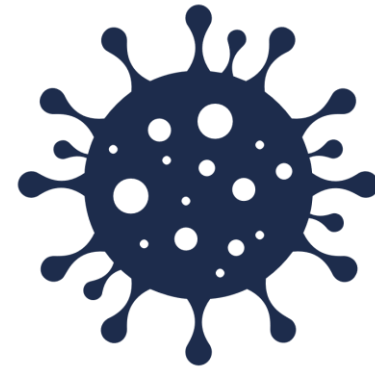


# Emerging Leaders in Public Health Convening - Session 4.1

## Public Health Messaging Across the Political Divide in the Time of COVID



November 16, 2020  
2pm – 5 pm EST



# COVID Messaging in a Difficult Communications Environment

**Gene W. Matthews**

Network for Public Health Law  
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[dhunter@networkforphl.org](mailto:dhunter@networkforphl.org)



**Barbara Alvarez Martin**

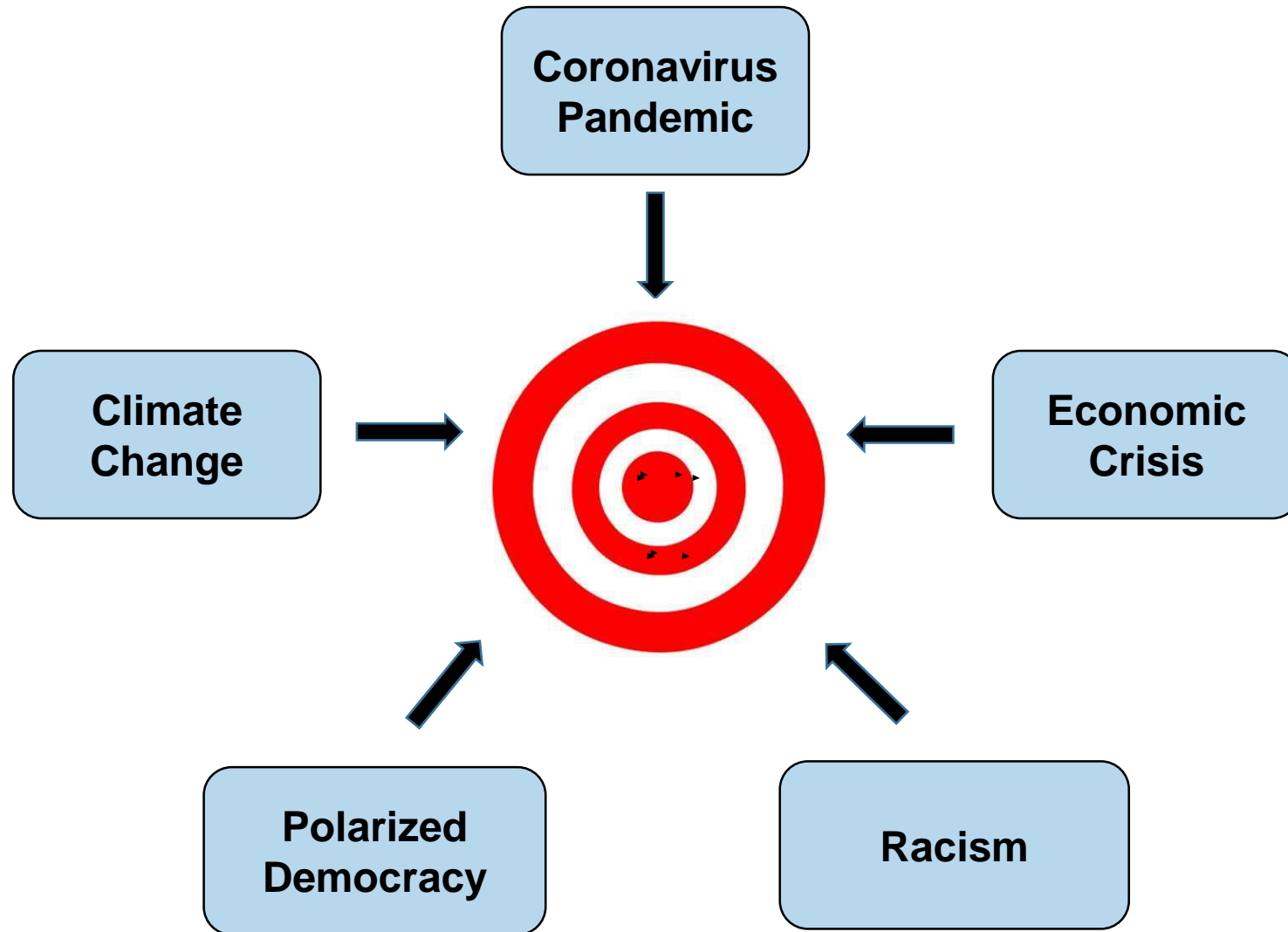
UNC Lineberger Comprehensive  
Cancer Center, UNC-Chapel Hill

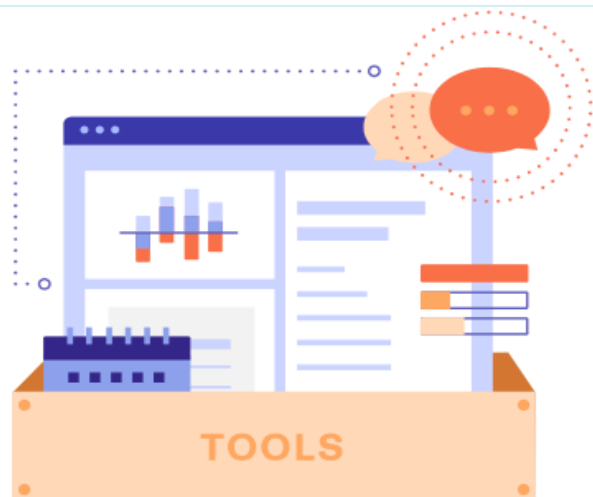
[bamartin@unc.edu](mailto:bamartin@unc.edu)



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# PHRASES Toolkit

Evidence-based tools and strategies to help public health professionals communicate more effectively. Get framing recommendations, sample emails, answers to tough questions, tested messaging, and more.

[Get Started](#)

Strategic Messaging

Stories from the Field

Sample Documents

Resource Library

<https://www.phrases.org/>

# Becoming Better Messengers

Effective messaging of public health challenges and interventions is essential to public health practice and especially to implementing public health laws and policies in a polarized political environment. It is easy for public health leaders to become consumed with the ongoing political and resource shifts taking place in public health and health care. However, it is also clear that those in public health, at all levels, want to engage more deeply and meaningfully with communities of all backgrounds who are burdened by poor health.

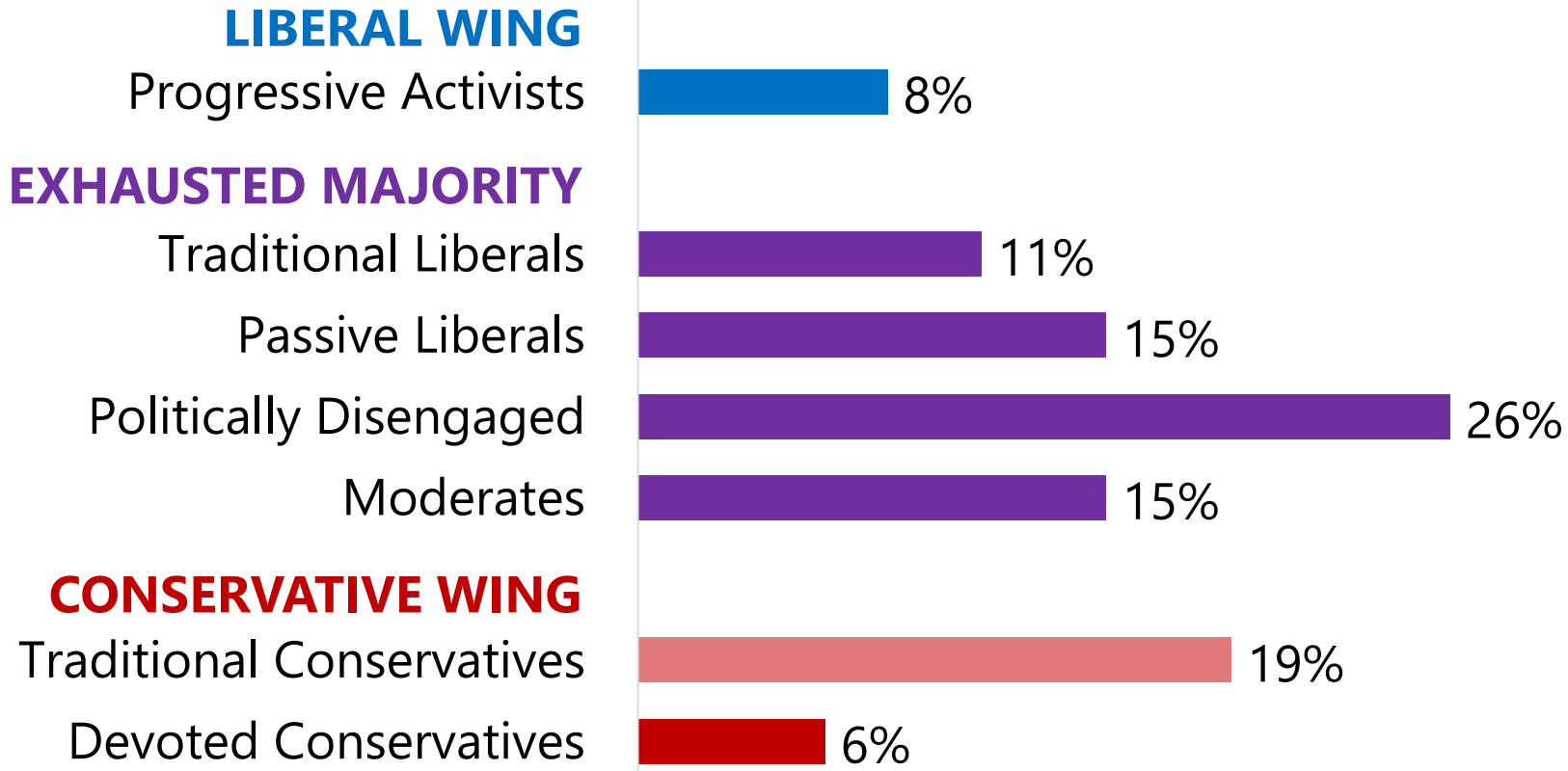


<https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/topics/trainings/becoming-better-messengers/>

