pull forward more contextual or systemic ways of thinking that typically lie in the background of Americans' thinking.

Choosing the right narrative or frame is critical for shifting mindsets. Which narrative or frame is the right one depends on which mindset advocates and activists are trying to shift. For activists looking to promote more systems thinking, there are some general strategies that have proven effective across issues, such as telling stories that foreground context rather than telling contextless stories about individuals, and balancing urgency with efficacy to avoid reinforcing fatalism. However, frame effects are often unpredictable and require empirical research to understand. This is an inevitable result of the complexity of human cognition. Because people's thinking is highly context-specific—it is shaped by the distinctive features of issues, which lead people to apply mindsets in variable and unpredictable ways—it is impossible to know how particular narratives or frames will be received without testing them empirically.

Table 2. Key concepts—communications content

Concept/term	
Stories	Accounts of particular events (fictional or real) that recount what happened.
Narratives	Broad patterns of meaning-making that put together specific elements of an issue in a particular structure or arc. Narratives are sometimes[67] understood as templates for particular stories or common patterns that arise from specific stories.
Frames	Frames are interpretive packages. They involve choices[68] about how an issue is presented—what is and isn't emphasized, how it is explained, what connections are made, and which commitments are invoked. Frames are not context-specific— the same frame (e.g., a value) can be applied in different ways in different contexts.
Messages	Particular communications in specific contexts. Messages involve specific wording and are communicated by particular messengers through particular channels to particular audiences with specific goals in mind.

Which channel? News media, social media, arts, and entertainment media all shape mindsets. While news and social media frequently receive most of the attention, arts and entertainment offer powerful, wide-reaching ways of shifting public thinking. There is evidence, for example, that the way people of different social identities are characterized on television shapes broad cultural understandings of groups and that shifts in such characterizations can contribute to mindset shifts.[69]

Because mindset shifts depend on repetition, the dissemination of mindset shifting communications through multiple channels is vital. Using arts, entertainment, and social media to disseminate a message or idea in addition to news media not only increases the likelihood that people will be exposed to a larger dose of the idea or message, but also broadens its potential reach, as these other media reach audiences that news media may not.

> **Choosing the right narrative or frame is critical for shifting mindsets.**

Moreover, different media offer different forms and formats that are suited for different purposes, so using multiple types of media enables those engaged in social change efforts to leverage the distinctive strengths of each type.[70] For example, news articles and documentaries are well suited for explanations of causal mechanisms (e.g., how social determinants shape health), while fictional entertainment is, as we note above, a powerful way of countering stereotypes (e.g., stereotypical depictions of Black people as not valuing their own health). Complementary messages in different media can reinforce a mindset shift (for example, advocates can build support for health equity by simultaneously getting good causal explanations into news media and counter-stereotypical depictions into entertainment media).

Face-to-Face Interaction

In-person interactions have the potential to shift people's thinking. While related to communication, the power of personal interaction does not appear to derive primarily from the content of communication so much as having a direct experience with another person.

Face-to-face interaction is, in particular, a powerful way to reduce prejudice.[71] Encounters with people from other social groups help to counter stereotypes and preconceptions. Such encounters make it harder to embrace a flat, stigmatizing depiction of members of other groups. These encounters reduce prejudice by enhancing knowledge about the other group, reducing anxiety about contact with that group, and encouraging people to adopt the perspective of the other group and imagine how they experience the world.[72]

Interaction can be employed as an intentional mindset shift strategy. Door-to-door canvassing about transgender rights has been shown, for example, to lead to durable decreases of bias toward transgender people.[73]

In other cases, in-person interaction may help fuel mindset shifts less intentionally. Mindset shifts around LGBTQ people have likely been propelled in part by organically occurring personal interactions. Because LGBTQ people are distributed throughout the population, as they came out in greater numbers, straight and cis people increasingly had contact with LGBTQ people without either group intentionally seeking this out. Interactions with LGBTQ family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers helped counter stereotypes and reduce prejudice among straight and cis people.[74]

Policy Change

Above, we discuss how mindset shifts can contribute to policy change. Here, we note that the arrow can point in the opposite direction as well, as changes in policy can contribute to mindset shifts.

There is substantial evidence from political science that policies shape public opinion.[75] This happens through policies' expressive power and their effects on lived experience:

— *Expressive power.* Policies frame problems and define acceptable solutions. For example, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which passed in the early 1990s, simultaneously cemented the norm against domestic violence and, arguably, framed solutions in terms that cast women as objects to be protected rather than as subjects whose power and voice should be amplified.[76]

— *Effects on lived experience.* Policies also change people's lived reality, which can lead them to understand their lives and their world in new ways. For example, when same-sex marriage became legal, people who were opposed to it now found themselves living in the world alongside same-sex married couples. The world didn't end, and the social order didn't dissolve, and same-sex married couples proved to be just as good neighbors as different-sex couples were. This change in policy arguably led to mindset changes by creating experiences in which people previously opposed to same-sex marriage saw that, in reality, it was not harmful to them.[77]

Effects on public opinion are not the same as effects on mindsets. Much of the policy feedback literature focuses on support for the policies themselves, and the ways in which social safety net programs tend to solidify public support for such policies once they are put in place.[78] However, the examples of VAWA and marriage equality illustrate how effects on thinking can shape thinking not only about the policy itself but about the groups and issues at stake in the policies.

