



The California Dream

Findings: Full Download

This project set out to identify a unifying narrative to support advocates as they work to shift attitudes and values in support of housing reform across California. The ultimate goal was to identify a shared foundational, long-term narrative framework with accompanying messaging to equip housing advocates with communications tools to build greater public will.

To put the California Dream narrative to work for your housing advocacy goals, it must be woven into your organization's public-facing communications materials. Here are all the resources for you combined in one place.

Contents:

- **Recommended Frames and Messages**
- **Mindset Segmentation Summary**
- **Common Frames, Reconsidered**
- **Glossary**
- **Message Model Template**
- **Op-Ed/Blog Post Template**
- **Media Release Template**



Recommended Frame & Messages

The chart below offers tested and proven language that you can adapt and apply in your own work. The frame is the high-level idea that comprises the narrative; the outcome messages offer effective language to move audiences toward the specific outcomes noted.

The *California Dream* narrative is the culmination of robust research to find an effective narrative that advocates can use to meet a broad cross-section of Californians where they are in order to garner more support for housing reforms over the short and long term. We've tested this narrative with California voters who hold multiple, overlapping, and often conflicting beliefs about housing issues. The *California Dream* narrative frame was one of the most compelling in our tests and was most effective at persuasion and engagement when used in messaging. This frame also proved effective for use in advocating a range of solutions on housing.

This narrative — focused on redefining the American Dream in a way that works for Californians — is effective at moving Californians to support housing as a basic right, to support production of housing in their communities, and to increase their likelihood to take action in support of housing solutions.

Even in the context of entrenched prior narratives and an increasingly heated public debate over how to best address California's housing crisis, this narrative frame, along with its accompanying messaging, is effective at shifting opinion toward actionable solutions.

The California Dream = Build What Matters to You

FRAME

It's about time we redefine the American Dream, and we Californians are the right ones for the job.

We need to reboot our idea of the American Dream to reflect the values of our present-day state. Californians know that when we bring people together from all different walks of life, we're able to spark new ideas, pioneer groundbreaking innovations, and solve big problems the Californian way. That's why we need to ensure we build communities where people from different incomes, beliefs, and backgrounds can live, work, and create together.

The California Dream of an inclusive, hopeful future must be open to people from all kinds of backgrounds and all walks of life. Every Californian has the right to a decent place to live, regardless of race or income, so they can be part of our shared future.

Desired Outcome: Housing is viewed as a fundamental human right (to be guaranteed) and not a privilege (to be earned)

Message: Californians know how important an inclusive, hopeful future is for people from all kinds of backgrounds and all walks of life. These values drive innovation, keep businesses and communities thriving, and bring California's unique culture to life. Let's make sure all Californians have the right to a decent place to live, regardless of race or income, so they can be part of our shared future.

Desired Outcome: Higher propensity to act (e.g., donate money, write to officials, sign petitions) in support of housing reform

Message: Californians know how to dream big, innovate, and lead the way. We know housing is a top priority for our community, and it's up to us to use our voices, our votes, and our dollars to make it a priority for lawmakers. Let's take bold action to solve one of the most urgent problems of our time and make sure everyone has a decent place to live.

Desired Outcome: Increase support for producing additional housing in one's community

Message: Rising housing costs are driving business, workers, and young people out of our communities, and if we wait to take action, the problem will only get worse. Let's expand housing options right here, right now, to protect the good jobs, great schools, diverse communities, and unique opportunities that matter to our families and neighbors.





Mindset Segmentation Summary

Mindsets Matter

By understanding the perceptions and worldviews of our audiences, advocates can more effectively shape messages to persuade and engage. Deep research into the values, attitudes, and beliefs that California voters hold about housing offers advocates a fresh, more nuanced, understanding of their audiences.

Deep Differences

Research shows that California voters hold conflicting beliefs about housing reform and housing affordability – and these beliefs don't necessarily map onto traditional political identities (e.g. Democrat, Republican, Conservative, Liberal, etc.), nor demographic identities of gender, race, ethnicity, or class. This is important for advocates who may be accustomed to digesting audience research through these more familiar lenses or through the political targeting lenses of base/persuadables/opposition.