# The Hidden Tribes of America

**14% of America, roughly 1/2 left and 1/2 right, consistently shouts, posts and votes**

**while 67% of us are exhausted**



*Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape* Source: October 2018 by More In Common. Chart: Adapted from Axios Visuals 10/17/2018

# BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH RISES SHARPLY

In a new national poll, voters across the country express support for the important work of public health departments and the role they play in keeping communities healthier and safer.



de Beaumont

## MORE VOTERS SAY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL

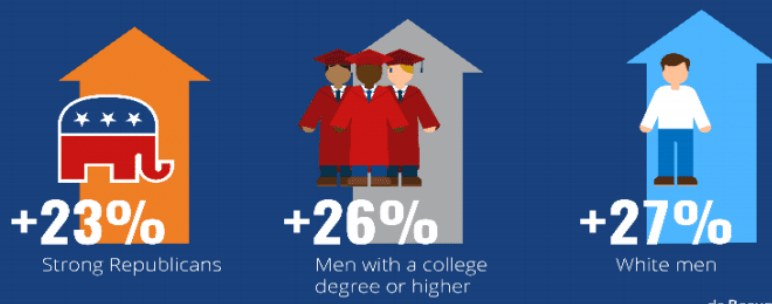
**7 in 10** voters say public health departments are important to create a healthy community.



**!** In 2018, only 5 in 10 voters agreed.

de Beaumont

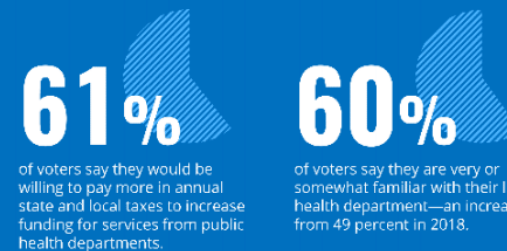
The growth was highest among...



de Beaumont

## VOTERS REPORT BEING MORE FAMILIAR WITH THEIR PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS AND ARE WILLING TO PAY MORE IN STATE AND LOCAL TAXES FOR THEM

Over the past two years, voters have continued to recognize the role of public health departments in their counties, cities, and towns.



de Beaumont



## VOTERS VALUE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Americans continue to support a full range of services to improve community health. The services that are most valued are:

- Help stop the spread of communicable diseases like ebola or the flu (82%)
- Support women and children's health (82%)
- Reach out to people at greatest risk for poor health outcomes (80%)
- Ensure environmental health (78%)
- Work together with the broader healthcare system to address issues before they become health crises (77%)
- Provide non-biased information on how to respond to a crisis (76%)

de Beaumont

Visit [www.debeaumont.org/2020poll](http://www.debeaumont.org/2020poll) to see the full poll details and learn more about the need for public health funding.

de Beaumont  
BOLD SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES.

Figures represent the percentage of voters who rated the service between 8 and 10, with 10 being the most important.

Poll methodology: Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national telephone survey among 11-800 registered voters July 7-13, 2020. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3.46%.

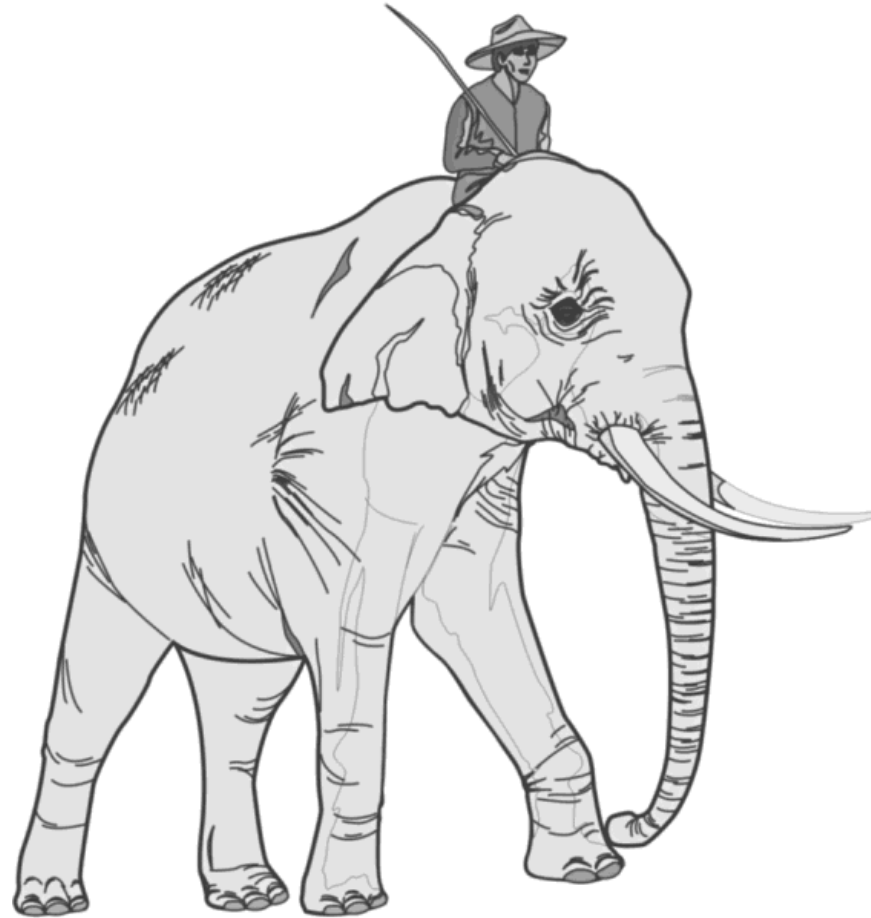
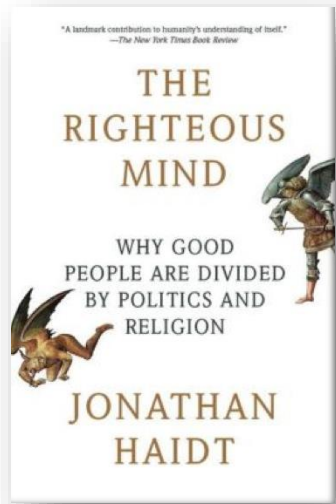
[https://www.debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/dbf-public-health-infographic-083120-2\\_dbf-pubhealth-support-infographic.png](https://www.debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/dbf-public-health-infographic-083120-2_dbf-pubhealth-support-infographic.png)



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# Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second



## Moral Foundations Theory

Understanding evolutionary moral psychology

Social and political judgments are particularly intuitive

90% = Intuitive Elephant

10% = Rational Brain



# We resonate differently to six foundational moral values



## 1. Care / Harm

**Compassion for the vulnerable;  
Intolerance of suffering**



## 2. Liberty / Oppression

**Free choices & actions;  
Social intolerance of bullies**



## 3. Fairness / Cheating

**People treated fairly, get what they deserve;  
Social intolerance of "free-riders"**



## 4. Loyalty / Betrayal

**Personal trust, group identity  
Social isolation for those who betray**



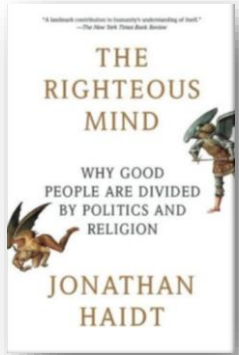
## 5. Authority / Subversion

**Competitive advantage of organized groups;  
Intolerance of those who subvert system**



## 6. Sanctity / Degradation

**Part of human spirit is elevated & pure;  
Aversion to personal degradation**



# Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)

**Care**

---

Harm

**Liberty**

---

Oppression

**Fairness**

---

Cheating

**Loyalty**

---

Betrayal

**Authority**

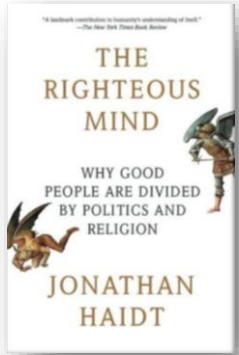
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Subversion