And of course, mindset shifts and policy change can potentially create a self-reinforcing spiral. Smaller policy wins can fuel mindset shifts which in turn can contribute to larger policy wins, which in turn can concretize mindset shifts.[79] This lies at the heart of the marriage equality campaign strategy. Winning the right to marry has propelled mindset shifts that potentially extend to changes beyond marriage to other LGBTQ issues such as employment rights and non-discrimination.

While possible, this spiraling dynamic is not automatic and is easily interrupted. The failed ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) arguably interrupted and slowed mindset shifts around women's equality. While counterfactuals are by their nature impossible to prove, it certainly seems that, if the amendment had become law, it would have further fueled the shift toward egalitarian perspectives on gender, as the policy itself served as a frame for the issue.[80]

Behavior Change

The relationship between mindset shifts and behavior change also works in both directions. As we discuss above, mindset shifts can affect behavior, yet changes in behavior can also shift how people think.

People change their behavior for reasons other than changes in how they think or understand issues—changes in incentives are an example of these non-mindset channels to behavior change. When incentives or other influences lead people to behave in ways that conflict with their existing mindsets—when they are induced to do things they don't agree with or that run counter to their current understandings—it can lead to changes in their thinking. In this kind of situation, the experience of dissonance between thinking and behavior creates pressure that is often resolved by changes in thinking that bring mindsets in line with behavior. These changes in thinking, which typically happen unconsciously, relieve the discomfort of dissonance.[81]

Mass Activism and Demonstrations

Social movements challenge existing power relations, cultural beliefs, and practice through sustained popular activism and demonstrations. To quote Charles Tilly, one of the great scholars of social movements, this activism comprises a series of "contested performances" that involve "repeated public displays of … numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness."[82]

Much of the effect of mass activism and demonstrations on mindsets is attributable to the factors discussed above. Mass activism is, to be sure, a particular channel for framed communications, and it brings about face-to-face interactions with other activists that can reinforce shifting mindsets. Similarly, participation in movements, which is often grounded in personal networks and elicited by personal bonds, leads to behavior that reinforces changes in thinking. And when movements win policy changes, these changes can shift mindsets both through what they express and by their material effects on people's lives.

Yet the effects of *mass* activism on mindsets are not wholly reducible to the role of communication, face-to-face interaction, policy change, or behavior change. The key to their power to affect mindsets lies in one of the aspects of social movements Tilly notes—numbers.

The *mass* expression of a challenge to the existing order in a large demonstration can provoke a more serious reconsideration of an existing way of thinking about the world than isolated communications or interactions. When many members of the community come together in this way, it becomes harder (though not impossible) to dismiss the challenge as a fringe one. Mass activism can place an issue more squarely at the center of public discussion and, in turn, open space for the contestation of dominant mindsets.

Mass demonstrations can also signal an initial movement toward a change in norms. Social science research has found that when people perceive a norm, it can affect their own thinking. In this way, the display of numbers in demonstrations can exert pressure on people's own thinking by making them see the existing order as *less* widely accepted than they thought and a potentially different order as *more* widely embraced than they realized.[83]

In highlighting the role that mass activism can play in shifting mindsets, we are not suggesting that this is their only or even main purpose. Activism seeks to change minds but also to more directly place pressure on those in power to act by changing their incentives or interests.[84]

Understanding when and how mindsets matter is critical for knowing when a mindset shift strategy makes sense and how it should be targeted. In addition, understanding the factors that make them shift is crucial for knowing when conditions are ripe for a mindset shift and how to strategically promote it.

In the next section, we distill the key lessons that emerge from this synthesis.

Lessons about Mindset Shift Efforts

The lessons below draw on the above synthesis and offer a set of insights that can inform mindset shift work. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, as the analysis above can be further plumbed for ideas. But here we focus on what we see as the clearest and most powerful lessons, in an attempt to make the this report actionable and useful to those who are engaged in or fund mindset shift work.

We briefly discuss how these lessons derive from the above synthesis and offer illustrative examples.

Lesson #1

A mindset shift strategy is most appropriate for broad social change efforts.

Mindset shift strategies make sense for big social issues, not narrow, highly targeted ones. Because mindsets are *broad, general* ways of making sense of the world, trying to shift them makes strategic sense when the desired social changes are similarly broad. While a mindset shift strategy on a broad social issue may help shift thinking about some more specific issue within it, if the goal is a very particular social change—say, a narrowly targeted policy change—a mindset shift strategy doesn't make strategic sense.

Adopting a mindset shift strategy to try to bring about a very specific, targeted change in the world is like planting, tending, and harvesting a whole field of wheat to get a single stalk.

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Health individualism stands in the way of collective action to address social determinants, as well as impeding progress on many other health-related issues (health care reform and environmental health, for example). Naturalist ways of thinking about the economy block appreciation of how policy can redesign how the economy works to solve myriad equality issues. The assumption that racial discrimination is about individual prejudice rather than systemic bias blocks all sorts of policies that would promote racial justice. These are the kinds of issues where mindset shift efforts make sense. Mindset shifts on these broad issues will, in turn, make it easier to move specific goals— like an increase in funding for community health clinics, or a technical change to strengthen regulations around hedge funds. But if the goal is to achieve one of these specific outcomes, a mindset shift strategy is out of proportion to the change sought.

