



INNOVATING FOR
THE **PUBLIC GOOD**
R & D FOR DEMOCRACY

A New Path to a Thriving Democracy

Building a Next-Gen R&D Lab

9/16/2025

The Problems We Face

A deepening set of political, economic, and social changes across society are threatening democracy

Disengagement with others

Cultural infatuations with autonomy, self-interest, and rugged individualism are elevated to such a degree that collective obligations are social bonds are de-emphasized.

Anti-democratic agendas

The MAGA movement is accelerating a decades-long movement to consolidate power, restrict rights, and limit opportunities.

Broken trust in institutions

Trust in government and other democratic institutions are at an all-time low.

Government isn't delivering

Gridlock and polarization have become the hallmark of our governmental institutions.

Fragmented media markets

In a world of echo chambers, algorithms, and limited trust for legacy media sources, there is often no shared pro-democracy narrative.

Lack of agency

People are feeling powerless to shape the future of our country and world. They are disengaging or looking to authoritarian leaders who promise to fix it all.

Growing resentment

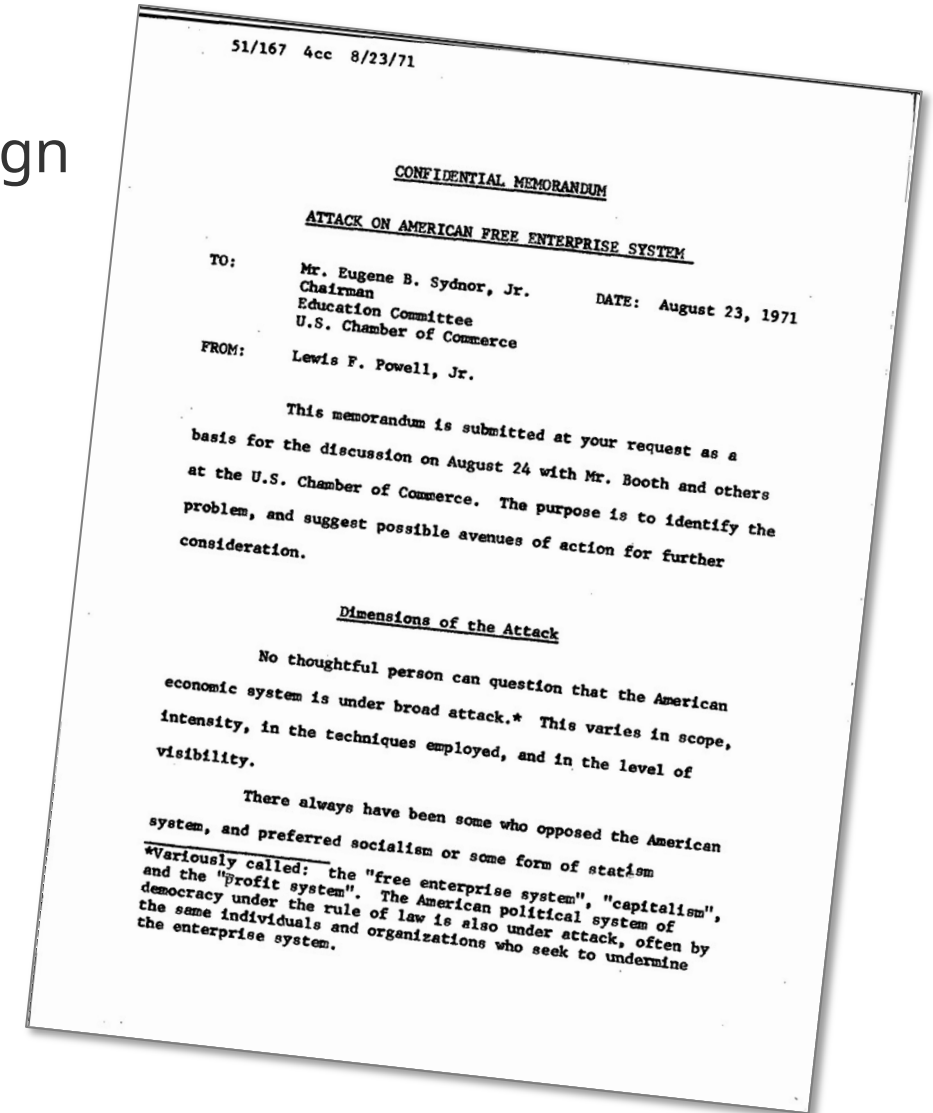
Elites cultivating a sense that other groups are benefiting more or responsible for problems in the country is leading to deeper polarization and othering.