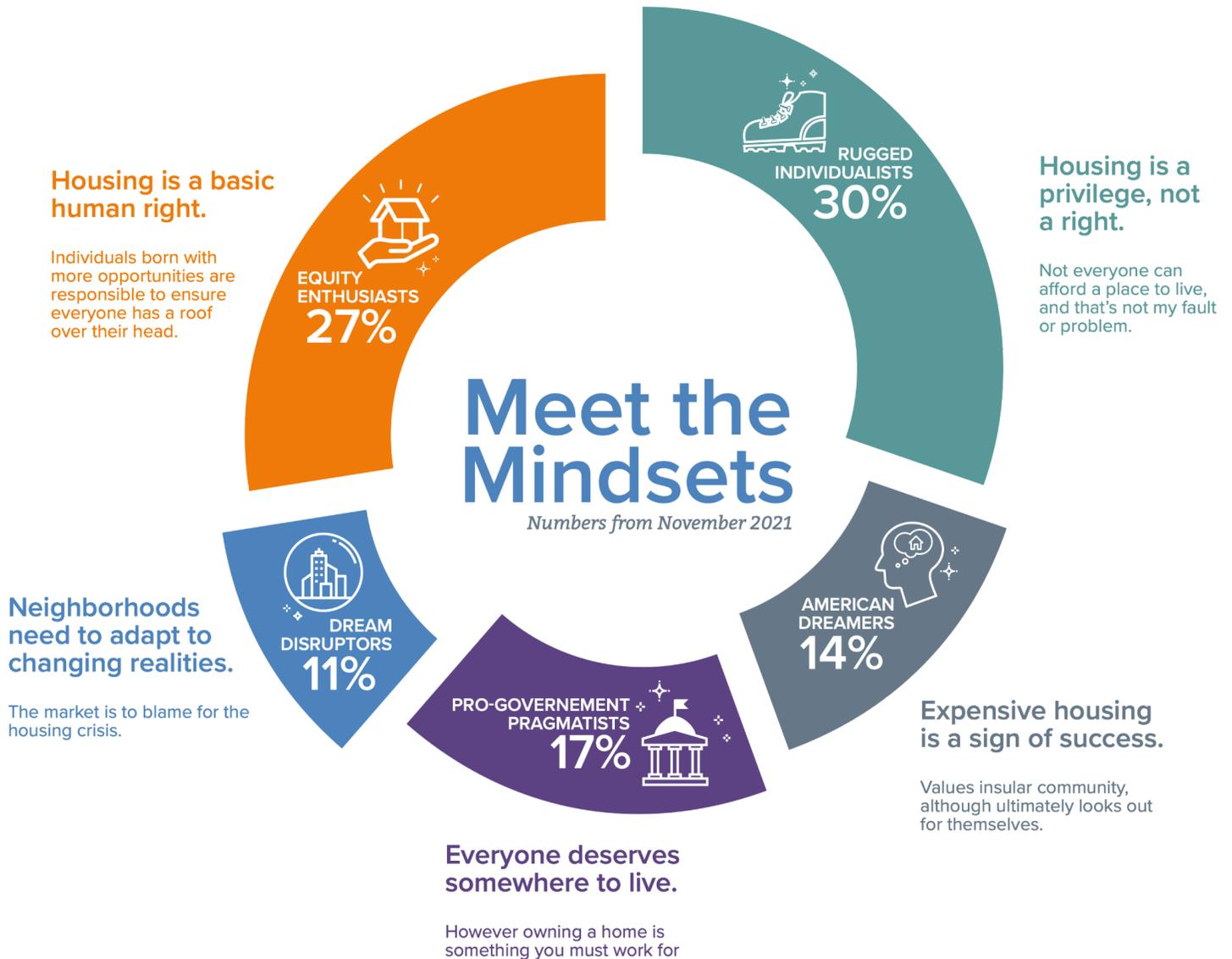


Mindset Segmentation methodology goes deeper to help us understand how audiences think, including the conflicting values and ideas they may hold about housing. The Housing Mindset Segments reveal a deep set of ideas and values that are operating underneath our geographic and demographic identities, shaping the stories we hold about housing, what's causing California's housing crisis, and how best to solve it.

What researchers learned through the Mindset Segmentation reinforces that housing is not yet bogged down by partisan tribalism among the electorate; while voters hold diverging ideas and opinions on the housing crisis and how to solve it, there's no clear "left" or "right" on many aspects of this issue.

Housing Mindset Segments

Deep audience research surfaced five distinct Mindset Segments that describe California voters' ideas on housing affordability.



Meet the Mindsets

Below are detailed profiles of each of the Mindsets, which offer valuable insights into the audiences advocates need to engage to advance housing reforms across California.

Rugged Individualists

“Housing security – and other financial achievements – need to be earned. It’s every person for themselves.”



Comprising 35% of California voters, Rugged Individualists are voters who believe having a home is something that needs to be earned. It's not something that people should expect to be provided for them. Focused on the individual rather than the collective, Rugged Individualists expect people to either pay more as housing costs increase or to move to a cheaper area.

Themes that emerged as defining beliefs and values of Rugged Individualists include:

- Housing is a privilege
- Too expensive? Pay more or move to an affordable area
- Opposes government intervention
- Home ownership is an avenue for wealth generation
- Does not value diversity
- Prefers living in close-knit community with similar people
- Does not feel responsible to think of affordable housing for others
- Homelessness is a result of bad personal choices
- Individualism over collectivism

It’s also worth noting where Rugged Individualists’ *demographics were statistically different from overall California voters, as they were more likely to be:*

- Older than 60 years old (43%)
- White, non-Hispanic (81%)
- Republican (45%)
- Independent (24%)
- Home owners (76%)

American Dreamers

“The American Dream is attainable if you buckle down, work hard, and take care of your community.”



14% of California voters can be categorized as American Dreamers. Similar to Rugged Individualists, American Dreamers believe that housing must be earned. American Dreamers are more likely to be renters and have lower income. American Dreamers are community-oriented as far as their immediate insular community goes, but ultimately focused on individual needs and outcomes, likely because of necessity.

Themes that emerged as defining beliefs and values of American Dreamers include:

- Housing should be earned
- High housing cost is a sign of success
- Values and trusts insular community
- Ultimately looks out for themselves
- Feels less safe in communities with lots of different types of people
- Prefers to live among people with similar race/ethnicity and economic class
- It's a shame when neighborhoods evolve over time
- Does not really understand the government's role in creating affordable housing
- Open to government intervention if it helps them

It's also worth noting where American Dreamers' *demographics were statistically different from overall California voters, as they were more likely to be:*

- Female (60%)
- Asian (28%)
- Undecided political views (8%)

Pro-Government Pragmatists

“People need to work hard to achieve housing security, but the government should help create a system that provides opportunity for everyone.”