Lesson #2

Mindset change depends on factors outside of strategists' control. Because of this, mindset shifts are realistic for some issues but not others.

This is a simple but key takeaway. Mindset changes depend in large part on underlying economic and social conditions, the constellation of interests, the status of expert discourse on the issue, the media and political environment, and how well a field or movement is organized at the outset of an effort, among other factors.

For those working for social change, this highlights the importance of determining whether or not a mindset shift is even feasible for a given issue, before engaging. Specifically, the question to ask is: Are conditions ripe for a mindset shift on a particular issue? In the next section, we offer key factors that both advocates and philanthropy can use to assess whether a mindset shift effort makes sense, given the factors outside of their control.

Lesson #3

Shifting mindsets is a major undertaking, but has huge benefits.

Displacing, shifting the salience, or stretching people's deep understandings of the world is a massive lift. It doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen without many different types of actions by many people.

There are different levers advocates can use to try to shift mindsets, but they are all, in different ways, difficult, time consuming, and costly.

— For communications to be effective, they need to reach target audiences repeatedly, preferably through different channels and from a range of messengers. Opinion leaders—whether these are respected community leaders at the local level, political champions, well-known experts, respected journalists, or influencers on social media—have a unique ability to amplify a message and shift the discourse. Cultivating opinion leaders while getting messages into different channels is key to shifting mindsets but also difficult.

— Face-to-face interaction is effective in reducing bias, but intentionally fostering interaction (e.g., through deep canvassing) is time and cost intensive.

— Policies can potentially shift mindsets, but both leveraging incipient changes in public opinion to pressure government and advocating for policies through an inside game are hard.

— Mass activism (whether in-person demonstrations or online activism, as in #MeToo) has the power not only to disseminate a message but to signal unity and commitment and challenge norms. Yet organizing mass activism is not only fraught with unpredictability, but involves logistical and strategic challenges.

None of this is to say that mindset shifts are impossible—they can happen. It is simply to recognize that trying to shift mindsets is ambitious, and the scale of the effort must be similarly ambitious.

Trying to shift mindsets is ambitious, and the scale of the effort must be similarly ambitious.

The good news is that if mindsets on an issue do shift, this can have substantial, enduring, and multifaceted effects. Because mindsets shape behavior, policymaking, and, at the deepest level, the contours of our social and political institutions, shifting mindsets opens up the possibility of changes at each of these levels. And because mindsets apply to many issues and are relatively durable, shifts in mindsets do not simply enable change on specific actions or policies in the immediate term (e.g., passage of a specific policy), but pave the way for changes in decision making and social organization into the future across a wide range of specific issues. For example, shifting Americans' thinking about health in a more ecological direction would affect the way individuals see their own role in their communities, open the door for fundamental changes to the various systems that affect people's health, and create space for a prioritization of health equity.

Shifting mindsets is a heavy lift, but one that has tremendous payoffs.

Lesson #4

Shifting mindsets takes decades, not months or even years.

Given that mindsets are woven into the fabric of our culture, it is not surprising that they take time to change. People often suggest that the marriage equality campaign led to changes in public thinking overnight. This is a misperception. The decades-long work of the LGBTQ movement slowly shifted public perceptions of sexual orientation, and the marriage equality campaign itself lasted decades.[85] While, on that issue, there were a string of policy successes over a short period of time and some successful shifts in framing that create the impression of a quick shift, this is belied by the significant work that preceded it.

Lesson #5

Finding and recognizing the common mindsets that run across specific policy change efforts creates opportunities for strategic partnerships.

Because mindsets are broad and shape thinking across issues rather than just on a specific policy, those working to move particular policies can make common cause with others working on policies that are understood through the same sets of mindsets.


By recognizing common cause in mindset shift efforts, groups can amplify their efforts.
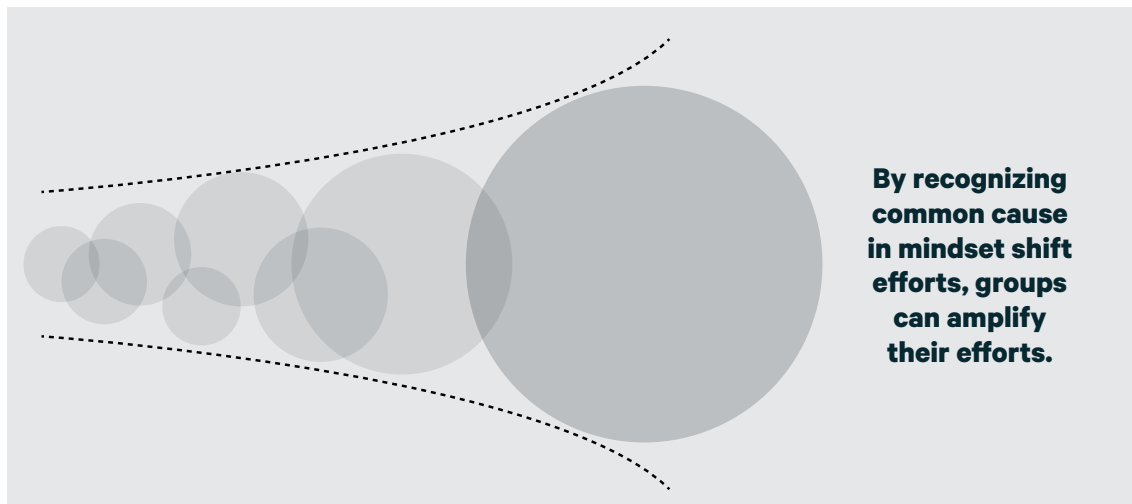
Advocates can fail to recognize common cause because their fields understand themselves as distinct.[86] For example, those working on anti-trust, labor, and tax policy may see themselves as different fields, but people's thinking about all of these draws on common mindsets about the economy. Or, to take another example, affordable housing, education, and public health advocates all run up against the same mindsets around race and poverty, which thwart their separate work to advance equity.