**Sanctity**

---

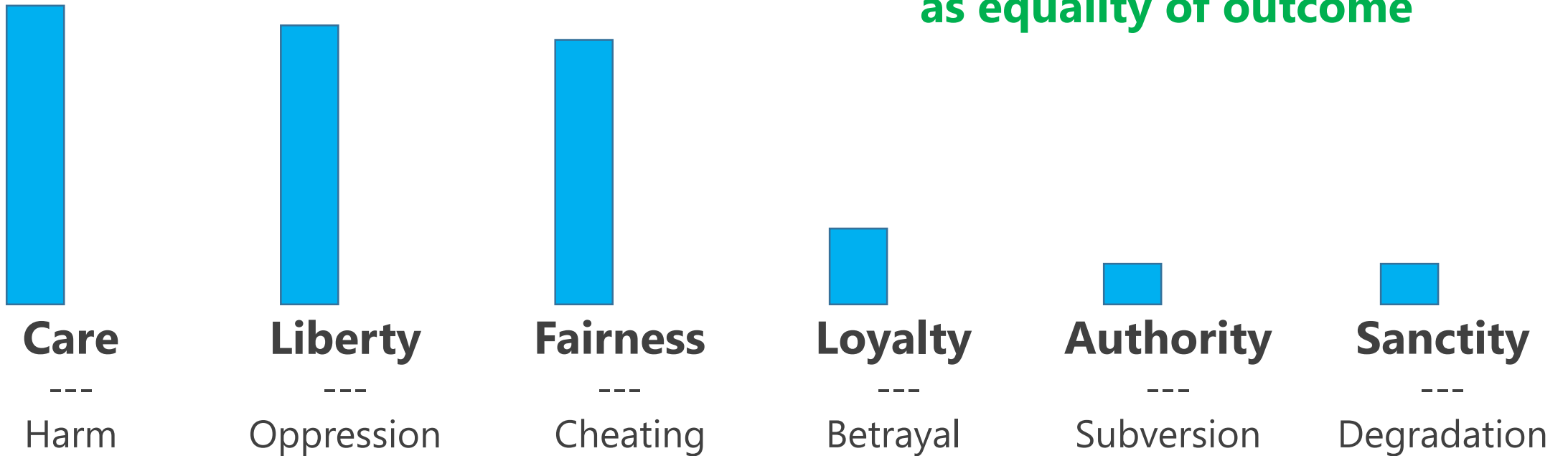
Degradation

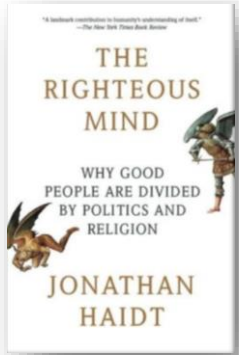


# The Liberal Moral Matrix

*Help those in need!*

Heavy on caring for the weak,  
preventing harm;  
focused on rights & fairness  
as equality of outcome



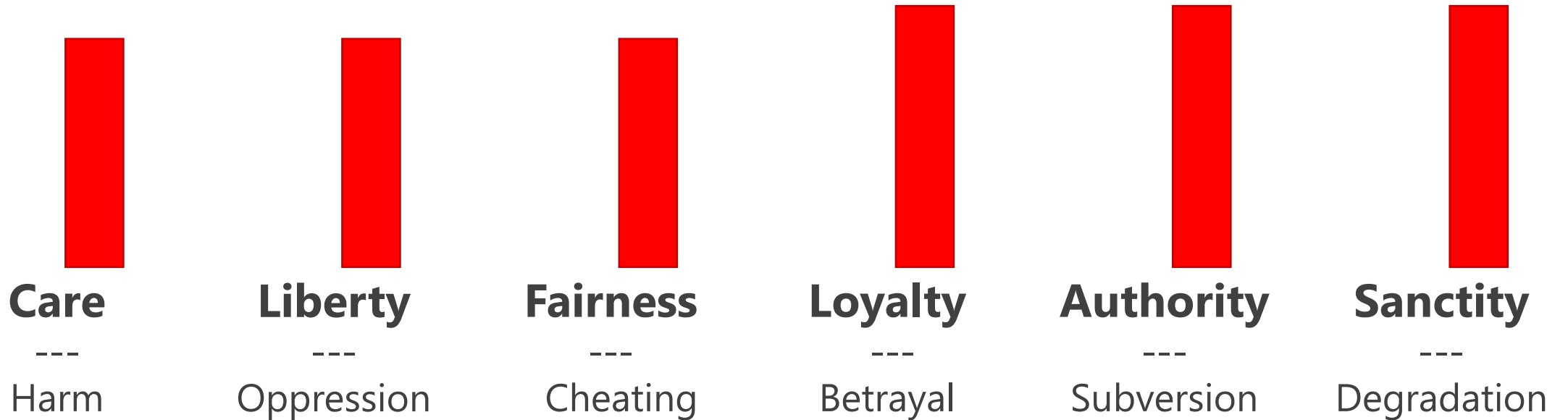


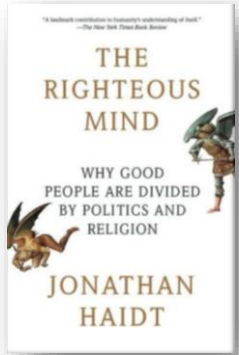
# The Conservative Moral Matrix

Includes first three (as equality of opportunity), but even more on the three “institutional” values.

*Help those in need!*

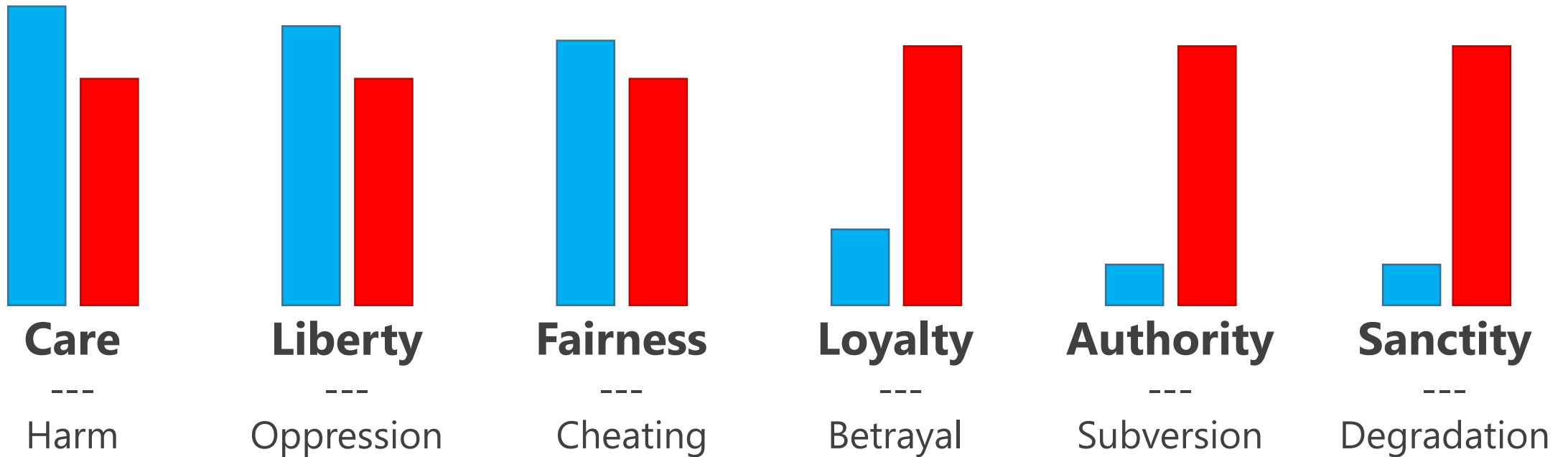
*Preserve norms and treasured institutions!*





# Haidt calls this the “Conservative Advantage”

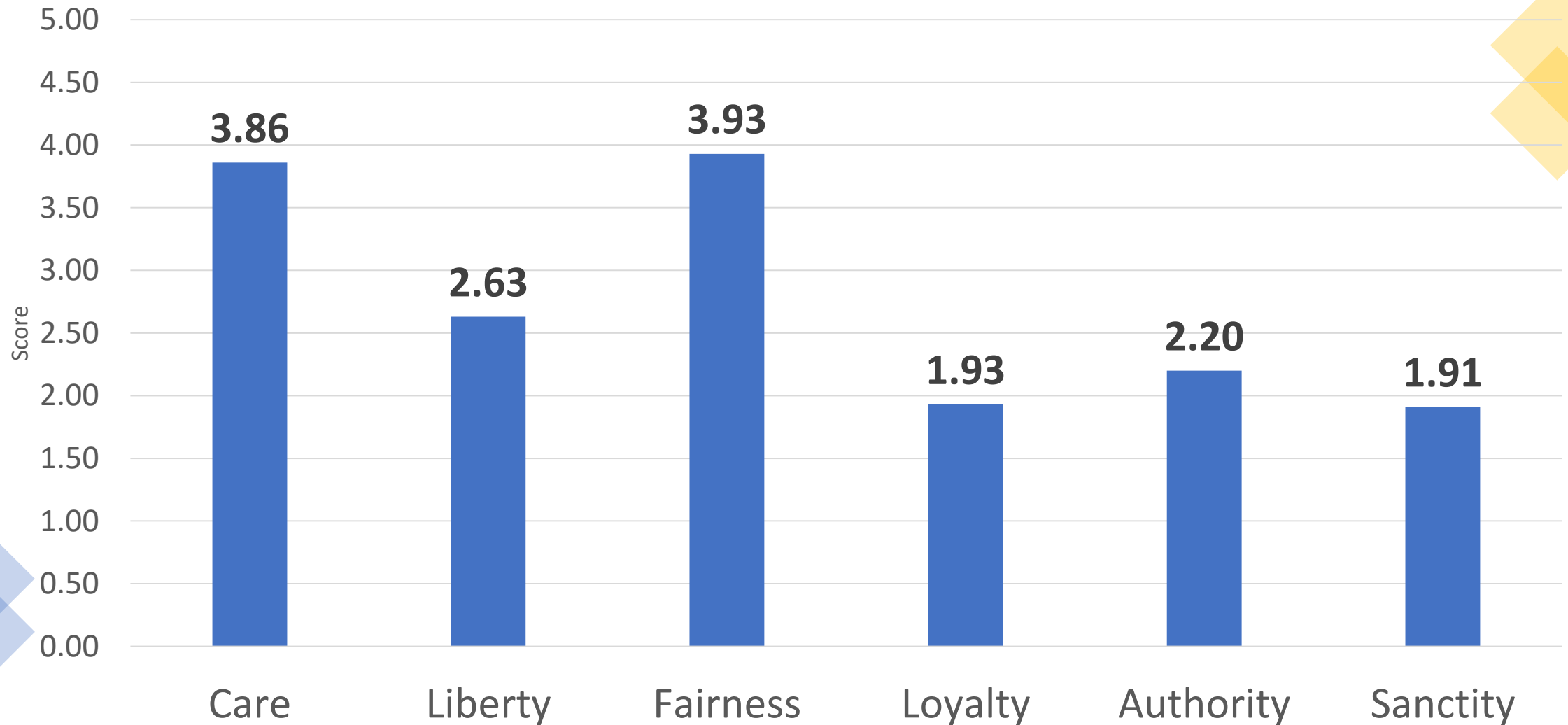
This framework gives us insight into a significant “Public Health Advantage” at this moment