Comprising 16% of California voters, Pro-Government Pragmatists believe that everyone should have a decent place to live, but they know that right now not everyone can. Pro-Government Pragmatists think the government should intervene to provide housing opportunities for more people and that owning a home is a wealth-generating opportunity.

Themes that emerged as defining beliefs and values of Pro-Government Pragmatists include:

- Housing is both a right and a privilege
- Everyone should have a decent place to live, but not everyone can right now
- Government should intervene to provide affordable and safe housing for everyone
- Owning a home is an opportunity for wealth generation
- Values close-knit community and diversity
- Would be proud to live in a community with affordable housing
- Would choose a neighborhood further from jobs, as long as housing prices are within budget
- Prioritizes collectivism over individualism

It's also worth noting where Pro-Government Pragmatists' *demographics were statistically different from overall California voters, as they were more likely to be:*

- 45-59 years of age (34%)
- Black, non-Hispanic (10%)
- Undecided political view (6%)
- No high school diploma (26%)
- High graduate or equivalent (30%)

Dream Disruptors

“We shouldn’t rely on legacy ideas and systems to solve modern day problems.”



Reflecting 12% of California voters, Dream Disruptors are supportive of most housing reforms, but unattached to and skeptical of the current housing system and market. Unconcerned about home ownership or property value, Dream Disruptors envision a future where everyone has a home, but no one has more home than they need. They’re pro-change, pro-diversity, and pro-innovation.

Themes that emerged as defining beliefs and values of Dream Disruptors include:

- Supportive of housing reforms, but skeptical of current system
- Unconcerned about home ownership or property values
- Envisions a future where everyone has a home, but no one has more than they need
- Community’s success has nothing to do with high housing costs
- Americans should be able to achieve financial security without owning a home
- Does not express strong community ties
- Most open to change in neighborhoods
- Healthy neighborhoods need to adapt to changing realities

It’s also worth noting where Dream Disruptors’ *demographics were statistically different from overall California voters, as they were more likely to be:*

- American Indian/Alaskan Native (7%)
- Asian (25%)
- Democrat (74%)
- 18-29 years old (36%)
- Have some form of college education (47%)

Equity Enthusiasts

“Everyone should be able to achieve their version of the American Dream; A rising tide lifts all boats!”

24% of California voters can be categorized as Equity Enthusiasts. Similar to Dream Disruptors, Equity Enthusiasts believe that everyone has a right to a home, and they are highly supportive of every housing reform tested — the most supportive of all 5 segments. Unlike Dream Disruptors, Equity Enthusiasts see value in home ownership and want that opportunity for everyone. Collectivist to their core, Equity Enthusiasts believe that individuals born with more opportunities in life have a responsibility to ensure everyone has a roof over their head. Equity Enthusiasts are pro-government intervention, pro-community, and against the free market determining who can live where.



Themes that emerged as defining beliefs and values of Equity Enthusiasts include:

- Housing is a basic human right
- Highly supportive of housing reforms
- Sees value in home ownership and wants that opportunity for everyone
- Collectivist to their core
- Individuals born with more opportunities have a responsibility to ensure everyone has access to housing
- Providing decent housing is the key to addressing homelessness
- Thinks of others before themselves
- Most willing to make personal sacrifices and use their own resources to help strangers

It's also worth noting where Equity Enthusiasts' *demographics were statistically different from overall California voters, as they were more likely to be:*

- 18-44 years old (54%)
- Mixed-race (7%)
- Democrat (73%)
- Educated with Bachelor's degree or above (51%)
- Renter (40%)



Unpacking the Mindsets

An important way of understanding the Mindsets is to see how they vary in how deeply held the core values are for each:

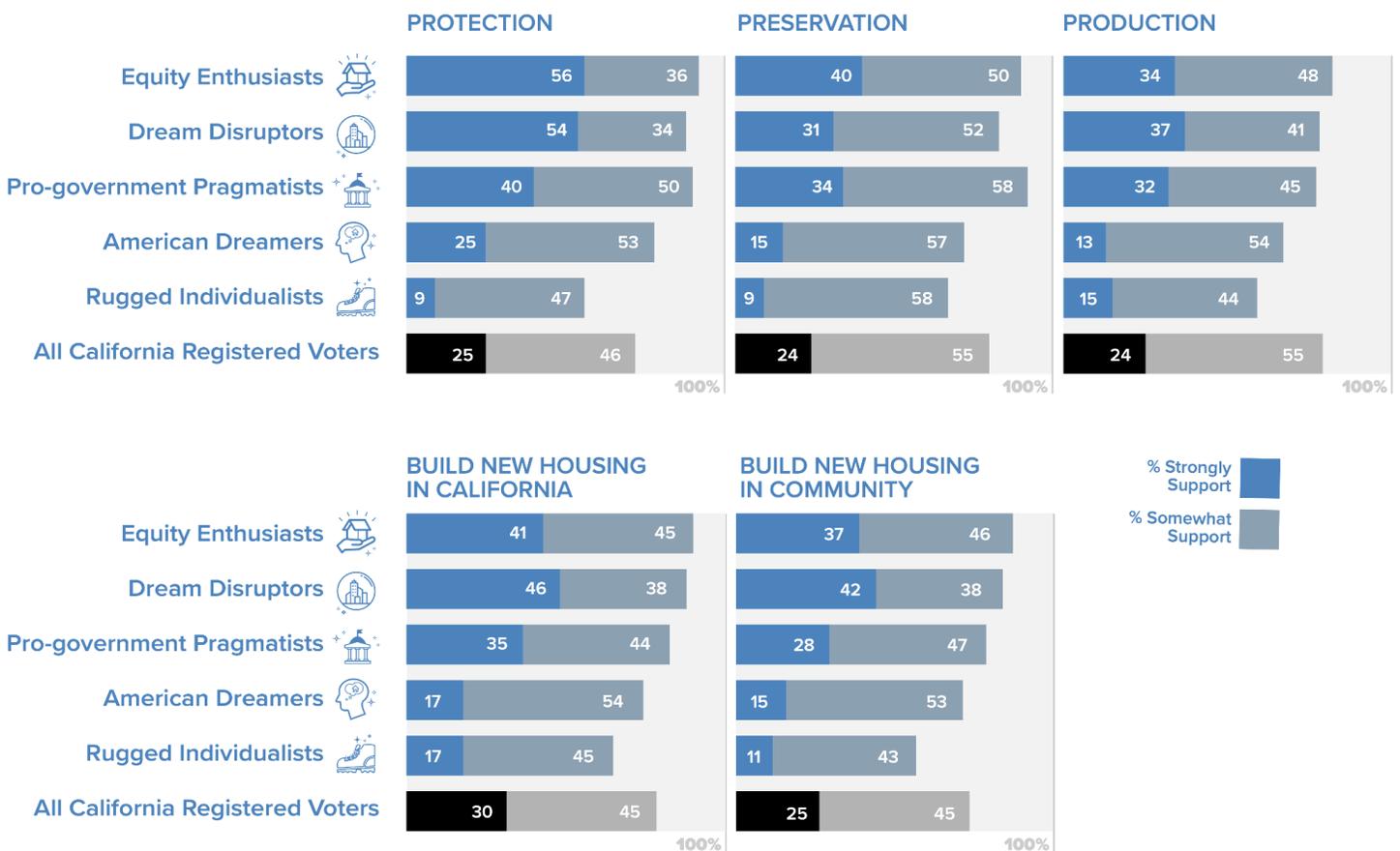


Support for Reforms Maps to Mindset

The chart below illustrates the level of support for specific housing reforms among each of the Mindsets, with Equity Enthusiasts consistently the most supportive and Rugged Individualists consistently the least supportive (although it's important to note that even amongst this least supportive group, the majority still supports reforms).

In fact, all Mindset Segments are generally supportive of reforms in the abstract, signaling opportunity across all mindsets:

Housing Reform Outcomes by Segment



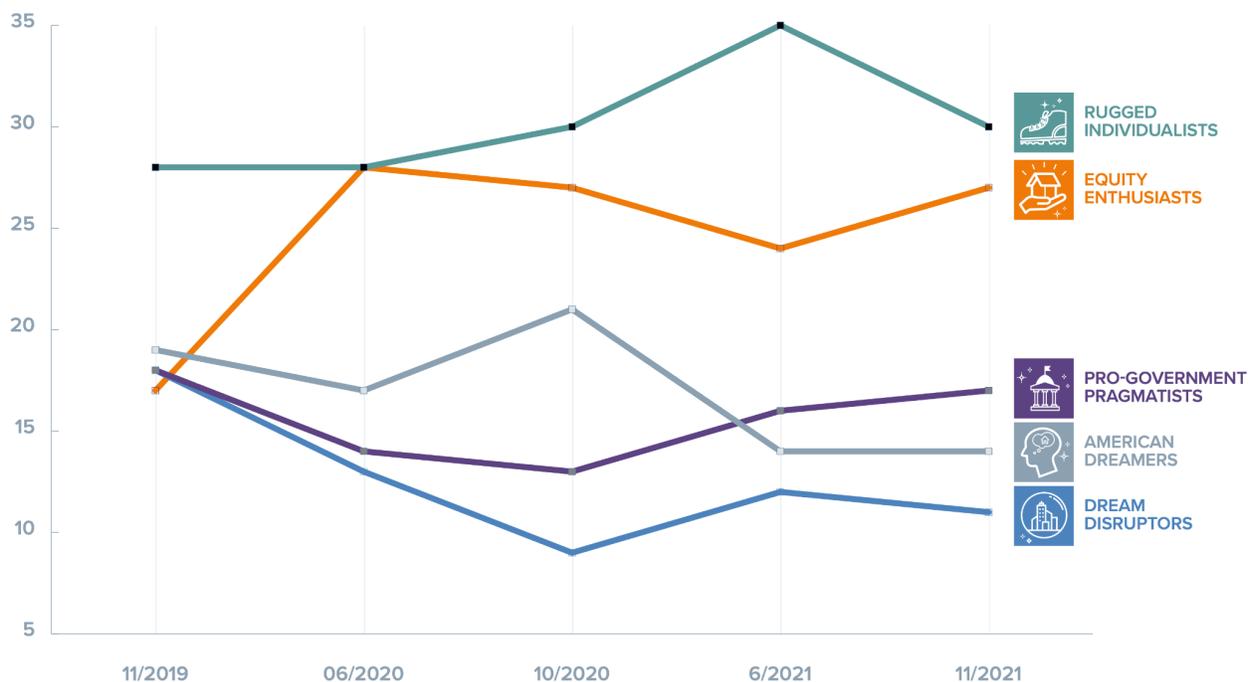
For further details on how each of the Mindset Segments reacted to the specific frames and messages tested, [download the full research report here](#).



