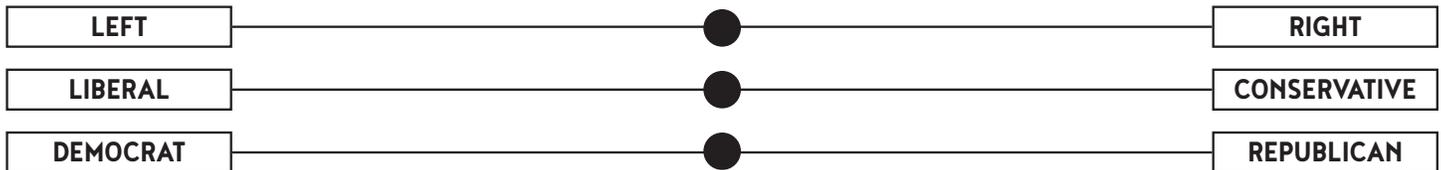


HOW TO FRAME THE CONFLICT

THE DOMINANT PARADIGM

LEFT/RIGHT POLARIZATION

Today the central conflict in the United States is typically framed as one between “left” and “right.” Related to this frame are the labels liberal and conservative, and the party identifications Democrat and Republican.



This is an inherited frame; we may repeat it daily, but we probably never consciously decided to use it, and it is worth re-examining. Here’s why. People’s position on the left vs. right spectrum tends to be fixed. Most individuals know where they stand in relation to these labels. The most common positions are to identify as a liberal, a conservative, a “centrist,” or to feel alienated from the entire framework.

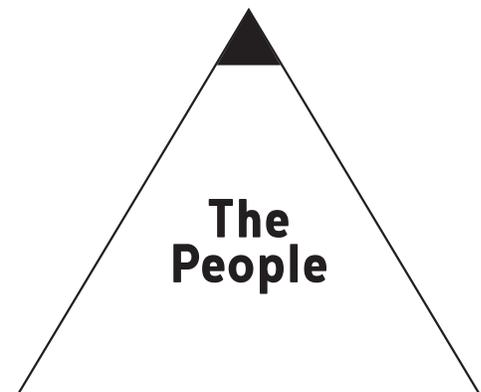
If persuasion is our goal, using language that invokes left vs. right polarization is usually a non-starter. For example, if we are knocking doors to try to persuade people to vote for the Democratic Party candidate in a Congressional race, our use of labels like left, liberal, and Democrat will only appeal to the people who already identify positively with those labels. This may work for motivating the “usual suspects” to turn out to vote, but it is a dead end if we’re aiming to persuade people who do not presently identify with those labels.

THE ALTERNATIVE

THE ALTERNATIVE: BOTTOM/TOP POLARIZATION

We’re living in what political scientists call a *crisis of legitimacy*, where political authority has lost credibility with a large majority of the populace. Millions of voters and potential voters feel alienated from politics. The dominant story that the political establishment has been telling rings hollow. In such a context, messages that name culprits at the top (e.g., those responsible for the 2008 financial meltdown) resonate. We also have the opportunity in this context to articulate new premises for popular solidarity: a revived sense of *We The People*.

The Elite /
The Corrupt Establishment



WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

WE DON'T SAY:

“We need a blue wave.”

WE DON'T SAY:

“We’re pulling the Democratic Party to the left.”

WE DO SAY:

“We need candidates with the courage to take on a corrupt political establishment. We need candidates who will stand up to Wall Street and fight for everyday working people.”