# Moral Foundations Profile: U.S. Public Health (n=248)

Responses submitted: July 29 - Nov. 15, 2020

## Respondents' Average Score, by Moral Foundation

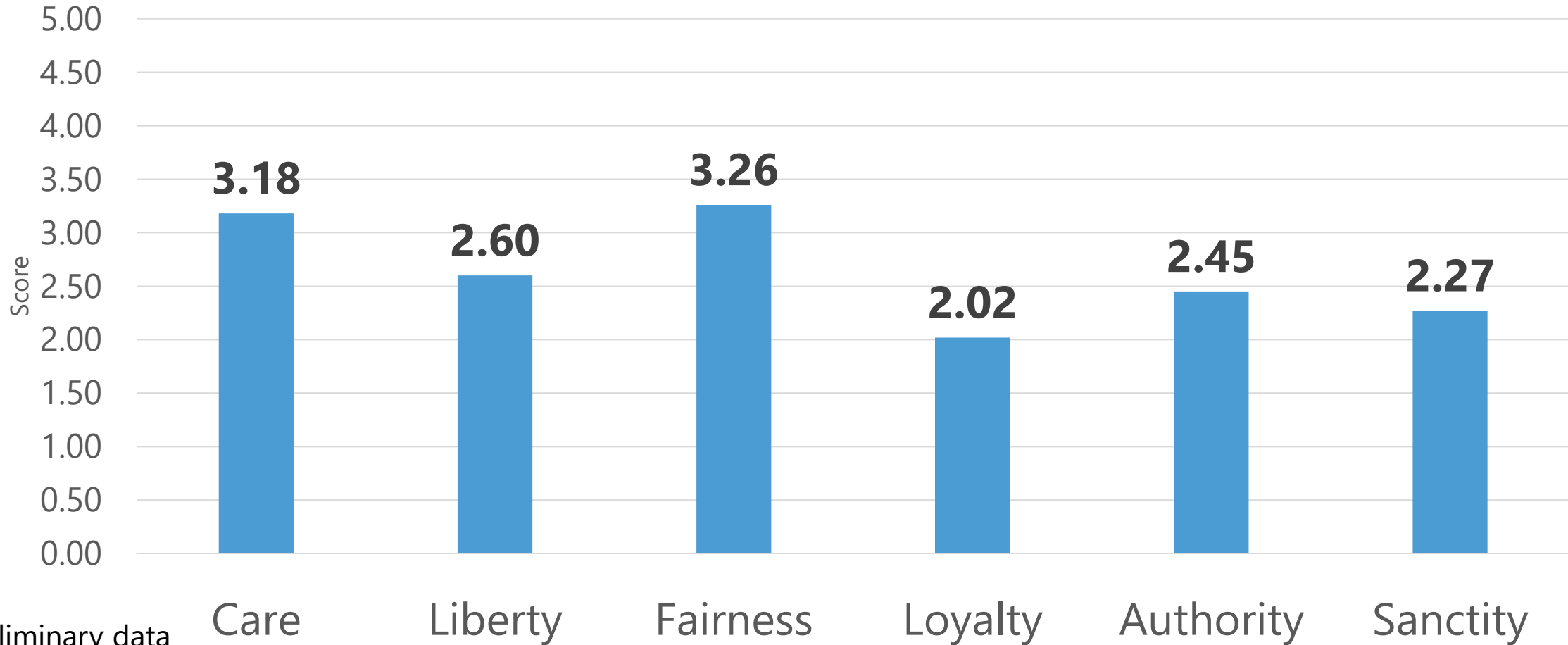


# Moral Foundations Profile: NC PH Leadership Conference (n=116)

Responses submitted: January 23 – February 14, 2020

THE  
N

## Respondents' Average Score\*, by Moral Foundation



\* Preliminary data



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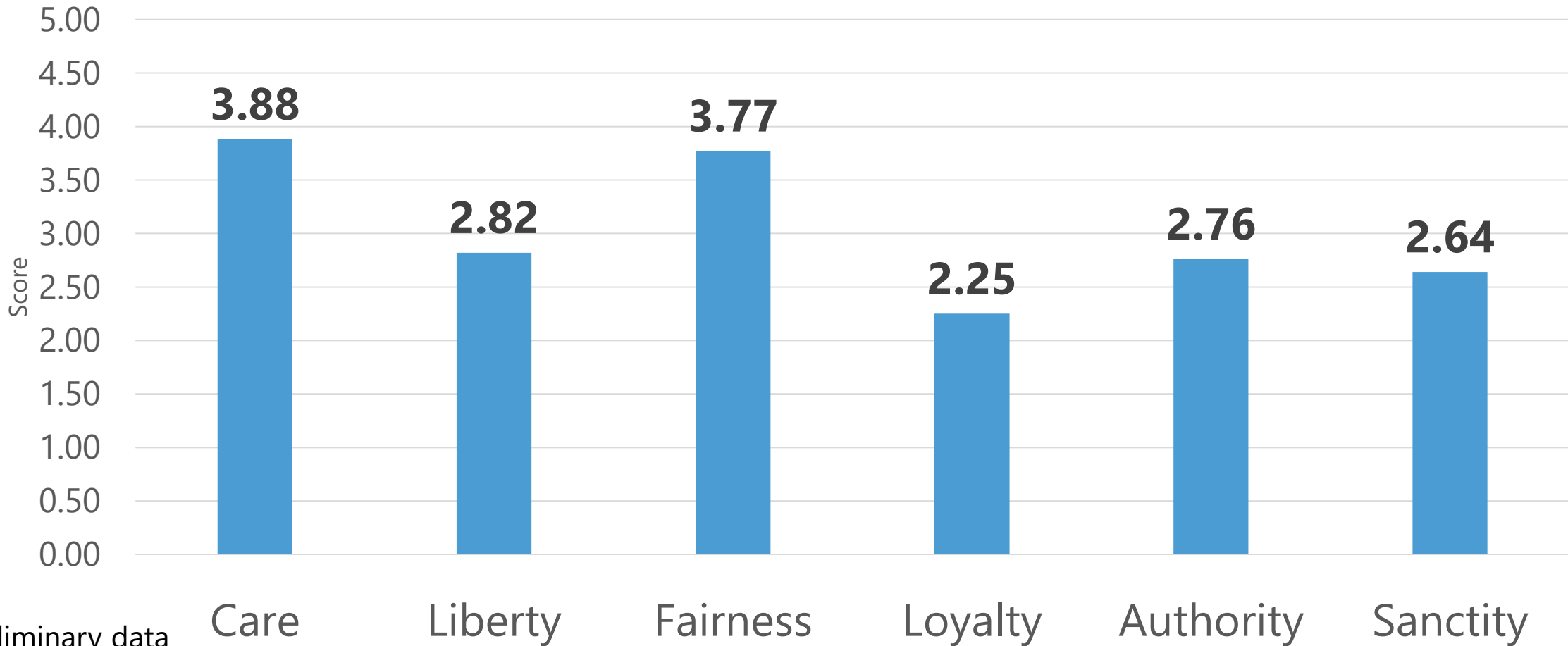
The Network  
for Public Health Law

# Moral Foundations Profile: NC Public Health (n=125)

Responses submitted: September 4 - October 20, 2020



## Respondents' Average Score\*, by Moral Foundation



\* Preliminary data



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North Carolina Institute for Public Health



**The Network**  
for Public Health Law



# Consider Knowledge vs. Self-Awareness

**Self Aware** *or* **Not Aware**

**What I Don't Know**

*or*

**What I Do Know**

"I'm aware I do NOT know this"

"I'm not aware what I don't know"

"I know this"

