



# FRAMING THE ECONOMY

How to win the case for a better system...

NEON  
NEF  
FrameWorks Institute  
PIRC



*“THIS project is essential. Both for coming up with a new story on the economy but also because, for once, it’s putting the best people in the same room to start actually working together. Unless we start this kind of coordination we’re going to continue to lose on the big structural questions which have made themselves felt across the west over the last couple of years. I’m also excited that we’re finally talking practically about what organisations and networks are going to be needed to communicate this story—we’re being out organised on the right and we’ve got to turn that around with a proper strategy.”*

**Gary Younge** | Journalist and Editor, The Guardian



*“I love the work Framing the Economy has done—the task of linking the climate with inequality and economics is central to helping us tell a new story that gives us the courage to change the system. Even more impressive is building the communications infrastructure or organising power needed to actually tell the story, linking up across countries. This is exactly the kind of work that’s needed right now and we should all back this project.”*

**Naomi Klein** | Author and Journalist



*“IT is such a refreshing development to see people on the progressive left using a methodological approach to communications. This project is a textbook example of how best to approach the problem of shifting mindsets. I have already been using some of the findings in my work, and the project is not even completed yet. It has the potential to be a game changer.”*

**Ben Stewart** | Head of Communications, Greenpeace



# FRAMING THE ECONOMY

How to win the case  
for a better system

## *What is the story of the economy in Britain? Who gets to shape public opinion about what it's for, how it's broken and how it can be fixed?*

These are the questions the Framing the Economy project set out to answer. We wanted to help civil society communicate and organise more effectively, to help bring about the changes needed to move to a sustainable, equitable and democratic economy.

The **dominant story of the UK economy**, and the politics that goes with it, has evolved significantly since we set out on this ambitious endeavour. The project was first conceived in 2015, at a time when the austerity story set the agenda.<sup>1</sup> The airwaves were full of politicians repeating that we had maxed out the nation's credit card and needed to stop borrowing; that the Labour government had spent too much and crashed the economy; that without drastic cuts to public spending, the UK could end up like Greece.

This **story was remarkably resilient**—against sluggish economic performance and failure on its own deficit reduction measures; against the reasoned arguments of Keynesian commentators; against the anger of anti-cuts campaigners. It not only reinforced austerity politics but crowded out space to talk about real threats to our economy, like climate change. It spread the feeling that sustainability and social justice were luxuries the UK could no longer afford. It was in this context that we first became convinced of the need for progressives to tell a much more compelling and cohesive story to counter this dominant narrative.

In the years since then, **British politics has been turned upside down**. In 2016, a new story took hold of the public debate: the Brexit story. The Leave campaign insisted that the UK needed to 'take back control' from distant elites in Brussels, that our economy would thrive if only we could make our own decisions. This proved an immensely powerful story for millions of people who felt ignored and disenfranchised. But of course, it is not only a story about elites, but about outsiders of all kinds: it has gone hand in hand with the demonisation of migrants and a terrifying rise in racism and xenophobia.

## *How can progressive forces tell a new story to help accelerate the shift to a new economic system?*

In 2017, we saw a glimpse of what could happen if the British people were offered **a more positive story about our collective future**. Against virtually all expert predictions, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party came to the brink of power with a message of ending austerity, rebuilding the public sphere and reclaiming common ownership of resources like energy and the railways. Ideas which had been taboo for a generation were suddenly back on the political agenda.

It is not only the content of these new stories that has changed the context we are working in, but also the way they have taken hold. During the Brexit campaign, economic experts lined up to warn of dire consequences to the UK economy if we voted to leave the EU. This was **not only ineffective**, but even seems to have strengthened the anti-establishment credentials of the Leave campaign. This challenges the assumption many had going into this project that the austerity story was so powerful in part because it was presented as the expert economic consensus.

Meanwhile, the **2017 election demonstrated** the power of both grassroots organising and social media to mobilise people and reshape the political debate. To respond to this moment, we must think about not just the story we need to tell, but how and where we need to tell it.