A Decades-Long Project

From **the 1950s to today**, a well-funded campaign to consolidate power has actively shaped:

- Political movements
- Narratives and culture
- Laws and policies
- State and local governments
- Courts and the judicial process
- The media ecosystem
- Economic structures



Greater Innovation is Needed in the Civic Ecosystem

Our **landscape analysis** found very few efforts aimed at generating the kind of transformative solutions our democracy urgently needs

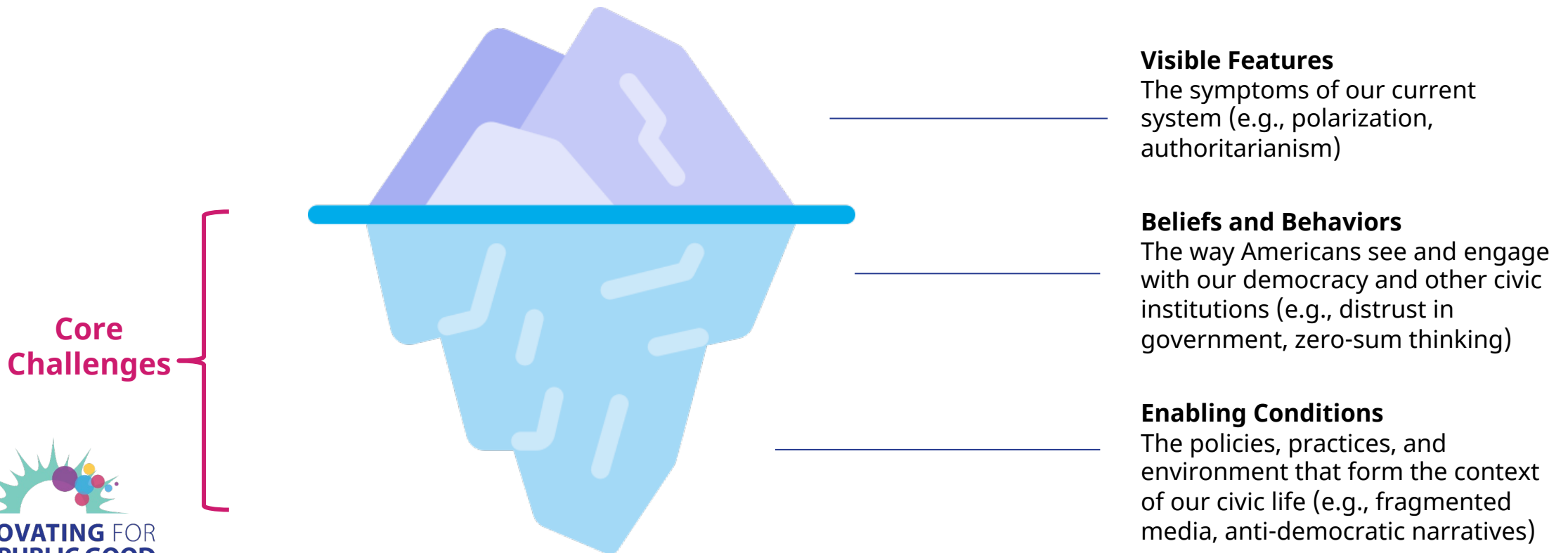
- Most organizations focus on tactical improvements to existing strategies rather than designing new ones
- Innovation is typically limited to elections, ignoring the deeper cultural, structural, and trust-based challenges to democracy
- Less than 15% of organizations show evidence of true innovation with potential for long-term transformation