Mindsets Over Time

For the last couple of years, researchers have tracked what percentage of the California electorate fall into each of the Mindsets and found that the segmentation remains relatively stable – Californians aren't dramatically changing their mind(set)s on housing. That's one reason why we need a narrative that is effective at bringing as many of the Mindset Segments to the table as possible.

Proportion of Mindset Segments Changing Over Time



When looking at the breakdown of California voters' views on housing issues, an important note for advocates is that given variables among the groups — turnout likelihood, level of political engagement, and other contextual constraints — movement toward statewide policy solutions will likely require a coalition across Mindset Segments.



Common Frames, Reconsidered

Researchers generated and tested a total of six narrative frames to assess how motivating and compelling voters found the frames, as well as the extent to which each frame was effective at achieving persuasion and engagement goals after being exposed to one of the frames.

The target audiences for these narrative frames were a cross section of California voters around the state because voters are the most immediate path to electoral and legislative progress. In order for these narrative tools to be useful for housing advocates in their efforts to advance reforms, the narratives must be effective in electoral and legislative contexts — which means they must be effective with voters. Because voters are often a tougher-to-persuade audience on reforms, we expect what works with voters will also work with the general population. By shifting public will, advocates can open new pathways to advance new ideas and practical solutions and ensure that all Californians have safe, affordable, and stable housing.

The table below details all six frames, as well as their performance among the [mindset segments](#). The research uncovered some surprising things about common housing advocacy frames that are familiar to and in popular use among advocates.

Of special import for groups focused on addressing racial inequities and the discriminatory origins of California’s current housing crisis are [messages that speak specifically to equity](#).

Review the frames below for the language that's most aligned with your organization's current messaging. Then review your audience prioritization and messaging strategies; you may want to rethink some of the frames below if they might be having unintended consequences counter to your advocacy goals. By better understanding the pros and cons of common frames currently in use among advocacy groups, we can see how our message may or may not be resonating with audiences.

The charts below reflect what we found at a high level, testing these particular frames and messages with this audience toward specific outcomes. We share the findings so that advocates may apply the learnings, noting that some of these commonly used frames did have some positive results among certain audience segments, **but overall none were as effective across the board as the California Dream frame.**

Green icons denote a productive outcome, red icons denote a counter-productive outcome, and gray icons denote an outcome that requires strategic consideration. Frames are listed from most to least effective across the greatest number of mindset segments.



FRAME

California Dream = Build What Matters to You

We care less about everyone owning a traditional home, and we care more about making sure everyone can afford to live in communities rich with diversity.

It's about time we redefine the American Dream, and we Californians are the right ones for the job. We need to reboot our idea of the American Dream to reflect the values of our present-day state. Californians know that when we bring people together from all different walks of life, we're able to spark new ideas, pioneer groundbreaking innovations, and solve big problems the Californian way. That's why we need to ensure we build communities where people from different incomes, beliefs, and backgrounds can live, work, and create the California Dream together.

Key Findings	✔ <i>California Dream = Build What Matters to You</i> is the most effective frame for increasing propensity to act. In fact, it is the <i>*only*</i> frame that increases propensity to act on housing issues. Respondents exposed to <i>California Dream = Build What Matters to You</i> were most likely to donate money to a non-profit organization focused on housing and sign a petition related to housing.
Mindsets Segments' Reactions	✔ Pro-government Pragmatists are the most persuadable. They respond well to the widest variety of frames, especially <i>American Dream = Safe & Stable Home</i> , <i>California Dream = Build What Matters to You</i> , and <i>Better Together</i> .

American Dream = Safe, Stable Home

Every Californian deserves a chance at achieving the American Dream, and that starts with having access to a safe and stable home.

Being able to work towards the American Dream starts with having access to a safe and stable home. **Without the necessary security that comes with having somewhere secure to call home and build a life from, it's nearly impossible to plan for your future,** focus on school or work, start a business, or contribute to the community you live in. When we ensure people from all walks of life can afford a place to live, we can make sure that more of us can make our American Dream a reality and contribute to our society's collective well-being.

<p>Key Findings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>American Dream = Safe & Stable Home</i> is the most appealing frame based on self-reported measures (i.e., convincing, inspiring, motivating).
<p>Mindsets Segments' Reactions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓✗ American Dreamers are most convinced, inspired, and motivated by the <i>American Dream = Safe & Stable Home</i> frame. However, this frame also reinforces their belief that housing is “mostly earned.” ✓ Pro-government Pragmatists are the most persuadable. They respond well to the widest variety of frames, especially <i>American Dream = Safe & Stable Home</i>, <i>California Dream = Build What Matters to You</i>, and <i>Better Together</i>. ✓ Equity Enthusiasts are most enthusiastic about <i>American Dream = Safe & Stable Home</i> and <i>Neighborhood Stability</i> frames.

FRAME

Neighborhood Stability

Making sure every Californian has access to a safe and stable home isn't just a nice-to-have, it's key to our collective resilience.

Making sure every Californian has access to a safe and stable home isn't just a nice-to-have. It's the key to ensuring that our towns and cities can maintain resilience during hard times. As we're faced with more social and environmental challenges, the more we see how our well-being is directly tied to our neighbors' stability and well-being. That's why it's our responsibility to make sure people from all different backgrounds and skill sets — from doctors, nurses, and firefighters to school teachers, bus drivers, and couriers — can afford to live side-by-side with one another and support each other during uncertain times.

Key Findings

- ✔ Compared to all other frames, voters were more likely to find the *Neighborhood Stability* motivating.
- ✘ However, motivation did not translate to positive outcomes, as voters exposed to this frame were less likely to believe housing should be guaranteed or is a community issue. Voters are also less likely to express support for production or preservation.

