

RUTLAND COUNTY DEMOCRATS FRAMES May 17, 2019

A frame is a way of interpreting the world. Republican frames are much more widespread than Democratic frames because corporate media—driven by a profit motive—are more favorable towards Republicans, who put profits over people. We should avoid using Republican frames because they’re underpinned by a wealth of arguments that would take us forever to undermine. We should just use our language instead. When someone asks you to reframe the conversation using their words, stick to your frame. For example, if a person starts to complain about “high taxes,” reframe the conversation by praising all of the services that are provided by our tax dollars—public works, libraries, education, healthcare, et cetera—and compare Vermont to states where these services aren’t provided because the taxes are so low. Point out that you are happy living in a state & a country where these services exist. Democratic frames focus on fairness & compassion.

Remember, you are the most important messenger! By fostering a positive view of Democrats in general, you help to elect Democrats. You also have an influence on whether the public reaches out to officials about proposed legislation. Elected officials need to believe that their constituents will support their votes.

Topic	Don’t use	Use	Explanation
Party	“right-wing”	Republican	The word “right” implies “correct.”
	“left-wing” or “liberal”	Democrat & Progressive	The word “left” implies that the other side is “right.” Some potential allies think “liberal” are “centrist.” Let’s build bridges!
Big government	“government” or “bureaucracy”	“community” or “America” or “public works, consumer protection, public safety, etc.”	Keep it local and/or patriotic. Talk about services the government provides. Remember, Republicans love big government when it comes to the military/prison-industrial complex.
Economy	“income inequality” or “free market/trade”	“economy that works for all of us, not just the rich” or “fair market/trade”	“Income inequality” is still an unfamiliar phrase for many voters. The “free” in “free market” sounds good, but it’s code for laissez faire policies that punish middle/low-income people by reducing competition & giving us no choice but to pay high prices to monopolies. Privatizing public services hurts most Americans.
Social security, pensions, ACA, etc.	“social safety net” or “benefits” or “welfare” or “entitlements” or “give rights”	“basic needs” or “delayed payment of wages” or “don’t deny basic needs”	Social security and pensions aren’t “given” to us. They’re loans we made to the government/businesses & we have the right to see these loans repaid to us. The ACA ensures our freedom and the right to life. (If you can’t afford medicine, you aren’t free.)
Taxes	“tax relief”	“tax fairness” or “tax system rigged for the rich”	The word “relief” implies that we’re suffering from taxes. In fact, we’re lucky that our taxes provide so many services. The problem is that taxes are unfairly collected.
Workers’ rights	“union” or “help the poor”	“giving workers the ability to bargain with unfairly powerful CEOs” or “honest pay for honest work” or “Wall Street/rich CEOs are profiting off of underpaid workers & shifting the burden of supporting them to us”	The word “union” sends up red flags for some people & Republicans praise people who don’t appear to need help (ignoring all how the system is unfairly rigged). Focus on the way big business profits off of under-paying their workers—workers create profits—leaving it to middle- & low-income tax payers to cover the costs of low income workers’ basic needs.
Poverty	“the poor” or “low income” or “disadvantaged people”	“hardworking Americans” or “members of our community”	Remind the listener that we’re talking about fellow Americans & members of our community.
Immigration	“illegal immigrants/aliens”	“New American immigrants”	Most undocumented immigrants overstayed their visa, which falls under civil—not a criminal—statute. Crossing the border to seek asylum <u>is</u> the process for asylum under international law. The word “alien” implies difference. Remember, they already pay taxes! They’re <i>unprotected</i> taxpayers.

Topic	Don't use	Use	Explanation
Racism/ Religious discrimination/ Sexism	“civil rights” or “protect/grant rights” or “discrimination” or “prejudice”	“remove unfair barriers” or “don't deny rights” or “freedom”	Freedom is an easy thing to get behind. We have equal rights. The problem is that they're being denied. Focus on the unfairness of that.
Women's reproductive rights	“pro-choice/life” or “partial- birth abortion” or “all women”	“forced birth” or “important life decision” or “thinking through her options” or “talking with her family & doctor” or “a woman”	No doctor would ever deliver & murder a viable baby. Instead of “late term abortion” say “later abortion.” There's no such thing as a partial birth abortion. Don't use their frames! Keep it as personal as possible.
Abelism	“disabled people”	“people with disabilities”	People aren't disabled. They <i>have</i> disabilities.
Intolerance	“hate” or “bigots” or “religious extremists”	“love” or “rejection” or “radical activists”	Focus on our values of love & inclusion. Avoid attacking a religion. Tolerance doesn't mean tolerating intolerance.
People in marginalized positions	“minorities” or “marginalized”	women, people of color, women of color, LGTQ+, the elderly, people with disabilities	People aren't minorities or marginalized. They're <i>placed</i> in marginalized positions where they're minorities. Specific groups are easier to identify.
	“identity politics”		Complaints about “identity politics” are really complaints that cis white men aren't the center of the discussion. (cis – identifies with sex/gender a person was raised with). Focus on people.
Education	“failing schools/teachers” or “run school like a business” or “student achievement”	“our children/community schools” or “opportunity to learn” or “each student is different” or “opportunity gap”	Keep the focus on children & teachers in our local communities. By giving all children a quality education, we ensure that we have the best and brightest coming to the table to solve America's problems. School re-segregation prevents this.
Environment	“climate change” or “global-warming”	“clean water/soil” or “right to stop use of eminent domain” or “for our grandchildren” or “support local farmers” or “create jobs in renewable energy & keep our money here”	“Climate change” is an easier sell than “global-warming.” But both might provoke arguments you don't need to have. Everything that's good for the environment is good for us as members of a community. Focus on that. The benefits of policies that are good for the environment outweigh the costs.
Criminal justice	“rights of criminals”	“risk to public safety when law enforcement is required to fill quotas” or “waste of our taxes in for-profit prisons”	Voters care more about their safety than the rights of people in jail. But racial profiling & for-profit prisons mean that our justice system undermines public safety by encouraging racial profiling which shifts the focus from the people most likely to commit crimes. Focus on public safety.
Gun control	“gun control/rights”	“to protect Americans, keep dangerous weapons away from dangerous people”	Democrats care just as much about safety as Republicans. Talk about how we can keep our communities safe.
DNC or VDP do something you don't like	“Democrats/DNC/VDP have lost touch”	“I am working to make change within the Democratic Party because the Democrats reflect most of my values.”	The DNC/VDP work for elected officials. If you want to change what they're saying, you have to elect new Democrats. You can't do that if you're attacking the Democratic party.

For more resources see:

Rutland County Democrats Messaging & Rutland County Democrats Organizing Strategy

Indivisible <https://indivisible.org/resource/organizing-mainly-about-listening>

George Lakoff *Don't Think of an Elephant*

Voicing Our Values http://www.progressivemajorityaction.org/message_guide