By recognizing common cause in mindset shift efforts, groups can amplify their efforts and have a better chance of reaching a scale of mobilization sufficient for the task. By coordinating across fields, advocates have a better chance of getting traction in shifting the fundamental mindsets around the economy or race and poverty that block progress. What's more, gains that they make on shared mindsets advance all of their issues—by coordinating in mindset shift efforts, they each help the other, as each field's work creates the space in public thinking, and, in turn, in our politics, to make change across issues.

Lesson #6

Early wins are important and can catalyze a positive spiral of mindset shifts and policy change.

The arrow between mindset shifts and policy change points both ways. Successful mindset shift efforts often target realizable short-term wins as a way of reinforcing mindset shifts that are already underway. The in-process mindset shift helps to make the policy change possible, and the policy change in turn deepens and advances the mindset shift.
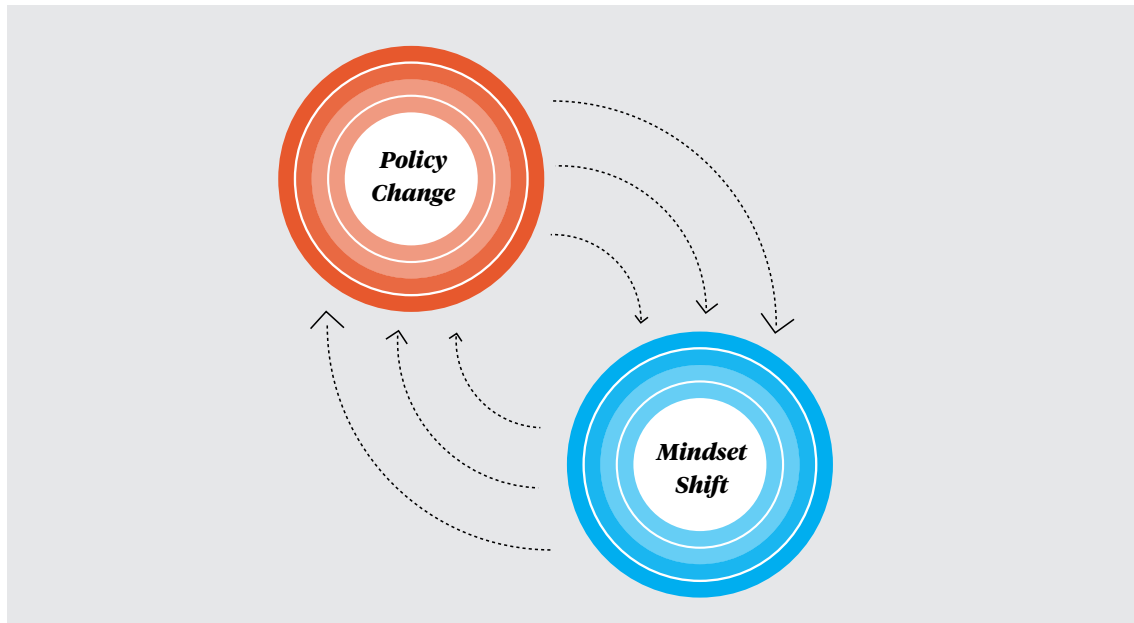

In addition to marriage equality, which we discuss above, tobacco control is an example of this dynamic. Initial wins on labeling policy and advertising helped fuel shifts in mindsets around tobacco's harmful effects, and the consolidation of these mindsets, in turn, contributed to further policy change (e.g., restaurant and public space bans). While this spiral was virtuous, it did not happen on its own. Creating and capitalizing on the relationship between policy change and shifting mindsets required key strategic decisions (e.g., the shift to focusing on non-smokers and secondhand smoke).

Lesson #7

When wins stop, change can stall.

This lesson is the flipside of the sixth lesson. Policy losses or the absence of wins can stem the momentum of mindset change and reinforce existing mindsets.