We need to invest in big swings that address the deep-rooted challenges in our democracy

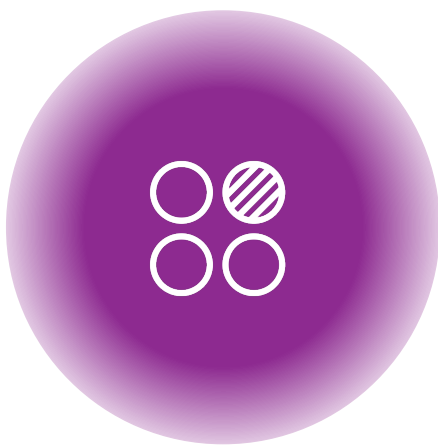
Our Core Civic Challenges

Durable change requires us to directly address the civic challenges that **lay under the surface** of the current political and social climate.



Our Core Civic Challenges

Our focus is on **three core challenges** that were chosen because they underpin many of the fissures in our democracy.



Othering



Fatalism



Hyper-Individualism

Our Core Civic Challenges

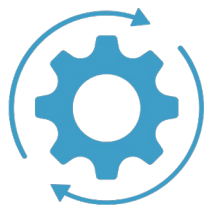
Issue	Othering	Fatalism	Hyper-Individualism
Dismantling of USAID	✓ Blames foreign nations or vulnerable populations for domestic hardships.	✓ America can't lead or help anymore; global systems are collapsing.	✓ "America First" rhetoric prioritizes domestic self-interest.
Attacks on DEI	✓ Marginalized groups framed as undeserving or divisive.	✓ Progress on equity is gone; nothing will change.	✓ Focus on "meritocracy" narratives that deny systemic barriers.
Anti-immigrant fervor	✓ Immigrants framed as threats to safety, culture, and jobs.	✓ Sense that "the system is broken" and only scapegoating outsiders can fix it.	—
Low voter turnout	—	✓ My vote won't change anything.	✓ Individual cost-benefit analysis outweighs collective responsibility.
Conspiratorial thinking	✓ Targets groups ("elites," minorities) as villains.	✓ Systems are rigged; nothing is real.	✓ Elevation of personal "truths" over shared facts.
Anti-vax movement	✓ Outsiders (scientists, government, immigrants) cast as threats.	✓ Distrust in science and belief that collective solutions are futile.	✓ "My body, my choice" reframed as rejection of public responsibility.

A Next-Gen R&D Lab for Democracy

IFPG is deploying an R&D model for **ambitious solutions that require vision, creativity, and risk tolerance**, leading to actionable results.



We're conducting **impact-driven research** that is rooted in understanding and tackling the core challenges



We're fostering **cutting-edge development** that generates bold solutions that are scalable in real-world settings