**"I was NOT aware I KNEW this!"**

**Sometimes you can surprise yourself!**



# Public Health resonates with all six MFT values

## “The Public Health Advantage”



1. Care



Care



2. Liberty



Social justice



3. Fairness



Equity



4. Loyalty

**The heart of Public Health:** Community coalitions

5. Authority

**Public Health is a police power:** Quarantine, food inspection, etc.



6. Sanctity

**The nobility of Public Health:** When others are running away from the fire, we run towards Ebola

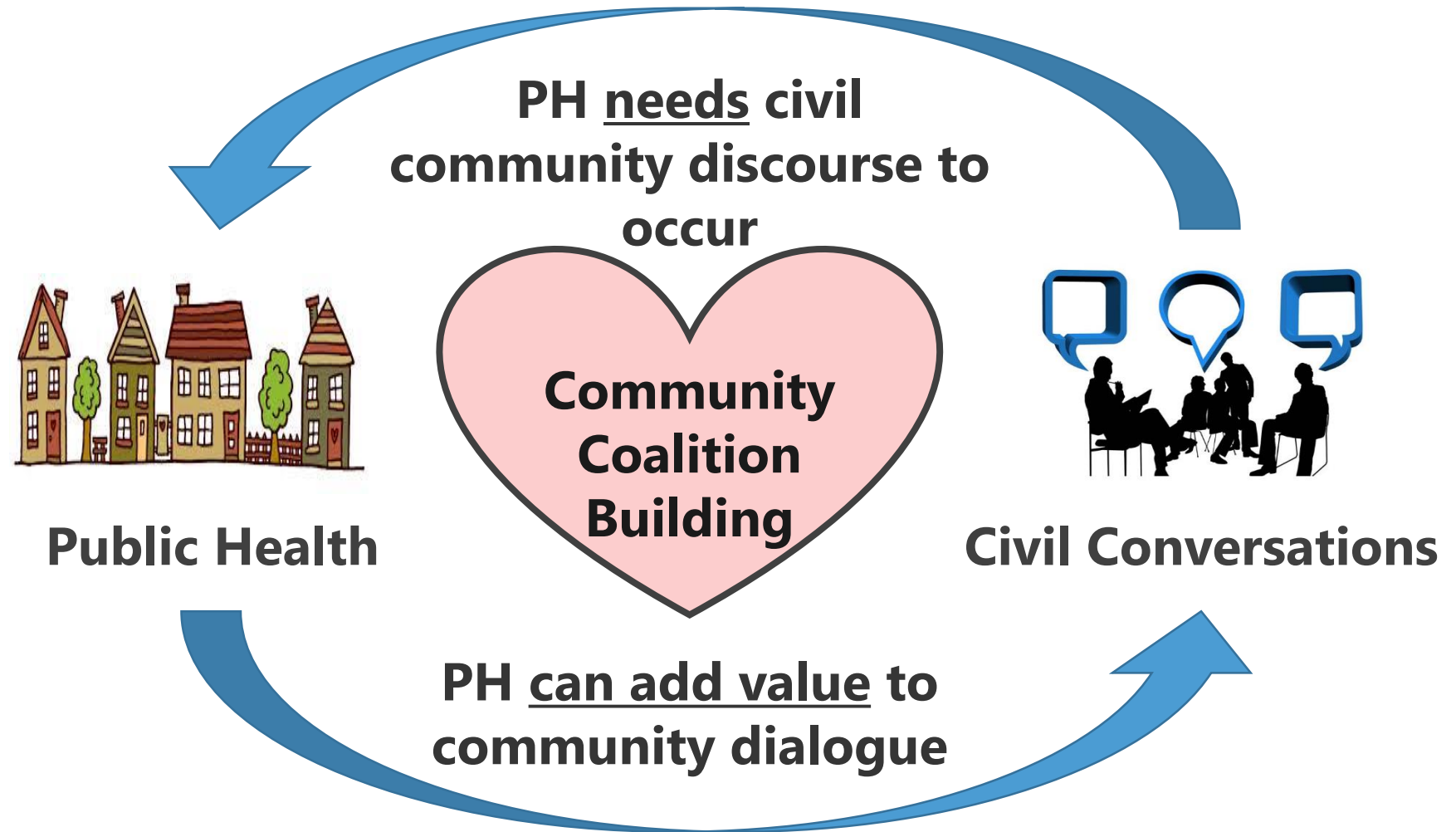
# Public Health & Civil Discourse

Public health has the breadth of moral values and can use them in a way:

➤ People across the political spectrum can feel safe engaging in relationships with us to improve their communities

...AND...

➤ Civil discourse is vital to the heart of public health



# But What if the Discourse... Looks Like This?

COVID-19 is also a public health communications crisis.

How can public health leaders gain trust and meet people where they are?



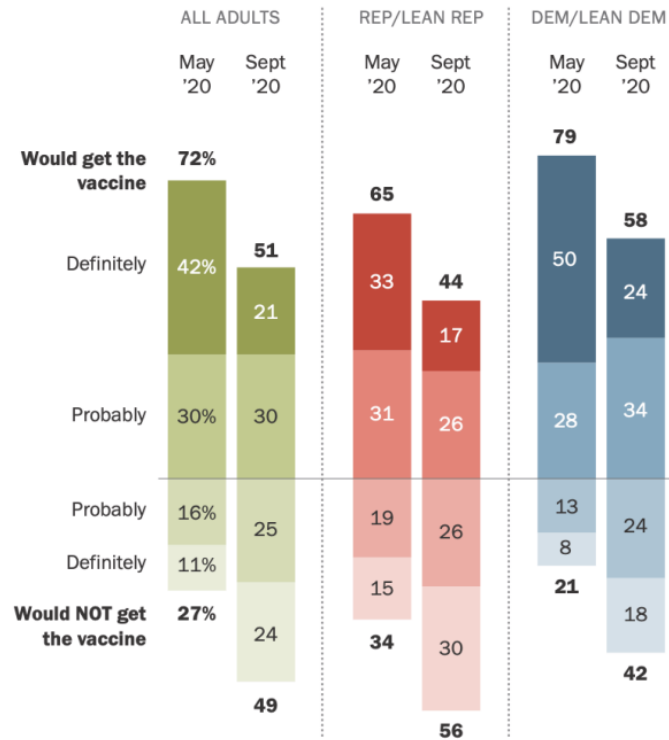
# U.S. Public Now Divided Over Whether To Get COVID-19 Vaccine

Concerns about the safety and effectiveness of possible vaccine, pace of approval process

BY ALEC TYSON, COURTNEY JOHNSON AND CARY FUNK

## Drop in share of Americans who say they would get a COVID-19 vaccine if it were available to them today

% of U.S. adults who say if a vaccine to prevent COVID-19 were available today, they ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.  
 Source: Survey conducted Sept. 8-13, 2020.  
 "U.S. Public Now Divided Over Whether To Get COVID-19 Vaccine"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/09/17/u-s-public-now-divided-over-whether-to-get-covid-19-vaccine/>

# Both Republicans and Democrats cite masks as a negative effect of COVID-19, but for very different reasons

BY PATRICK VAN KESSEL AND DENNIS QUINN

## Republicans mention masks or mask wearing more often than Democrats when asked how COVID-19 pandemic has made their life difficult or challenging

In an open ended question, % in each group who mentioned the following words or terms



31% of references to masks express concern that others are not wearing masks or taking the pandemic seriously (just 5% for Rep/Lean Rep)

27% of references to masks express skepticism about masks and/or the severity of the pandemic in general (just 3% for Dem/Lean Dem)

Note: Each list contains the 10 words or phrases that appeared in the most survey responses from members of each party. Terms have been reduced to their root form (e.g., "wearing masks" to "wear mask"), and 339 common English words (e.g., "and," "from") were excluded.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/29/both-republicans-and-democrats-cite-masks-as-a-negative-effect-of-covid-19-but-for-very-different-reasons/>

# Empathy is Key

Empathy helps us:

- Build relationships
- Reframe and connect
- Become trusted messengers

*“Empathy is not simply a matter of trying to imagine what others are going through, but **having the will to muster enough courage to do something about it. In a way, empathy is predicated upon hope.**”*

— **Cornel West**



# What Can We Do?



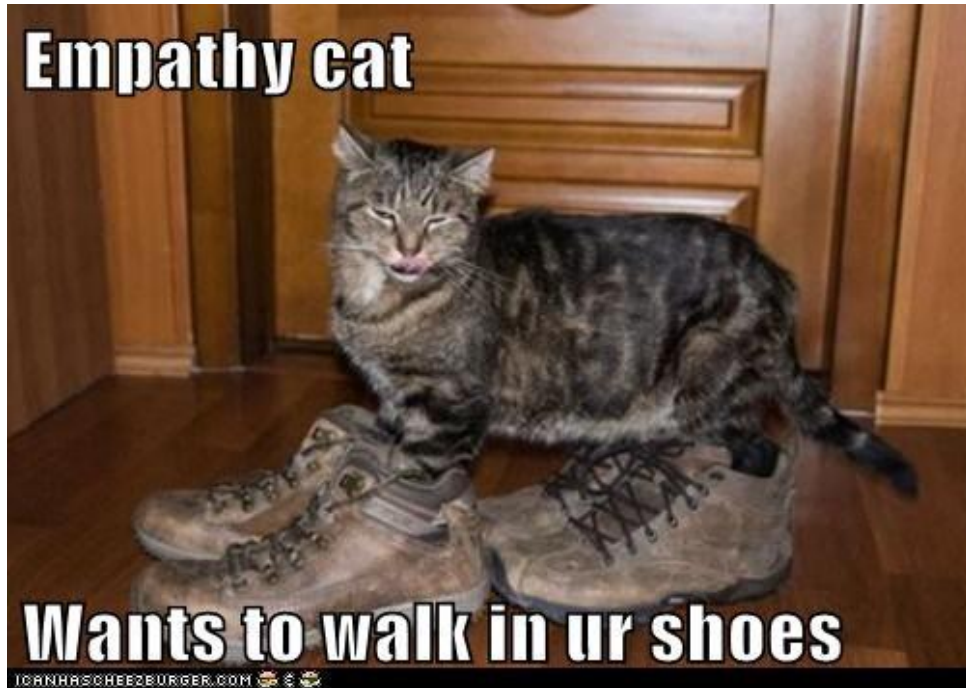
## **Be Candid and Look to Connect**

- State my position clearly
- Explain/advocate my position
- What data and interpretations informed it?
- \_\_\_ data leads me to believe that \_\_\_ is the best option.