Mindsets Segments' Reactions

- ✘ Rugged Individualists are most repelled by the *Neighborhood Stability* frame which focuses on the importance of ensuring people from all different backgrounds can afford to live side by side during times of crisis.
- ✘ Exposure to *Racial Equity* and *Neighborhood Stability* weakens American Dreamers' support for the 3Ps.
- ✔ Equity Enthusiasts (who are already most predisposed to support reforms) are most enthusiastic about *American Dream = Safe & Stable Home* and *Neighborhood Stability* frames.

FRAME

Racial Equity

Emphasize the current opportunity to rectify historically discriminatory practices in housing policy to close the racial wealth

gap and diversify the mix of housing available to all families.

More than any other place in the nation, California has the best opportunity to create a racially just housing system. Historically discriminatory practices, such as redlining, restricted the growth of many of our towns and cities by keeping millions of Black and brown families from owning their homes. **Today, we have the opportunity to finally make things right. By focusing on solutions that directly address these injustices, we can close the racial wealth gap and diversify the mix of housing available to all families.** Such efforts will ultimately strengthen our state’s economy by ensuring that every Californian can share in the prosperity of our growing neighborhoods.

Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✔ <i>Racial Equity</i> has potential to frame housing as a “community” vs. “individual” responsibility.✘ However, it also produces polarizing results across segments.✔ Respondents exposed to <i>Racial Equity</i> were more likely to view housing as a “community” instead of “individual” responsibility.
Mindsets Segments’ Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✘ Exposure to <i>Racial Equity</i> and <i>Neighborhood Stability</i> weakens American Dreamers’ support for 3Ps.✘ Dream Disruptors are harder to persuade with narrative frames and do not find any of the frames to be particularly motivating. Although they already express strong support for the 3Ps, exposure to the <i>Racial Equity</i> frame weakens the strength of their support.✔✘ Among Equity Enthusiasts, exposure to <i>Racial Equity</i> slightly weakens support for the 3Ps; but increases likelihood of donating.

FRAME

American Dream = Access to Success

Focus on empowerment and the opportunity to provide people with access to success.

The crux of the American Dream is about making sure everyone can work hard and build the life they want for themselves. It's our responsibility as Californians to make sure every Californian has equal opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential. **Still, it's also up to each one of us to make good choices about our personal housing situation if we want to improve it.**

Key Findings	❌ Voters exposed to the <i>American Dream = Access to Success</i> frame were less likely to find it inspiring or motivating, and this frame was least likely to yield positive views on housing outcomes.
Mindsets Segments' Reactions	✅❌ Rugged Individualists only respond well to the <i>American Dream = Access to Success</i> frame. However, this is the least popular frame among all other segments.

FRAME

Better Together

*Connect individuals with collective benefits.
The sum is greater than its parts.*

Here in California, we believe the sum is more significant than its parts. When we build neighborhoods with a mix of homes for people of all income levels, our communities become richer with diversity and more connected through shared experiences. That's why it's important to ensure housing in cities and towns across our state meet a wide range of people's needs.

Key Findings	✘ Respondents exposed to <i>Better Together</i> were most likely to view housing as a privilege that is “ <i>completely earned</i> ” and “ <i>much less likely</i> ” to vote for a candidate focused on increasing affordable housing.
Mindsets Segments' Reactions	➖ Pro-government Pragmatists are the only group that responds well to <i>Better Together</i> .



Glossary

Narrative, Defined

There are as many definitions of narrative as there are brilliant narrative strategists. That said, it can be helpful to hone in on shared understanding of terms in practice. The ideas below are offered as a means of clarifying the context for – and usages of – the narrative research offered here.

Narrative

Joseph Phelan of [ReFrame](#) defines narrative as “a collection or system of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief.”

It’s the story people have in their heads about the way things work, and it provides a framework for ingesting new information or forming new attitudes related to an issue. In an advocacy context, narrative is the broad story we’re advancing about our issue, constructed and reinforced by frames and messages.

Narrative is about how we make meaning of the world. It’s made up of ideas and beliefs that are shortcuts for how we make sense of the world around us.

Dominant Narratives

Dr. Tiffany Manuel of [TheCaseMade](#) describes dominant narratives as “common explanations, beliefs, or ways of thinking that get reinforced through culture (e.g., through the stories we tell and our culture norms) that often make it more difficult for people to see their collective interest in having systems designed to produce equitable outcomes. Because dominant narratives are so normalized through their repetition and authority, they have the illusion of being objective and apolitical, when in fact they are neither.”

[See here for more on the dominant narratives on housing in California.](#)

Frame

“A frame is a guide,” according to [FrameWorks Institute](#). “It directs people where to look, but more importantly, helps them interpret what they see. Every message—whether written, spoken, illustrated, or signed—is presented through a frame of some kind.”

The frame is what we’re emphasizing in the story we want to tell, and it is a key building block of narrative, along with messages. Because all frames reinforce or undermine some narrative, we use “frame” and “narrative frame” interchangeably.

Messages

Simply put, messages are the words and phrases we choose to place within a frame that will connect with our audiences to move them toward our goal. Messages are nested in frames that prime and reinforce narratives. Conversely, narratives are formed and solidified through frames and messages. Used effectively in concert, they can result in narrative change.