These are **times of great danger but also of great possibility**. For the first time in decades, there is a sense that the economic consensus is fracturing, that a change must and will come. A space has opened up to talk and think differently about the economy. The question is what this space will be filled by: a narrow, nationalistic story which scapegoats outsiders, or a positive vision for a just and sustainable future? It is imperative that civil society rises to the challenge.

**The aim of this report is to help achieve that goal.**

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project has been a partnership between the **New Economy Organisers' Network (NEON)**, the **New Economics Foundation (NEF)**, the **FrameWorks Institute** and the **Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC)**. It has combined the FrameWorks Institute's proven methodology for evidence-based framing work with PIRC's expertise in participatory framing techniques and NEON's track record of building powerful and mutually supportive networks of campaigners.

It was important from the outset that this work should be shaped and owned by the communicators who would use its recommendations. There were two key mechanisms for building this input into the project:

1. The **NEON Common Agenda** project (see Chapter 1), based on extensive consultation with organisers across our community, provided the building blocks of the shared story we were trying to communicate.
2. The **Framing the Economy Network** (see next page) and **affiliates network** brought together journalists, communications officers, campaigners, political advisors and thought leaders from across the movement. The Network met five times during the course of the project to hear its emerging findings and input ideas for testing.

The research process itself consisted of three key phases:

1. **Understanding our audience:** analysing the frames the public already hold about the economy;
2. **Mapping the gaps:** comparing this understanding with the *Common Agenda*, and generating ideas and hypotheses to bridge the gaps;
3. **Changing the story:** identifying frames that work through empirical testing and participatory workshops.

The rest of this report summarises what we found during each of these phases, our final recommendations, and next steps for translating this new story into change in the public debate.

### THE FRAMING THE ECONOMY NETWORK & ADVISORY GROUP

We set up the Framing the Economy Network because we felt that the outputs of the project would more likely be used by communicators who had a sense of ownership over them. At each crucial stage of the research, the Network was invited to shape the direction of the project—from formulating research questions to designing the story that the project would eventually recommend.

The **Network** was consulted before cognitive interviews, the mapping the gaps exercise, and changing the story. For the latter, we took the Network on a two-day weekend retreat where they were guided through a process which would eventually produce a story for us to test. The close relationships forged between members of the Network and the Framing the Economy team also allowed Network members to become ambassadors for the project within progressive circles and organisations. This has meant that the project has been influential far beyond the scope of the original Network. In Chapter 6, we outline the next steps for Framing the Economy, including our plan to transform the Network into a permanent communications hub which will share best practice of how to distribute frames in the media.

The **Advisory Group** consists of six members who gave the project team advice on how best to engage with the Network, the obstacles we might encounter when running the project and how to overcome them, and potential contacts we might want to approach in order to make the project as successful as possible. The group met several times over the course of the project, as well as engaging with the project team individually. Some members also joined us for Network meetings.

*While the Network and Advisory Group were instrumental in shaping and directing this project, we do not attribute any of the specific ideas and recommendations within this report to individual Network members, or the organisations they represent.*

## SUMMARY

### 1 | DEFINING OUR VISION

## FORGING A COMMON AGENDA

Before we could frame a new story, we first needed to be clear about the story we want to tell: a story that outlines our shared analysis of what is wrong with the economy and how we believe it should be changed.

To do this NEON interviewed and ran workshops with over 250 progressives. We found alignment on the analysis that neoliberalism is the problem and that for forty years we've had increasing economic inequality and extraction of wealth from common resources, such as land and energy. We need to move away from these unequal, insecure and environmentally unsustainable practices and start organising our economy to deliver good, meaningful lives for everyone.

Our *Common Agenda* outlines an economy based on the values of equality, community, liberation and stewardship of the environment, where we restore collective provision of basic needs (outside the market), democratic & common ownership (especially of public goods like land & energy) and co-operation & sharing (not just competition).