## **Be Humble and Curious**

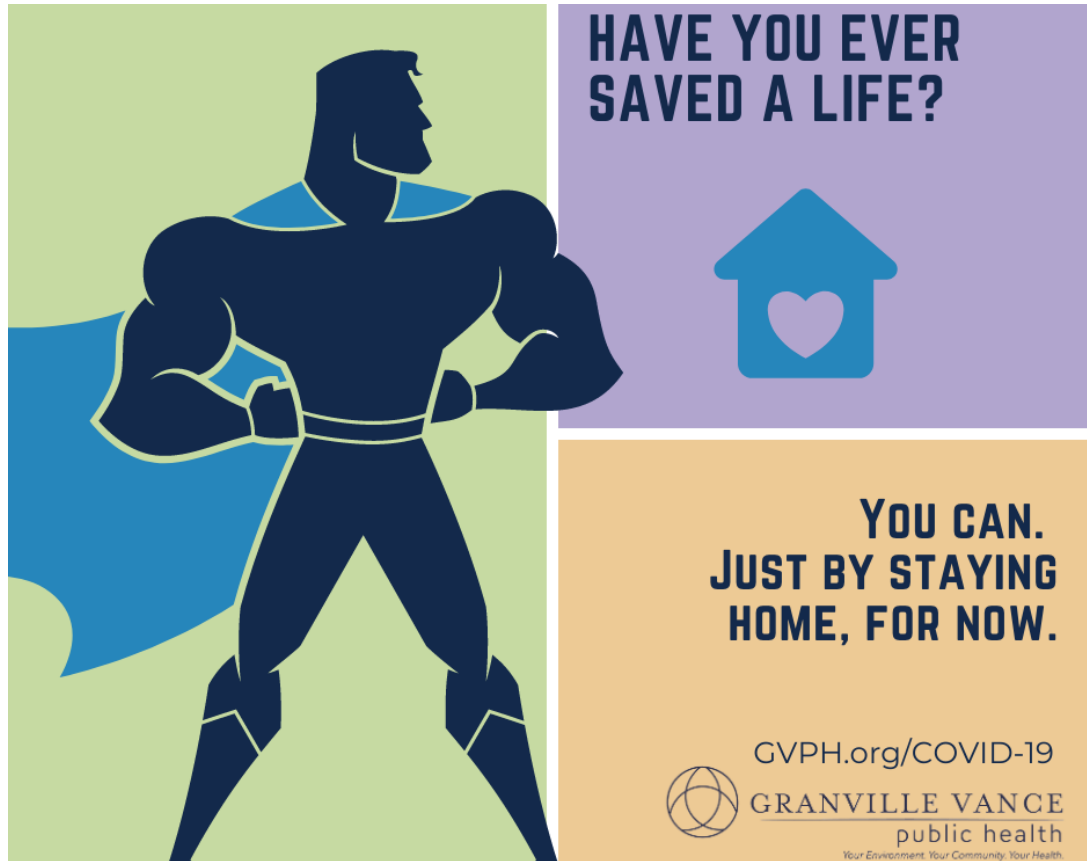
- What's your perspective?
- Test my position – what am I missing?
- Tell me more about that.
- Can you give me an example?

# Empathetic Messaging for COVID-19

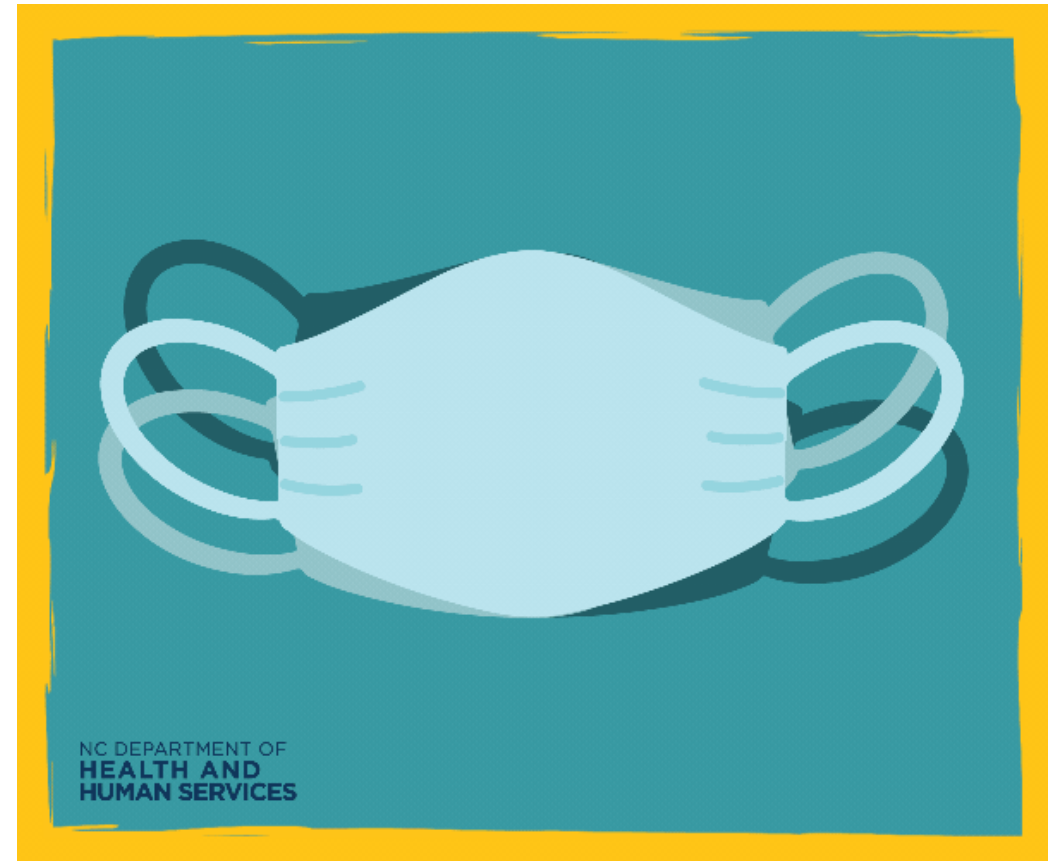




# Empathetic Messages Bridge Divides



Granville Vance Public Health social media campaign collaboration with North Carolina Institute for Public Health



NCDHHS' COVID-19 Response website:  
<https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/ncdhhs-response-covid-19>



# DEEPER TRAINING

New opportunities for skill-building training for our workforce on these deeper values

Ability to frame individual issues to resonate with each of the 6 foundational values

Useful both to frontline PH workers in the community AND to leadership officials advocating to decision-makers for law & policy change

Six Intuitive Foundational Moral Values Adapted from: Haidt, <i>The Righteous Mind</i> , Vintage Books (2012)	
Moral Foundation	Your Public Health Message
<b>1. Care</b> (pairs with Harm) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</li> <li>(Security, Shelter, Food, Water, Warmth)</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Liberty</b> (pairs with Oppression) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical and Mental Freedom</li> <li>Social Intolerance of <u>Bullies</u></li> </ul>	
<b>3. Fairness</b> (pairs with Cheating) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equality of Opportunities</li> <li>Social Intolerance of "<u>Free-Riders</u>"</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Loyalty</b> (pairs with Betrayal) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal Trust, Group Identity, Patriotism</li> <li>Social isolation of those who <u>betray</u></li> </ul>	
<b>5. Authority</b> (pairs with Subversion) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive advantage of organized groups</li> <li>Deference to "good" leaders (Alexander the Great)</li> <li>Social intolerance of those who <u>subvert</u> the system</li> </ul>	
<b>6. Sanctity</b> (pairs with Degradation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not simply a religious value</li> <li>Respect for the human spirit</li> <li>Social aversion of personal <u>degradation</u></li> </ul>	

# Six Intuitive Foundational Moral Values

## CORONAVIRUS WORKSHEET

### Moral Foundation

### Your Public Health Message

#### 1. Care (pairs with Harm)

- Reflects the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Security, Shelter, Food, Water, Warmth)

- Protect yourself and others**
- Help those most vulnerable**
- Public health can assist you**
- Stay healthy and safe**

#### 2. Liberty (pairs with Oppression)

- Physical and Mental Freedom
- Social Intolerance of Bullies

- Coronavirus can threaten our safety and freedom**
- We want our community to be free from fear of contagion**
- The quicker we beat this, the quicker we recover and return to normal**

#### 3. Fairness (pairs with Cheating)

- Equality of Opportunities
- Social Intolerance of "Free-Riders"

- Everyone has an interest in beating his outbreak**
- Those at home all need to have resources to stay there**
- Infection does not discriminate**
- We have an interest in everyone getting appropriate care**

Moral Foundations	Your Public Health Message
<p><b>4. Loyalty</b> (pairs with Betrayal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Trust, Group Identity, Patriotism</li> <li>• Social isolation of those who <u>betray</u></li> </ul>	<p><b>-Do your part, wash your hands and don't be a risk to others</b></p> <p><b>-We need to protect our community</b></p> <p><b>-Limited resources should go first to responders, HCW's and those caring for us.</b></p> <p><b>-I'm loyal to you and want to keep you safe</b></p>
<p><b>5. Authority</b> (pairs with Subversion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive advantage of organized groups</li> <li>• Deference to "good" leaders</li> <li>• Social intolerance of those who <u>subvert</u> the system</li> </ul>	<p><b>-Scientific evidence and common sense: protective measures work</b></p> <p><b>-Listen to your local public health official</b></p> <p><b>-Respect HCW's and the risks they are taking</b></p> <p><b>-Quarantine and social distancing may be necessary</b></p> <p><b>-Be a good role model for others</b></p>
<p><b>6. Sanctity</b> (pairs with Degradation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not simply a religious value</li> <li>• Respect for the human spirit</li> <li>• Social aversion of personal <u>degradation</u></li> </ul>	<p><b>-Public health does not run, it stands by your community</b></p> <p><b>-Support those taking risks to care for your loved ones</b></p> <p><b>-Look for ways to serve others</b></p> <p><b>-Help nurture the spirits of those needing comfort</b></p> <p><b>-Be willing to sacrifice your wants for community needs</b></p>