Mindset Segment

A mindset segment is a way of understanding our audiences outside of traditional differentiators like demography, partisanship, or geography. As such, our values-based mindset segments differ from traditional segmentations and surface the unique ways that a set of audiences think about housing affordability, rooted in values. In the context of this toolkit, those audiences were drawn from California voters.



Narrative Change

Narrative change is a set of strategies for shifting paradigms and discourse over time. The purpose of narrative change is to shift dominant narratives to make our ideas and values common sense or mainstream. Meaningful narrative change is not possible without real narrative power behind it.

According to Alan Jenkins, co-founder of [The Opportunity Agenda](#), “Narrative change is not about consensus on every policy detail, but rather agreement on the broad values, themes, and directions that the public discourse and public policy should take.”

Narrative Power

Narrative power is the ability to change the norms and rules our society lives by. [ReFrame](#) defines narrative power building as “the long-term effort of advancing, establishing, and reifying/defending narratives through a variety of strategies and tactics.” Narrative power is built through the practice of strategic communications.

Dr. Tiffany Manuel of [TheCaseMade](#) also defines narrative power as “the retelling of a story so that it calcifies and becomes hardwired into the meaning we make of ourselves, as well as the meaning we make of the world around us.”

Narrative Strategy

A practice of making decisions about how to harness the power of narrative to reach a policy goal, narrative strategy includes intentionally choosing how, when, and where to use narrative to help reach a particular set of advocacy goals.

Production, Preservation, Protection: 3 Ps of Housing

Housing advocates are advancing in concert a broad, thematic set of solutions:

- Production: Increase the supply of housing.
- Preservation: Keep our existing stock of homes affordable.
- Protection: Protect residents from displacement.

Strategic Communications

Strategic communications is defined by [ReFrame](#) as “consistently and persistently saying the right thing, to the right people, at the right time, to mobilize social power and advance your narrative, to accomplish short-term objectives and set up long-term victories.” Some key tactics used to deploy strategic communications include:

- **Op-Ed:** An opinion-driven feature of 600–750 words (traditionally run opposite the editorial page of a newspaper, but now also on digital platforms such as [Medium.com](#), or even as a blog post on an organization’s own website), [op-eds](#) can be a useful tool for advocates to make the case in your own words. They should convey a personal voice and clearly advance your point of view and key message. [See a sample here.](#)
- **Media Release:** A [media release or press release](#) is a short, compelling news story written by advocates to be sent to targeted members of the media. The goal of a press release is to pique the interest of a journalist or publication and convince them to cover your issue. The press release should contain all the essential information (who? what? where? when? how? and most importantly, why?) for the journalist to easily produce their own story. [See a sample here.](#)
- **Call/Door Script:** Despite the title, these tools are less a script and more like a conversation guide and talking points to support community organizers who might be canvassing a neighborhood in support of housing reforms, or volunteers who might be making phone calls to turn our supporters to an event.

Target Audiences

Target audiences are the specific sets of people you are trying to reach — the more specific the better. In advocacy, the target audience is often the people who have the power to make your goal a reality, such as city council members with the power to vote on a housing policy. Additional target audiences can include the specific groups or types of people who can persuade the decision maker.



Message Model: Values, Problem, Solution, Action

This message model draws from the [Opportunity Agenda's Values, Problem, Solution, Action \(VPSA\) approach](#).

The VPSA approach is a starting place for developing messages and talking points that are based in values and motivate your audiences. Building out your messages using this model can be a starting place to organize and refine your thinking about a project or campaign, as well as inform your external communications.

Be sure to draw from the [California Dream narrative key messages](#).

From the Opportunity Agenda

Values	Leading with values creates broad points of agreement and shared goals that will resonate with nearly any audience.
Problem	Being explicit about the problem, and how it threatens shared values, creates a sense of urgency and connects individual stories to broader systems and dynamics.
Solution	Offering a solution gives audiences a sense of hope and motivation. The best solutions are connected directly to the problem offered, and make clear where the responsibility for change lies.
Action	Assigning an action gives the audience a concrete next step that they can picture themselves doing, and creates a feeling of agency.



Sample VPSA message model for the California Dream narrative

<p>Values</p>	<p>Every Californian has the right to a decent place to live, regardless of race or income, so they can be part of our shared future.</p> <p>The California Dream of an inclusive, hopeful future must be open to people from all kinds of backgrounds and all walks of life.</p> <p>It's about time we redefine the American Dream, and we Californians are the right ones for the job.</p> <p>Californians know how to dream big, innovate, and lead the way.</p> <p>California values drive innovation, keep businesses and communities thriving, and bring our state's unique culture to life.</p>
<p>Problem</p>	<p>Rising housing costs are driving business, workers, and young people out of our communities. If we wait to take action, the problem will only get worse.</p>
<p>Solution</p>	<p>California must build communities where people from different incomes, beliefs, and backgrounds can live, work, and create together.</p> <p>Let's expand housing options right here, right now, to protect the good jobs, great schools, diverse communities, and unique opportunities that matter to our families and neighbors.</p>
<p>Action</p>	<p>Let's make sure all Californians have the right to a decent place to live, regardless of race or income, so they can be part of our shared future.</p> <p>Let's take bold action to solve one of the most urgent problems of our time and make sure everyone has a decent place to live.</p> <p>We know housing is a top priority for our community, and it's up to us to use our voices, our votes, and our dollars to make it a priority for lawmakers.</p>

See also a [sample VPSA message model from Yimby Action](#), to see what this model can look like in action.