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### 2 | UNDERSTANDING OUR AUDIENCE

## HOW DOES THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

Cultural models are the shared, durable assumptions and understandings of the economy within British culture.

We conducted a literature review and ran 40 in-depth interviews in London, Newport (South Wales), Glasgow, Wolverhampton and Hull to identify cultural models for how the economy works, why it works that way and how it should work (see summary on page 10).

We worked with our Network and Advisory Group to map the overlaps and gaps between the cultural models and the *Common Agenda*, coming up with some key challenges and opportunities for framing on the economy.

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### 3 | CHANGING THE STORY

## IDENTIFYING & TESTING NEW FRAMES

Values communicate what matters in the economy, metaphors explain how the economy works, and policy exemplars (that is, exemplar policies we can use to convey our vision) give people a sense of what can be done to make change.

We developed and tested a number of ideas for each of these three key ‘frame elements’, or aspects of a new story on the economy. We decided, with the help of our Network and Advisory Group, that it was most strategic to focus on communicating the idea that our economy is a product of human design and, therefore, can be re-designed.

Through several phases of empirical testing, involving on-the-street-interviews, focus groups and large, nationally representative survey experiments, we developed two stories that could help to build support for a new economy: A “populist” story of ‘*Resisting Corporate Power*’ and a non-populist story of ‘*Meeting Our Needs*’.

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### 4 | APPLYING THE FINDINGS

## CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

In the final phase of the project, we ran workshops with campaigners who communicate on housing and regulation from a wide range of organisations and groups. The goal of these workshops was for campaigners to map how the public think about these topics and then reflect on how our Framing the Economy findings might be used and applied to reframing the specific topics of housing and regulation.

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### 5 | TELLING THE STORY

## NEXT STEPS

No progressive framing project can succeed without also addressing the issue of communications infrastructure: the ways in which progressive communications are supported, funded and organised. Powerful and evidence-based new stories are necessary, but a story alone is not enough. We analysed the relative strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for progressives communicators in the UK, offering several key recommendations for the new infrastructure and training that is needed.

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## HOW DOES THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

These are the key cultural models, the shared, durable ways of thinking we identified through in-depth interview research. Read more on page 24.

### WHAT THE ECONOMY IS AND HOW IT WORKS



#### Economy as Container

People saw the nation as functioning like a pot, with people putting in (contributing) or taking out (draining).



#### Economy as Money

Discussions of the economy are nearly always about money and people often drew on the metaphor of circulation.



#### Cognitive Hole

While people had some limited ways of understanding the economy, many mechanisms of the economy remain in a black box, seen as being governed by 'mysterious market forces'.



#### Edge of Disaster

The economy was thought of as volatile, unpredictable and difficult to manage, with language like 'tumbling', 'falling' often being used in interviews.

### WHY THE ECONOMY WORKS AS IT DOES



#### System is Rigged

Many thought that the economy was manipulated by elites with coordinated nefarious intent.



#### Hidden Agenda

People displayed remarkable and blanket distrust of news sources, assuming different ideological biases.



#### Greed=Human Nature

At base, human nature was often assumed to be selfish, therefore producing natural and inevitable inequality.

These models in particular led to tremendous *fatalism* and an *inability to imagine* positive, structural changes in the economy.

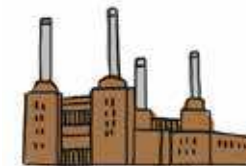


### HOW THE ECONOMY SHOULD WORK



#### National Self-Reliance

People thought Britain should aim to meet its own basic needs without being reliant on other countries.



#### Ideal Past

People had nostalgia for a time when wages were high, inequality was low and, as a country, we were more 'self reliant'.



#### Government Responsibility

Despite cynicism about elites, people saw a role for the government in fixing problems and regulating the economy.