As we discuss above, policy change can lead to mindset shifts in two ways: by expressing a particular perspective and stamping it with the authority of the people, and by changing people's lived experience. When policies are defeated, this can interrupt a mindset shift through these same mechanisms. The high-profile defeat of a policy may send a signal that a new way of looking at the issue isn't appropriate, right, or popular. And when policies are *not* put into place, people's lived experience doesn't change in ways that might further propel a mindset shift.
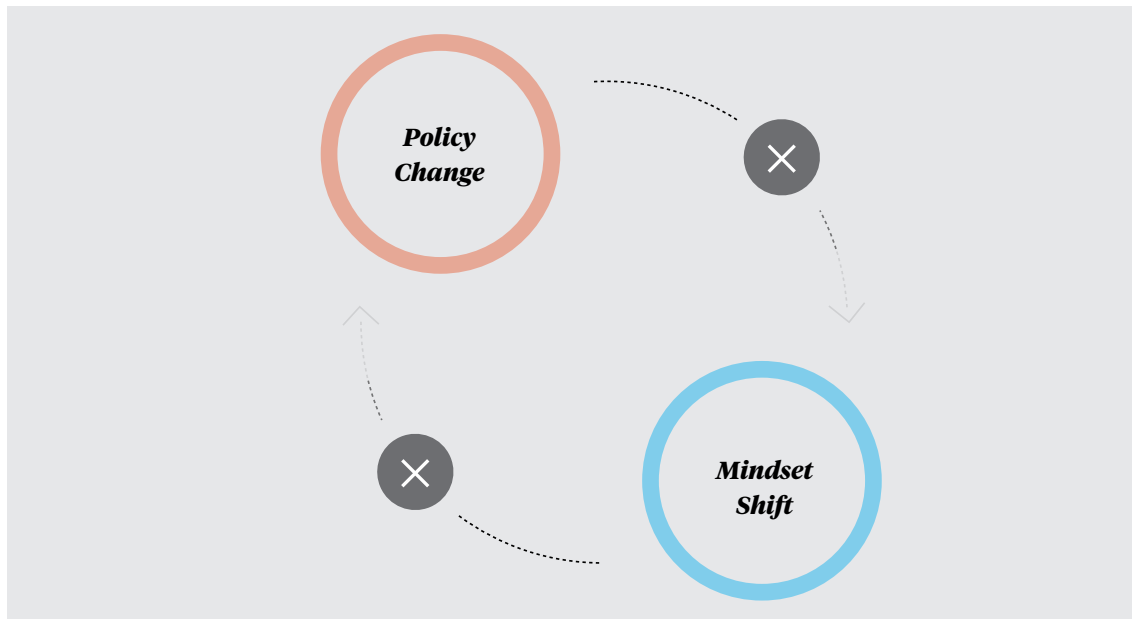
As we propose above, the defeat of the ERA is a possible example of this lesson. This defeat arguably slowed the shift toward egalitarian thinking about gender, both by signaling rejection of egalitarian ideals and failing to change lived experience in ways that would have normalized gender equality.

And of course, when opposing policies are put in place—policies that reflect existing mindsets that advocates are seeking to change—this is likely to strengthen these mindsets and make change more difficult.

Lesson #8

The social segregation of groups along class, racial, religious, and ideological lines, coupled with increasingly fragmented media, complicates efforts to shift mindsets across the whole population.

Because Americans are more segregated socially and in our media than we have been in the past, it can be hard to reach everyone. Social change advocates lack easy access to unfriendly media and it's hard to break into social networks that they are not part of. This can make it difficult to reach certain parts of the population.

While social segregation and media fragmentation make it hard to reach some groups, they make it easy to reach others and more likely that groups will accept communications, since, in a polarized and partitioned environment, messages that do make it to groups are likely to be seen as coming from trusted sources.

What this means for a specific strategy will depend on the nature of the issue and current public perceptions. If the easy-to-reach groups within aligned media and proximate social networks are not yet where advocates want them to be on an issue, then it likely makes sense to focus on them first and try to shift their thinking. At that point, broadening beyond these more aligned groups makes sense, though this will likely require cultivating different messengers or people in harder-to-reach social networks (e.g., people from different fields or with different ideological affiliations), being creative about channels (e.g., focusing on entertainment media), or otherwise adopting strategies that are cognizant of the current social and media landscape.

Lesson #9

New or altered mindsets often emerge from discrete groups within society.

Ways of thinking capable of contesting dominant mindsets often arise from dedicated spaces and specific groups. Depending on the issue, these groups may be a set of experts or practitioners introducing a new way of understanding an issue (e.g., scientists and public health experts on tobacco), activists who meld new science with existing elements within the culture (e.g., environmentalists who blended new ecology with spiritual mindsets), or a marginalized group that develops or adapts a way of understanding its own identity or experiences (e.g., trans discourse on gender identity).

The recognition that mindset shifts can emerge from these dedicated spaces suggests the importance of supporting and amplifying the voices of specific groups who are introducing new, potentially transformative ways of thinking about an issue. Supporting these groups is a way of fostering the development of thinking that challenges entrenched views and amplifying their voices is a way of recognizing and disseminating new perspectives.

Lesson #10

Mindset shift efforts must focus on changing the mindsets of the public, not policymakers.

As we discussed above, mindset shifts among the general public can significantly contribute to policy change. It is less clear whether targeting policymakers' mindsets on their own is a viable strategy.

This is not, of course, meant to suggest that attempting to directly influence and persuade policymakers is a mistake. Lobbying policymakers or otherwise trying to influence them directly (e.g., by providing them with key information that might shape their decision making) can have an effect on their actions and decisions. As we have discussed, changing policy through this type of work can be a critical part of a mindset change effort, as the enactment of policies can help propel mindset change.

These attempts to influence policymakers, however, should not generally be understood as an attempt to shift their mindsets. The mindsets that shape our thinking about social issues come from the broader culture, and, in turn, policymakers' mindsets are unlikely to shift separate from changes in thinking within this culture. Engagement with policymakers may try to temporarily activate one of the widely shared, already available mindsets on an issue, but this engagement is unlikely to produce durable, long-lasting change in the basic assumptions or models that policymakers use to make sense of the world.[87]

The takeaway from this is that mindset shift efforts should generally target public mindsets, though attempting to influence policymakers' positions on specific policies may very well be part of a broader mindset shift strategy.