Source: *The Opportunity Agenda's [Vision, Values, Voice Communications Toolkit](#)*





Template:

Op-Ed / Blog Post

Generating your own content with Op-Eds and blog posts is one powerful way to help shape the narrative and support specific advocacy goals. The byline for an Op-Ed can be an organization leader or other spokesperson; it can also be an impacted community member with first-hand experience of the issue.

This template can help you craft either an Op-Ed or a blog post. A common maximum word count for Op-Eds is 600 words. One way to start is by writing 100 words for each of the six sections of an Op-Ed, as outlined below.

Be sure to weave the [California Dream narrative key messages](#) into your writing; consistency of your message will help it to stick.

See also a [sample Op Ed from Housing California](#), to see what this model can look like in action.

The following Op-Ed structure is adapted from [The Op-Ed Project's Tips and Tricks](#).

Op-Ed Structure

- **Opening paragraph:** This is what grabs the reader’s attention, and should ideally be connected to a news hook or something else timely. ([Learn more about what makes a news hook.](#))
- **Thesis or argument:** Introduce the main argument by the second or third paragraph. (Don’t save it for the conclusion.)
- **First point:** The first bucket of evidence plus context to back up your argument. One approach is to provide two pieces of evidence (such as data points or a reputable study), along with context about why these are important and how they are connected to your argument.
- **Second point:** The second bucket of evidence plus context to back up your argument. One approach is to provide two pieces of evidence (such as data points or a reputable study) along with context about why these are important and how they are connected to your argument. (*A third point can be added if necessary or relevant, but keep the word count in mind.*)
- **“To Be Sure” paragraph:** Proactively preempt your likely critics. This can be by acknowledging any flaws in your argument or by referencing a common misconception or major opposing viewpoint. Then briefly state your counter-argument to provide clarity and help bring the reader along to your viewpoint.
- **Conclusion:** This often circles back to your thesis or main argument, restating a key message or talking point.

Things to keep in mind for submitting an Op-Ed:

- Decide in advance what newspaper or other media outlet you're ideally writing for, and have a backup in mind.
- Make sure you know the maximum word count before submitting; most newspapers are strict with this. Only submit an Op-Ed that is within the word count.
- Include a suggested title when you submit. Remember to keep it very short; you can look at recently published Op-Ed titles for examples of lengths.
- Consider contacting the Op-Ed editor in advance of writing to see if they are potentially interested in the topic you're writing about. This may help you to tailor the Op-Ed to what the editor is looking for in Op-Eds and what they're not interested in.
- [Learn more about pitching Op-Eds](#) (source: *The Op-Ed Project*)

Tips for creating a Blog Post:

- This model works for crafting a blog post as well, but you have more flexibility since this will likely live on your own website.
- You're not limited in length in a blog post the way that you are in an Op-Ed, but keep in mind that many readers may not read all the way to the end. Thus, make sure to emphasize your key points in the early paragraphs.
- The tone of a blog post can be more informal than an Op-Ed, depending on the voice of your organization and the audience for the blog post.
- Use plentiful subheads and short paragraphs to keep the reader's eye moving through the post.
- Be prolific in linking to background information, especially to content on your own website, partner websites, and relevant news coverage.
- Once you've published the blog post, make sure to promote it widely on your social media channels.
- Blog posts can also be shared with reporters as additional analysis on an issue they may be covering.



Template: Media Release

The best use of a press release is to announce something new to reporters. If you want to provide comment on something that is currently being covered in the news or that will be covered (such as a hearing on legislation that has previously been in the news), consider releasing a short statement or quick quote rather than a full press release.

See also a [sample press release from cityLAB at UCLA](#) for a look at how housing advocates can build in the California Dream narrative frame. Be sure to weave in the [California Dream narrative key messages](#); consistent uses of the messages will help them stick.

Press release tips:

- Keep in mind that shorter is better for reporters, who are stretched increasingly thin as newsrooms continue to shrink. Utilize links to background information as a way to help keep things short.
- Emphasize and lead with what is newsworthy (things that are new, different, timely, etc) and the main point.
- A press release is an opportunity to help advance narrative. To do so, be intentional, strategic, and weave in your key messages or talking points connected to the larger narrative.

Press Release Template

For Immediate Release: [DATE]

Media Contact: [Name, email, phone]

Title

[title should be short and emphasize what is new, different, newsworthy to reporters who would potentially cover this]

Today [name of organization or coalition] [announced, released, launched] [short description of what is being announced, etc.].

[Brief explanation of why this is timely, relevant, important. For example, if there is an upcoming hearing on a policy the press release is focused on, include that here.]

[Quote 1: Quotes should be a maximum of 3 succinct sentences so that they are quotable for reporters, and ideally include your main messages or talking points in order to reinforce the larger narrative.]

[Key points or evidence broken into separate paragraphs: This is to provide evidence, context or important data points, along with context about why these are important and how they are connected to your argument.]

[Bullet pointed lists are an additional way to provide a succinct spotlight on items that you want to draw a reporter's attention to.]

Key findings include:

- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 1
- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 2
- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 3
- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 4
- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 5
- Data / evidence, key point, or finding 6

[Quote 2: For a press release on a coalition effort, you may want to include a quote from a partner organization. Press release quotes can also be from a third party validator or someone from an impacted community. Again, quotes are the prime place to echo key messages that reinforce the larger narrative.]

[Background information: An overview of any background information can go here, and can include links to additional information.]

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[Brief two to three sentence overview of the organization or coalition, often referred to as boilerplate language or an elevator message, similar to what is found on the "About Us" section of an organization's website.]