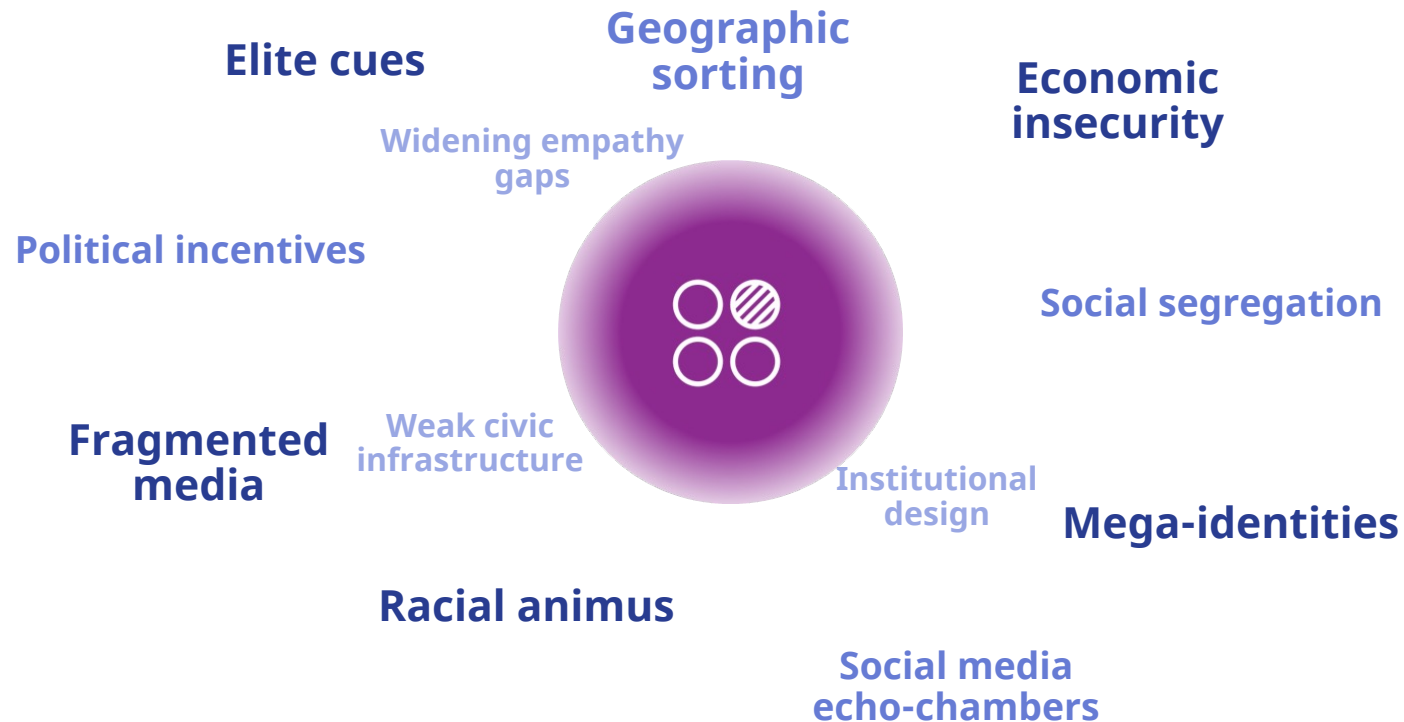
Guiding Principles

- Clear vision with ambitious goals
- Stable, risk-tolerant funding
- Top talent with diverse expertise
- A culture that embraces failure
- Empowered teams with high accountability
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Developed pathways to impact
- Rigorous metrics and learning

Conducting Impact-Driven Research



Repairing our democracy requires more than great ideas. We need to **understand the full picture** of the systems we're trying to change.

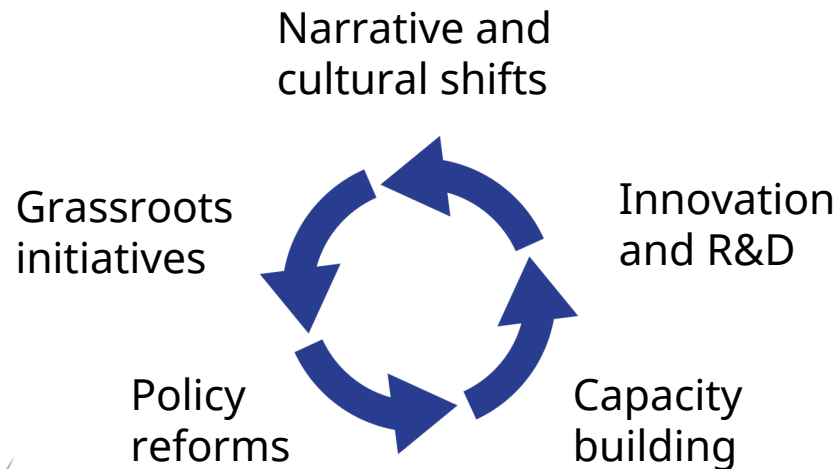


Conducting Impact-Driven Research



We drive better solutions by creating an intentional **blueprint for addressing the core challenges.**

With a blueprint, we can see how solutions reinforce each other.