Lesson #11

Mindset shifts that spread widely are more likely to generate fundamental social change.

While mindset shifts often begin with specific groups, their ability to generate policy, institutional, or systemic change depends on their broad adoption. Broad mindset shifts do not guarantee policy change, but if mindset shifts are confined to small pockets of society, they will be unlikely to result in policy change.

How widespread a mindset shift must be to generate social change is, to be sure, issue specific. The details depend in significant part on the specific goals of advocates, the strategy they are embracing, and the political context.

If advocates are trying to enact (or combat) a specific policy in the short term, they typically only need to target the "moveable middle." For example, when advocates are waging a campaign on a referendum about a specific policy (e.g., legalizing same-sex marriage, requiring parental notification for abortion, or raising the minimum wage), they don't need to convince everyone, just a plurality of voters. In a short-term political contest, the focus often isn't even primarily on changing minds so much as mobilizing potential voters who support a policy position (or candidates who champion this position) and depressing enthusiasm or turnout on the opposing side.

Over the longer term, however, mindset shifts are more likely to support broad and durable policy change (on LGBTQ rights, abortion, or employment, for example) if new ways of thinking become more diffuse and widespread—not necessarily wholly displacing conflicting mindsets but becoming available ways of thinking for the large majority of society.

Lesson #12

If the goal is policy change, mindset shift efforts only make sense if an issue is currently salient or can realistically be made salient through strategic work.

The policy responsiveness literature makes clear that shifts in public opinion—and, by extension, the mindsets that ground this opinion—are more likely to matter when an issue is salient. This makes sense—if a social issue isn't high on the political agenda, then policymakers are both less likely to realize that opinion is shifting and, to the extent they know about it, are less likely to think that they will face repercussions for failing to respond to the shift.

If advocates' goal is policy change, a mindset shift strategy only makes sense if the issue in question is salient, or when advocates stand to make it so. If advocates successfully shift public thinking but the issue never becomes salient, the mindset shift is unlikely to result in policy change.

How Can Those Engaged in Mindset Shift Work Be Most Effective?

In this section, we draw on insights from the interviews and literatures reviewed to offer recommendations about how those involved in doing or funding mindset shift work can be most effective in this work. These recommendations build directly on the lessons outlined above, taking an additional step in thinking through what it means to put them into practice.

These recommendations are directed toward all those engaged in mindset shift work, including advocates, activists, other types of practitioners, and funders. Given the philanthropic sector's resources and convening power, funders have a pivotal role in bringing mindset shift work to scale, which our research suggests is necessary for it to be effective. Within the recommendations, we highlight how funders can best enable and amplify the efforts of those on the front lines of mindset shift work.

Recommendation #1

Start by examining key factors to assess when and whether a mindset shift strategy makes sense.

A mindset strategy isn't appropriate for every issue. Some issues are too narrow or complex for a mindset strategy to make sense, while others may not be ripe for mindset shifts. Our analysis of interviews and literatures suggests reviewing the following factors to determine if a mindset shift strategy makes sense:

— **_Issue breadth._** Mindset shift efforts make the most sense for big social issues. If the issue is narrow, it might benefit from a broader mindset shift, but trying to shift mindsets purely for a narrow purpose doesn't make strategic sense. Given that mindset shifts are a heavy lift—they require a variety of costly and time-intensive efforts and take years to succeed—other strategies, such as targeted communications or policy campaigns, are better suited to achieve narrowly focused ends.

— **_Availability of an alternative mindset or an expanded way of thinking._** In order for a field or movement to intentionally bring about a mindset shift, there needs to be clarity about the way of thinking it is trying to amplify and spread. This could be a new mindset that comes from scientists, activists, or thought leaders from marginalized communities, for example. Or it could be a new way of applying an existing mindset that emerges from one of these groups. Or it could simply be an existing but recessive mindset that's already available within the culture but needs to be pulled forward. If there is not a clearly identifiable way of thinking that can be promoted, it is difficult to develop a clear strategy.

— **_Simplicity/complexity._** Highly complex or technical policy issues are less responsive to shifts in public thinking than simpler ones. While all policies involve technical details, if the core of the issue is a technical dispute, a mindset shift effort is inappropriate. If the average person can't understand the central considerations, the public is unlikely to have meaningful opinions about the issue or to mobilize around or vote based on it. In such cases, efforts focused on public thinking are likely an ineffective path to policy change.

— **_Salience/potential salience._** In order for a mindset shift effort to make sense as a way of promoting policy change, an issue must either already be salient or be capable of becoming salient. Policymaking is more responsive to public opinion on issues that people believe are important and that figure prominently in the national political discourse. Mindset shift efforts are most appropriate for these types of issues, and make less sense for issues that are not and are unlikely to become salient.

— **_Feasibility of and commitment to working at scale over a long period._** Given that mindset shift efforts are major undertakings, organizations or actors contemplating them (including funders) should assess whether a sufficiently large and extended effort is feasible, taking into account not only their own capacity and commitment but others'. This might include, for example, assessing whether there are already significant efforts underway by activists or experts and whether there is a realistic prospect for support from multiple funders. Relatedly, it requires an assessment of how the field or partners that would need to be mobilized are organized—can they coordinate enough to be effective, and do they have the needed reach to make change?