## RECOMMENDED STORIES

We recommend two stories that campaigners and communicators can use to build support for a new economy. Each story contains ‘frame elements’—e.g. values and metaphors—that we have found, through empirical testing, to change thinking and increase support for progressive economic policies. These stories are the result of many stages of testing that we have processed with the help of our Network and Advisory Group. Read more on page 38.

### STORY ONE

#### THE POPULIST STORY: RESISTING CORPORATE POWER



*Over the last forty years, our government has become a tool of corporations and banks, prioritising the interests of the wealthy rather than giving equal weight to the needs of everyone. We need to reprogramme our economy so that it works in the interests of society rather than just in the interest of corporate elites.*

This story centres on how the economy is both unfair and broken, and lays blame squarely on corporate power and wealthy elites. It argues that the economic system has been unfairly influenced by a powerful few for their own benefit—and that this manipulation is the source of the economy’s problems. This story draws on the value of *Economic Strength* or *Equality* as the rationale for supporting progressive policies and uses a *Reprogramming* metaphor to show how the economy has been intentionally designed—and can be redesigned—through policy decisions.

### STORY TWO

#### THE COMMON GROUND STORY: MEETING OUR NEEDS



*A good society makes it possible for everyone to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. Yet, our society is currently focused solely on profit, and people are forced to chase money rather than happiness. The laws and policies that we make lay down tracks that determine where the economy takes people. Right now, our economy is built around profit rather than being built to get people to their true needs.*

This story brings into focus the priorities of individuals and society. By drawing on the value of *Fulfilment*, this story identifies deeper needs—beyond the need to make money—and makes the case for an economy that prioritises happiness and fulfilment over profit. It utilises a metaphor of *Economic Tracks* to illustrate the significant role the economy plays in structuring opportunities, making it clear that society’s current priorities result from the way the economy has been designed.





vision

# CHAPTER 1

## DEFINING OUR VISION: FORGING A COMMON AGENDA

Before we can *frame* a new story, we first need to have an idea of the *content* of the story we want to tell. How do we think the economy works? What does it look like when it's working well, and in what ways is it not working at the moment? What's our vision for an economy that's functioning well and delivering the outcomes we want? This understanding needs to be shared between a wide enough range of people—social movements, politicians and influencers—to achieve a 'critical mass' that can shift the public debate.

### COMMON AGENDA: THE STORY SO FAR

NEON's *Common Agenda* project was set up because we realised that progressives have struggled to articulate this shared narrative in recent years. Movements are often defined by what they are against rather than what they are for (e.g. the climate change movement, the anti-cuts movement, the anti-fees movement, the movement to shut detention centres, etc.). While these movements are essential, if we want to shift the system we need to go beyond oppositional politics and have a clear answer to the question: 'what's your alternative?' Only then can we move to the next stage of translating this alternative into compelling stories that can resonate with the UK public.

We were inspired by efforts elsewhere that had brought together a diverse range of voices to set out a common vision—from Common Weal in Scotland to the Leap Manifesto in Canada to the Next System Project in the United States. But this was not about coming up with a manifesto or a new theory of everything that NEON members are expected to 'sign up' to. We know that our community is made up of people with many different perspectives and priorities, and this diversity is part of our strength. What we wanted to do was find the common ground between these different perspectives.

We were looking for a set of claims about how the economy works that we can all get behind—and a set of values and principles about the world we want to

build that we can all believe in. We can think of these as the building blocks of a shared narrative. But they aren't tablets of stone: it's vital that we continue to discuss and debate these issues and that they keep evolving as our movement evolves. After two years of interviews, workshops and discussions involving over 250 people from across the NEON community, here's what we've come up with so far.<sup>2</sup>

### WHAT ARE WE FOR? A SHORT SUMMARY OF OUR COMMON AGENDA

#### WHAT'S GOING WRONG WITH OUR ECONOMY?

- ❗ **Neoliberalism:** For forty years things have been run based on the rule that 'markets know best' and governments should stay out of the way.
- ❗ **Power:** This has sucked wealth and power up to a small elite, and disempowered the majority of people. These inequalities of economic power intersect with gendered and racialised oppression, and with colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.
- ❗ **Rent and extractivism:** The economic elite increasingly makes money not by producing things that are socially useful, but by owning and controlling common resources (e.g. land, energy) and extracting wealth from others (e.g. speculation by banks).