# Centering Equity in Public Health Messaging

- The WHAT and the WHY
- Audience considerations
- Creating a narrative
- Other language considerations
- Engaging the community

# The WHAT and the WHY

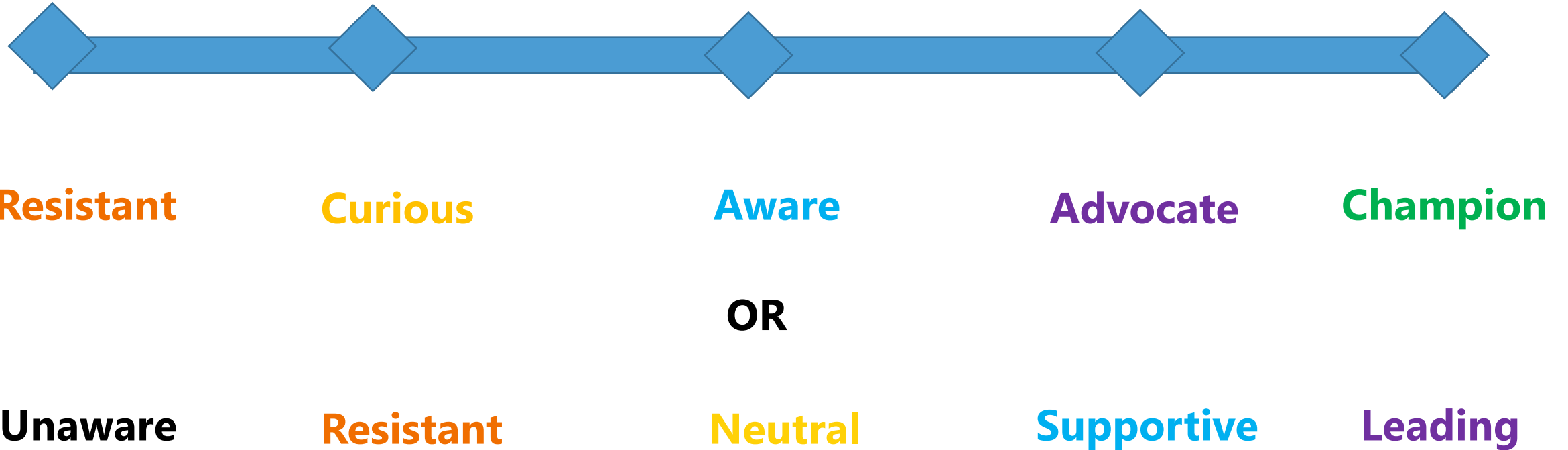
- **What does it mean to center equity?**
  - Focusing on equity in the **CONTENT** of the message
  - Focusing on equity as an **OUTCOME** of the message
- **Why should we center equity?**
  - Share solutions that ensure that everyone has what they need in the way they need to have the best health possible
  - Normalize conversations about what leads to differences in health outcomes

## Naming and Framing...

*We can't get to the America we want without talking about racial equity, structural racism, and racial and ethnic discrimination. But if communications aren't framed carefully they can reinforce misconceptions about people of color and set back change.*

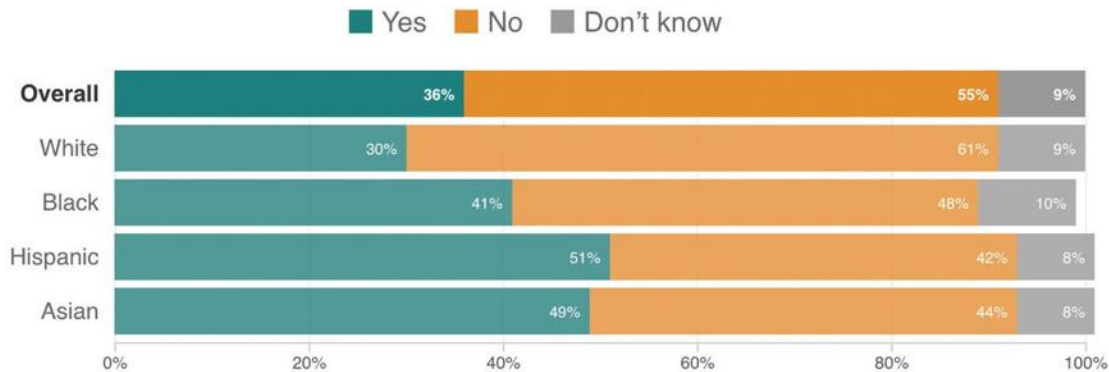
**FRAME  
WORKS**

# Audience Considerations



# Audience Considerations

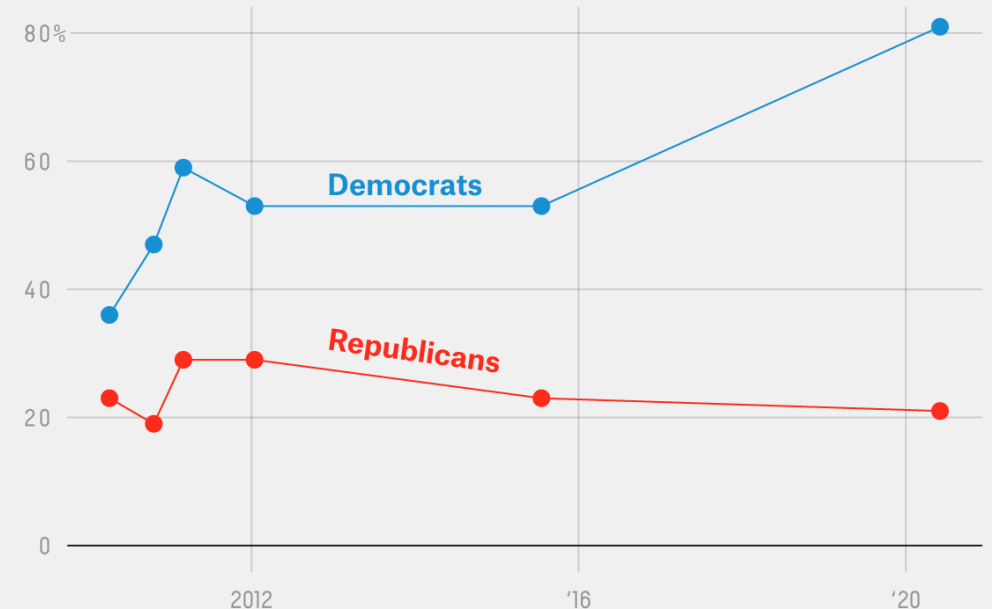
Since the death of George Floyd in May, have you personally taken any actions to better understand racial issues in America?



NPR, August 27, 2020, <https://n.pr/3iQ6ga4>

## Democrats and Republicans split on systemic racism

Share of respondents who think that white people have a better chance of getting ahead in today's society than black people, by party



FiveThirtyEight

SOURCE: CBS NEWS POLLS

FiveThirtyEight, June 17, 2020, <https://53eig.ht/3dtnE3d>



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North Carolina Institute for Public Health





# Audience Considerations

Assume most of us want the same things...

...racial equity

...health equity

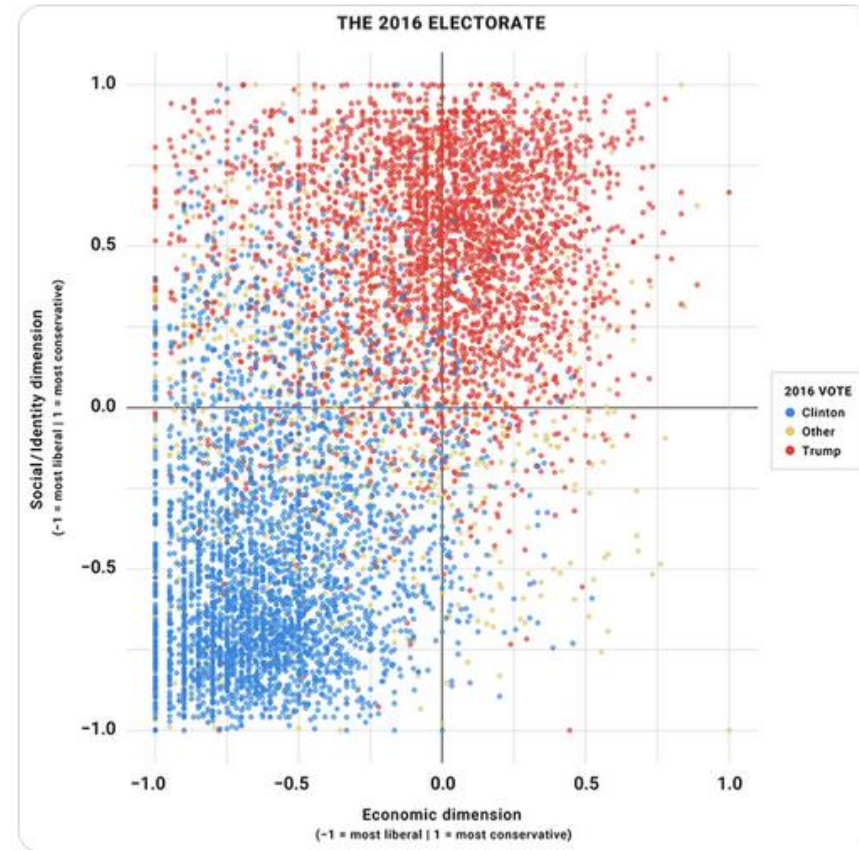
...economic stability

How do different groups define these concepts? What language resonates?



Lee Drutman  
@leedrutm

If you are trying to make sense of Florida's vote to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour AND reelect Trump, I'd like to remind of the upper-left hand quadrant of this chart I made back in 2017. Lots of voters are socially conservative and economically liberal.