— **_Underlying social conditions and lived experience._** This is, perhaps, the hardest point to assess. Mindset shift efforts are more likely to succeed when they respond, in some way, to tension in people's lived experience resulting from the failure of an existing mindset to adequately account for or make sense of people's experience. Organizations or actors considering an effort should consider whether social conditions provide such an opening or impetus for change. Exploratory focus group research that probes whether such tensions exist on an issue may be useful in determining whether underlying social conditions currently create openness to shifts in thinking.

Recommendation #2

Begin mindset shift work by answering three strategic questions and using seven guiding principles—but be prepared to adjust.

Once advocates and funders have determined that a mindset shift effort makes sense, they should develop a strategy for change that clearly answers three questions:

1. What ultimate social outcome are they looking to promote?

2. How would a mindset shift enable or lead to that outcome?

3. How would funders' support contribute to this mindset shift?

Answers to these questions will vary across issues, and, in turn, different strategies will be appropriate in different cases. That said, there are some general guidelines we can derive from our synthesis of interviews and literatures:

1. ***Be prepared to commit at scale and over the long term.*** Mindset shifts take time and large-scale efforts, so commitments need to be significant and sustained. This is particularly important for funders: Funding small bits of mindset shift work is unlikely to make a difference. Partnering with other funders is one way that funders can ensure the work is funded at a large enough scale.

2. ***Invest time and resources in coordination.*** Because mindset shift efforts require action on a large scale, they can only succeed through extensive coordination among actors working on an issue. Funders can effectively use their convening power to assist in this coordination, supporting broad, cross-issue coalitions and movements with a clear strategy.

3. ***Use different levers and channels simultaneously.*** To maximize impact, those engaged in mindset shift efforts must employ a range of tactics across different spaces, including the development and dissemination of new expert paradigms, framing and narrative change efforts that work across a variety of channels (including, e.g., arts and entertainment), grassroots field and movement work, and policy campaigns, among others.

4. ***Undertake short-term policy campaigns that advance long-term goals.*** Identifying paths to near-term wins that are likely to begin shifting mindsets is critical. To determine whether or not a policy win would help shift mindsets in the right direction, advocates and funders should consider the following:

   — *Effects on lived experience.* Would implementation of the policy change people's lived experience in ways that help to promote a mindset shift? (For example, the legalization of same-sex marriage gave people the experience of living in communities with same-sex married couples, which further undermined negative assumptions about LGBTQ people.)

— *What the policy expresses*. Through their expressive power, policies validate some ideas while undermining others. Advocates and funders should consider whether the policy reinforces or undermines the mindsets that it wants to promote. For example, the DREAM Act, in highlighting Dreamers as a group that has done no wrong, reinforces the deserving/undeserving distinction in people's minds, which undermines a broader shift toward being a more pro-immigrant society. Given the good the Act would have achieved, this is a tradeoff that activists might reasonably decide to accept, but as a *mindset shift* matter, the whole debate around the DREAM Act was counterproductive.

— *Narrative through line*. To fit within a mindset shift effort, policy campaigns should ideally be connected to subsequent campaigns via a narrative through line—commonalities in framing or narrative strategy across campaigns that build on each other in ways that shift the public discourse on an issue. Advocates and funders should undertake policy campaigns that fit within the broader narrative they are trying to advance. Funders can use their influence to ensure that framing and narrative strategies across campaigns are aligned.

5. ***Measure and evaluate progress to guide decision making and strategy.*** In order to get the feedback on progress needed to adjust strategy, it's important to evaluate and measure progress as you go. This means measuring progress not only on whether and to what extent mindsets are shifting over time within society as a whole or within a community, but also progress on more proximate indicators tied to the strategy and tactics used. For example, for communications, it is important to measure the extent to which communicators are using common frames and whether those frames are making their way into the public discourse).[88] Funders should build support for measurement and evaluation into their investment in mindset shift efforts.

6. ***Be open to adjusting strategy as you go to match changing conditions.*** Mindset shifts are unpredictable, so advocates and funders must put in place processes to adjust strategy along the way, based on ongoing feedback.

7. ***Build attention to material power and interest into your strategy—don't treat mindsets as all that matters.*** Because mindset shift efforts focus on how people think, it is easy when doing this work to inadvertently slip into the habit of treating ideas as all that matters—to act as though social change is *only* about mindsets. To avoid this tendency, those working on mindset shift efforts must make a point of attending to material power and interests. Mindset shift efforts must be coordinated with interest-based mobilization strategies and take into account the entrenched power of actors with a major stake in the status quo. For example, while a shift away from a medicalized mindset opens more space to consider enacting policies that address the social determinants of health, policy change around health requires attending to the interests of insurers and hospitals, among others. Major changes in social policy depend on interest-based mobilization and alignment.[89] Mindset shift work must be understood as one facet of a broader strategy.

Recommendation #3

Focus mindset shift efforts on the public.

As we discuss above, mindset shift efforts make more sense when they target the public than policymakers. Policymakers' mindsets do, of course, shape their decision making, but their mindsets largely stem from the broader culture. To the extent that their mindsets are not separate or different from the mindsets of the public, attempting to shift policymakers' mindsets without simultaneously shifting the broader public's mindsets is not realistic.