We can't solve everything at once, but a blueprint lets us:

- Understand and prioritize where change is needed most
- Spot bottlenecks and gaps that block progress
- Coordinate across sectors and between stakeholders

Project: Combatting Mechanics of “Othering”

We’re unpacking **what is dividing (and uniting) Americans** to build an evidence-based strategy to counter Othering.

Across the board, voters feel that people like them are losing power – although post-election Harris voters feel this more acutely.

*Thinking about the changes that have occurred in our society over the past 10 to 20 years, do you think **people like you** are mostly gaining power or losing power in our country?*



Mostly gaining Mostly losing Net gaining power

The “othering” rhetoric used by the right generally has less salience among younger voters than it does older voters.

How big of a problem is...

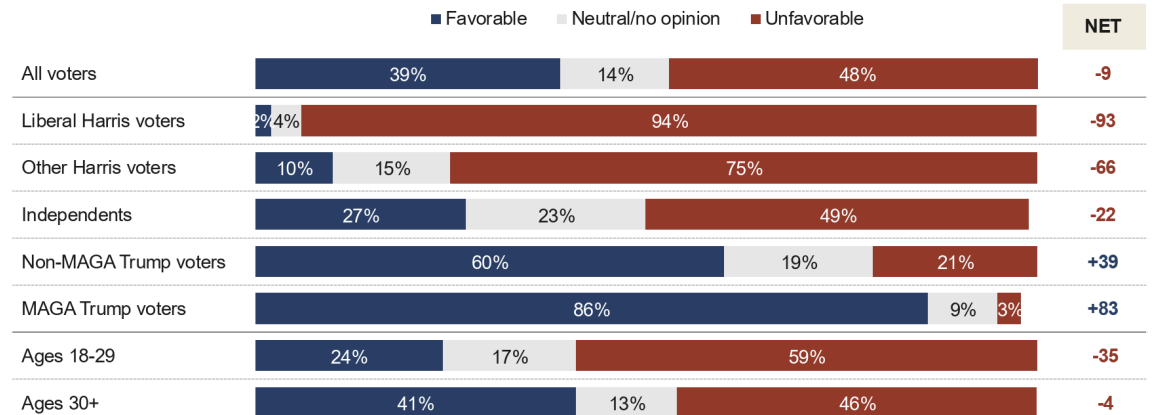
% Very/Fairly Big Problem

Issues younger voters are more concerned about	Racial injustice and systemic racism against Black and African Americans
	Mistreatment of immigrants in America to build a better future
	The rights of women being threatened
Issues older voters are more concerned about	The loss of family values and patriotism in America
	The rise of socialist and woke ideologies in the United States
	The rise in woke ideology and the threat to traditional values
	Immigrants who want to take over the country instead of adapting to American culture



Trump’s deportation agenda is unpopular outside his base, and especially among younger voters.

Feelings toward the Trump Administration’s deportation policies



Project: Deep Audience Understanding



We conduct endless studies and surveys to try to capture the American people, but **are we asking the right questions?**

Americans care about democracy... right?

81% of likely voters surveyed in 2024 believed that democracy was under threat.

When asked who was more “committed to democracy,” 48% of Americans surveyed said Harris and 28% said Trump.

Developing Breakthrough Solutions



We set up IFPG to be a launchpad for transformative breakthroughs that **redefine what's possible in our democracy**.

We **identify, test, and scale solutions** by:

- ➔ Generating knowledge and demonstration projects in our *Center for Innovation*
- ➔ Sparking new ideas with the *Prize for Democratic Innovation*
- ➔ Incubating strong ideas that align with our roadmaps
- ➔ Evaluate the impact of promising interventions

**Multi-pronged
approach**

Developing Breakthrough Solutions



Our **Center for Innovation** is an engine for **research and experimentation** to kick-start solutions in promising new areas.

Connecting experts from a variety of fields, the Center creates an interdisciplinary ecosystem where cross-sector collaboration fuels innovative solutions.

Creative Councils

Generate ideas and manage initiatives

Technical Partners

Contribute specialized skills to build out solutions

Innovation Fellows

Selected to support a project or develop their own ideas



Early-stage solutions

These innovations can inform the practices of others or be spun out as stand-alone solutions

Developing Breakthrough Solutions



We **boost innovation in targeted high-leverage areas** by awarding an annual **Prize for Democratic Innovation**.