# Creating a Narrative

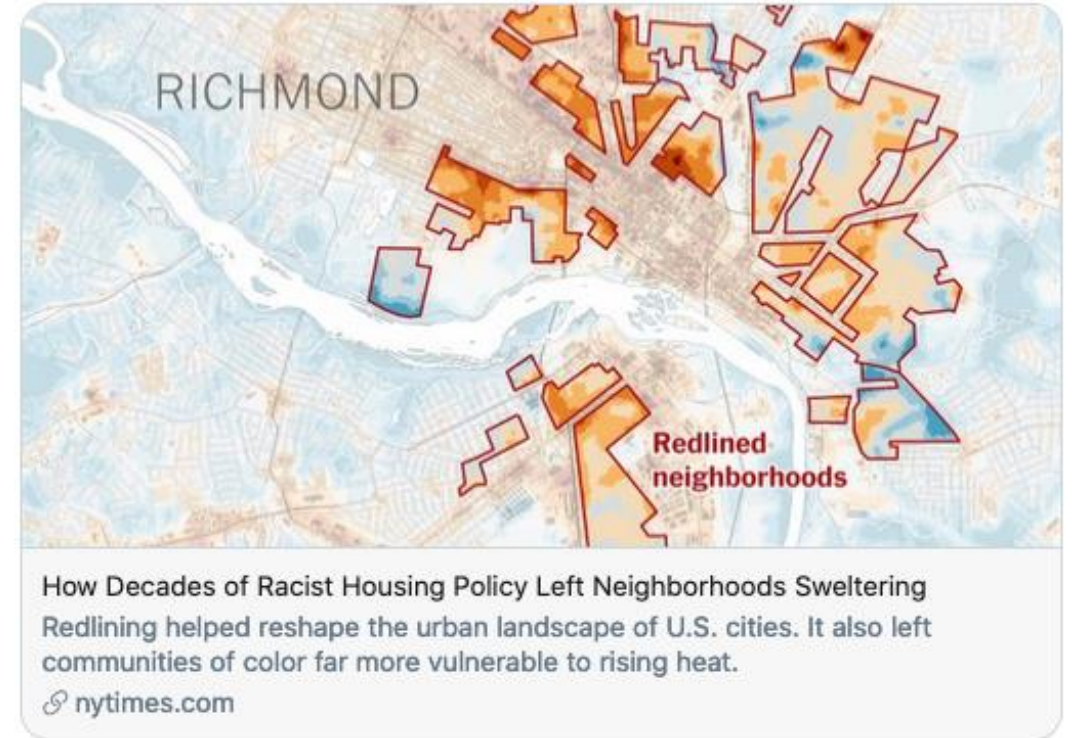
- Lead with Values
- Connect to history when possible
- Draw a through-line to the issue today
- Focus on solutions

1. Care
2. Liberty
3. Fairness
4. Loyalty
5. Authority
6. Sanctity

# Creating a Narrative

**Focus on places or conditions** rather than people (or systems over individuals)

- **Instead of...**African Americans in this community have higher rates of diabetes.
- **Consider...**Diabetes is more common in neighborhoods that don't have access to healthy foods



# Other Language Considerations

- **Use language that is meaningful** to your audience... and meaningful to you
- **Take an asset-based perspective**
- **Be aware of cognitive biases:** the Framing Effect and Authority Bias

## Authority bias

We're more likely to trust and be influenced by ideas that come from authority figures.



## Framing effect

We draw different conclusions based on how an idea is presented to us.



<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/11-cognitive-biases-influence-politics/>

# Engaging the Community



<https://www.mobilecause.com/storytelling-for-your-organization/>

- ...to develop messaging
- ...to lead with the message
- ...to create opportunities for community storytelling
- ...to recognize and appreciate the differences in communities
- ...to build community trust



**What do people want to know versus what we as public health professionals want to tell them?**

# Communication as an Essential Public Health Service: Tying it all together



- Developing and disseminating accessible health information
- Communicating with accuracy and necessary speed
- Using appropriate communications channels
- Developing culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant communications
- Employing the principles of risk communication, health literacy, and health education
- Actively engaging in two-way communication
- Ensuring communications are asset-based

**Toolkit:** Public Health National Center for Innovations. 10 Essential Public Health Services Toolkit. September 9, 2020. <http://ephs.phnci.org/toolkit>

# 3 Take-Aways



1

Public health has a vital role to play amid this polarization

2

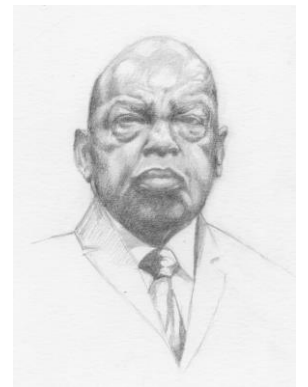
Public health cannot afford the luxury of contempt or being condescending towards those in our communities who do not happen to share our viewpoints

3

We must build the skill-sets of our entire workforce in order to change law & policy to meet many new challenges  
[How do we reach out to the underserved white working class?]

*Try to find the goodness in every human being.*

*Don't ever give up on that other*



## Becoming Better Messengers

Effective messaging of public health challenges and interventions is essential to public health practice and especially to implementing public health laws and policies in a polarized political environment. It is easy for public health leaders to become consumed with the ongoing political and resource shifts taking place in public health and health care. However, it is also clear that those in public health, at all levels, want to engage more deeply and meaningfully with communities of all backgrounds who are burdened by poor health.



<https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/topics/trainings/becoming-better-messengers/>



# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

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## Opinions

# We're public health experts. We need to do a better job of talking to conservatives.



Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) puts on a mask as he speaks to reporters at the U.S. Capitol on Sept. 21. (Nicholas Kamm/AFP/Getty Images)

Opinion by **Lindsey J. Leininger** and **Harold Pollack**

Oct. 12, 2020 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

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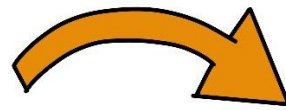
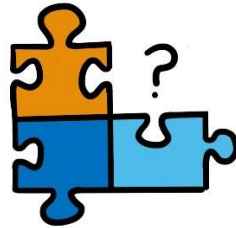
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/12/were-public-health-experts-we-need-do-better-job-talking-conservatives/>

**Washington Post**  
**October 12, 2020 by Lindsey J. Leininger and Harold Pollack**

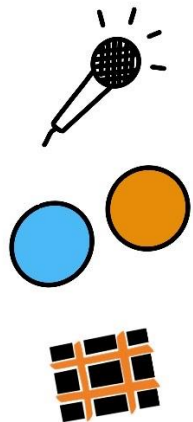
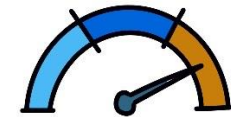
# THREE STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME



## SOURCES of POLARIZATION



## AMPLIFIED BY



EXTREME  
POLITICAL RHETORIC

NO POLITICAL  
MIDDLE GROUND

POLICYMAKING  
GRIDLOCK



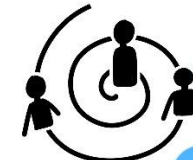
COVID-19



ECONOMIC  
IMPACT/  
JOB LOSSES

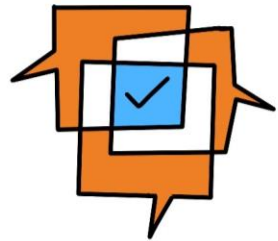


SYSTEMATIC  
AND STRUCTURAL  
RACISM



IMPACT OF  
PANDEMIC ON  
COMMUNITIES OF  
COLOR

# HOW CAN WE MOVE BEYOND DIVISIVE RHETORIC?



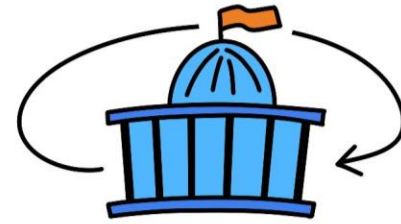
## USE COMMON-GOOD VALUES

- CARE** → ✓ EVERYONE IS ANXIOUS AND SCARED. POSITION SAFEGUARDING OUR PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AS IN EVERYONE'S INTEREST.
- LOYALTY & FAIRNESS** → ✓ FOCUS CONVERSATIONS ON WHAT ALL AMERICANS NEED.
- LOYALTY & FAIRNESS** → ✓ AVOID HARMFUL STEREOTYPES and GENERALIZATIONS.
- CARE/HARM** → ✓ AVOID HARMFUL STEREOTYPES and GENERALIZATIONS.



## USE METAPHORS CAREFULLY

- ✓ POORLY CHOSEN METAPHORS CAN CREATE CONFUSION and LEAD TO WRONG ACTIONS.
- ✓ WE DON'T COMPARE COVID-19 WITH HEART DISEASE, DROWNING, and MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS.
- ✓ COVID-19 is MORE LIKE A FOREST FIRE, ONLY QUICK and DECISIVE ACTIONS CAN KEEP IT FROM SPREADING.



## EMBRACE THE UNIQUE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT - but hold it accountable

- ✓ WE NEED GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTIONS THAT BENEFIT EVERYONE.
- ✓ AGENCIES and OFFICIALS AT ALL LEVELS SHOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE.
- ✓ GOVERNMENT CAN EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY SET AND ENFORCE RULES THAT KEEP US SAFE AND WELL.
- ✓ POLICIES ARE IMPORTANT TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY.

- ← **AUTHORITY & FAIRNESS**
- ← **AUTHORITY**
- ← **AUTHORITY, FAIRNESS CARE**
- ← **AUTHORITY**

SOURCE: "AT THE HEART OF OUR CRISIS: AMERICAN POLARIZATION", THE HILL, JUNE 16, 2020