As the public's mindsets shift, so too will policymakers', who, like all of us, share the assumptions of the culture they come from. These shifts in cultural context not only directly shape policymakers' decision making, but also, as members of the public begin to draw on different mindsets, shift the political incentives and pressures that policymakers face. Shifts in public thinking on salient issues affect policymakers' decisions across all levels and branches of government.

Focusing mindset shift efforts on the public does not mean foregoing direct lobbying of policymakers. To the contrary, an inside game can help bring about policy wins, which in turn can help reinforce mindset shifts in progress. But this inside game should not itself be confused with a mindset shift strategy—it is not about shifting policymakers' mindsets, but rather appealing to their existing commitments or incentives.

Focusing mindset shift work on the public also helps sustain policy change. If high-profile policy changes are the result of an inside game *only* and happen *without* broad support, there is a real danger that gains will be reversed as political winds shift and new policymakers come into office. Shifting public mindsets helps ensure that policy wins are durable.

By targeting *public* mindsets as the object of a mindset shift strategy and recognizing the role of an inside game *within* this strategy (but not confusing this *for* the strategy), advocates and funders can sharpen their efforts, clarifying how different actions fit into a mindset shift strategy as well as how mindset shift efforts fit together with other aspects of a social change strategy.

Recommendation #4

Coordinate work on mindset shifts within cross-cutting coalitions and funding groups.

While there are, to be sure, narrower, issue-specific mindsets that matter for advocacy and activism, many of the mindsets that thwart progressive change cut across issues. At the deepest level, bootstraps thinking and individualism block systemic and structural thinking across social issues—from economic issues to health to criminal justice and climate change. Mindsets

about race, class, and gender undermine equity across social and political issues. At a slightly lower level, foundational understandings of health—for example, the understanding of health as the absence of illness and the association of health with medicine—pose problems for those working on issues like nutrition, tobacco disparities, or mental health. Similarly, foundational understandings of the economy—for example, the idea that markets work as they do naturally due to forces outside of anyone's control—undermine support for everything from anti-trust regulation to higher taxes.

Yet policy, practice, and philanthropy tend to organize work at the specific issue level rather than in broad domains like the economy or health. The result is that mindset shift work tends to be focused narrowly while key mindsets run across issues and function broadly.

Those working on mindset shifts can increase their impact by working with partners across issues to address common mindsets that thwart progress. Developing cross-issue mindset shift strategies expands the number of potential partners who can take action to shift thinking, which makes it more feasible to work at the scale needed for effectiveness.

There are, of course, existing venues for advocates and funders to work across specific issues—for example, cross-cutting coalitions and advocacy tables and issue-based funder affinity groups. By locating mindset shift strategy at this level and coordinating work within cross-cutting spaces, advocates and funders can better ensure impact.

Given the complexity of mindset shifts, any attempt to distill a clear set of takeaways has limitations. We offer these lessons and recommendations to help readers make the move from insights to action, but these takeaways are, inevitably, not exhaustive. We encourage consideration of the whole paper, as the fuller mapping of existing knowledge about mindset shifts earlier in the paper may well prompt additional reflections that can help advocates, activists, other practitioners, and funders in the challenging work of shifting mindsets.

Appendix: List of Interview Participants

— David Broockman, Stanford University

— Valerie Chang, MacArthur Foundation

— Brett Davidson, Open Society Foundation

— Jamie Druckman, Northwestern University

— Alexa Eggleston, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

— Donald Green, Columbia University

— Cynthia Hallett, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights/ ANR Foundation

— Hahrie Han, University of California at Santa Barbara

— Doug Hattaway, Hattaway Communications

— Christine Herbes-Sommers, Vital Pictures

— Jane Junn, University of Southern California

— Jee Kim, Narrative Initiative

— Robin Koval, Truth Initiative

— Celinda Lake, Lake Research Partners

— Michael Linden, Groundwork Collaborative

— Lilliana Mason, University of Maryland, College Park

— Margaret Morton, Ford Foundation

— Daphna Oyserman, University of Southern California

— Nisha Patel, Robin Hood

— Abigail Scott Paul, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

— Katherine Peck, Civic Participation Action Fund

— Francesca Polletta, University of California at Irvine

— Anat Shenker-Osorio, ASO Communications

— Bradd Shore, Emory University

— Theda Skocpol, Harvard University

— Lynda Tran, 270 Strategies

— Micah White, Co-Creator of Occupy Wall Street, Activist Graduate School

— Evan Wolfson, Georgetown Law School, Yale University; Founder of Freedom to Marry

— Caira Woods, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Affiliations were current at time of interviews.

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3. Triandis, H. C. (2002). "Subjective culture." *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no. 2.; Kitayama, S., et al. (2010). "Ethos of independence across regions in the United States: The production-adoption model of cultural change." *American Psychologist* 65, no. 6: 559–574.

4. The Narrative Initiative's understanding of "deep narrative" most closely overlaps with the concept of mindsets, as it conveys both expansiveness and the durability of certain ways of making sense of the world that are embedded within culture. On their definition, deep narratives "provide a foundational framework for understanding both history and current events" (see: narrativeinitiative.org/what-is-narrative). See also "meta-narratives," p. 14 in Shirazi, N., Kim, J., and Hynes, L. (2017). *Toward New Gravity: Charting the Course for the Narrative Initiative*. The Narrative Initiative.

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86. Interview with Abigail Scott Paul.

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How Do They Happen?

A FrameWorks Strategic Report

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