Prizes are grants to individuals, teams, or organizations leading innovative efforts. The prize program offer **multiple benefits**, such as:

Concentrating problem-solving around our identified gaps

Expanding the net cast for identifying promising solutions

Bringing visibility to IFPG and our strategic vision



Surfacing and elevating the most promising ideas

Seeding risky but potentially transformative solutions

Encouraging cross-sector collaboration

Project: Continuous Narrative Initiative

We're creating an **"always-on" narrative infrastructure** that normalizes pro-democracy values and counters authoritarian framing.

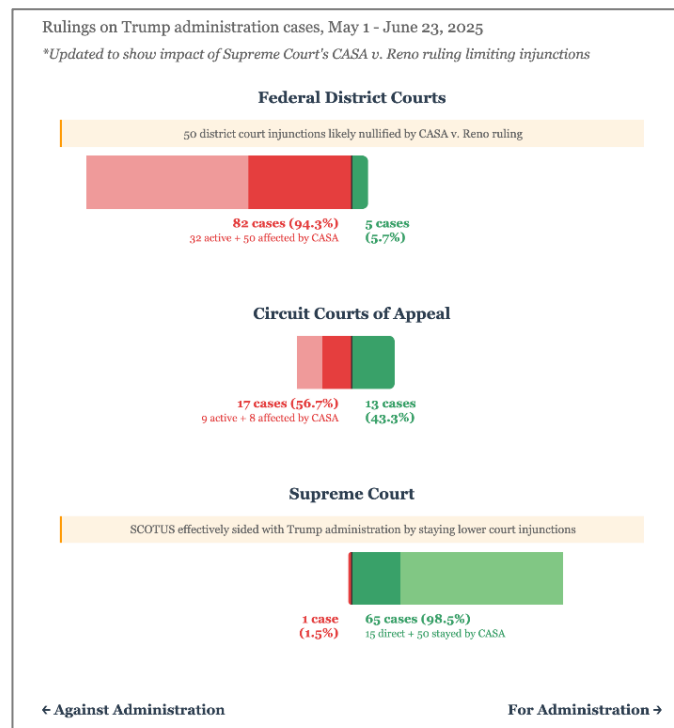
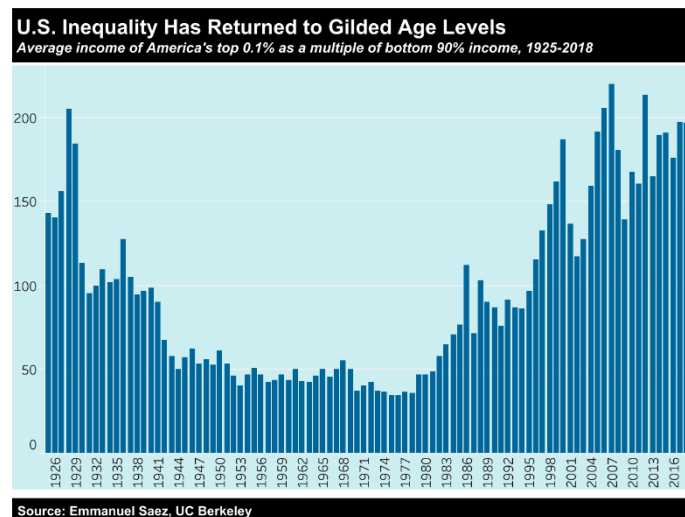
Near-term activities:

- Develop communication plans to reinforce key messages over time and across channels
- Test a variety of formats (local radio, podcasts, short-form video) to find what builds sustained engagement rather than one-off spikes
- Establish pilot "narrative hubs" in two to three media markets to test coordinated approaches



The Time for This Work is Now

Our **political**, **economic**, and **social structures** are at a breaking point. How we emerge as a country will be determined by **what we do today**.



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"On Data and Democracy", Substack by Adam Bonica





QUESTIONS?