This has made our economy:

- **Unequal:** most people's living standards aren't rising, and the fruits of economic growth are increasingly going mainly to those who already have the most.
- **Insecure:** many people and communities can no longer rely on a secure livelihood, while our broken banking system and dependence on personal debt to disguise inequality makes our economy unstable and prone to crashes.
- **Unsustainable:** we're destroying the ecological systems on which the whole economy depends. Climate change is an existential threat, but we also face urgent crises on biodiversity, air, soil and water.

## WHAT'S OUR ALTERNATIVE?

### WHAT'S THE ECONOMY FOR? VALUES FOR A NEW ECONOMY

*Economic progress means enabling everyone to have a good and fulfilled life.*

This isn't the same as prioritising economic growth, and it means money and markets can't be our only yardstick of value.

The new economy should be based on **values** of:

- ✓ **Equality and human dignity:** recognising that we all have equal worth as human beings, and an equal right to a good life—and that our value as people does not depend on our ability to work, or on the price of our labour.
- ✓ **Solidarity and community:** recognising that we depend on each other, and are not just isolated individuals; and rejecting the politics of division (migrants versus British-born, strivers versus skivers) which leaves people to sink or swim in the market.
- ✓ **Autonomy and liberation:** building a society which gives people genuine freedom to fulfil their potential and live the lives they choose—by dismantling systemic oppression rather than relying on the 'freedom' of the market.
- ✓ **Stewardship of the environment:** protecting the health of the world we're part of, for future generations and because the economy ultimately depends on it—but also for its own intrinsic value.

## HOW SHOULD THE ECONOMY WORK? PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW ECONOMY

There are **three key principles** we need to reclaim from our history:

1. **Collective provision of basic needs:** outside the market—the idea that there should be a basic floor which nobody is allowed to fall below. For some people this might mean social housing or defending the welfare state. For others, it might mean ideas like universal basic income.
2. **Democratic and common ownership:** such as land, energy and public transport—as opposed to the neoliberal emphasis on private ownership. For example, this might mean keeping our NHS public, or setting up municipal energy companies. This can take many different forms, from state-owned entities to local and community ownership, but all involve putting common resources into public or community hands.
3. **Co-operation and sharing:** acting together to achieve our goals, pooling our resources freely in a spirit of reciprocity as opposed to the neoliberal emphasis on competition. This translates into a range of practical solutions, from cooperative enterprise to mutual aid networks.

But we also need to correct the 'blind spots' of the past—around power, unpaid work and ecology—with **three new principles**:

4. **Participation and empowerment:** making decisions together about things that affect us, through institutions and spaces where everyone has an equal voice. This means creating new structures that are genuinely empowering and democratic, rather than simply replicating the top-down hierarchies or oppressive structures of the past.
5. **Controlling our work and time:** unpaid work, particularly care work, has long been a blind spot for both the left and right. By empowering people over their work and time, both paid and unpaid, we can reduce gender inequalities and enhance our ability to care and provide for each other outside the market. For many people the idea of a shorter working week is central to this.
6. **Sustaining ecological systems:** making this a non-negotiable rule of all decision-making. For example, this might mean carbon budgets or hard caps on our use of natural resources, rather than just manipulating the price of carbon or resources. For some people, moving towards a 'circular economy' is also central to this.

Below we summarise the *Common Agenda* position ('we say') on some of the key areas of the economy. We summarise this in contrast to the received wisdom of the neoliberal political project in the UK ('they say').

ISSUE	THEY SAY...	WE SAY...
What makes people tick?	Maximising our personal utility	We're social, co-operative, not always rational
What is the economy?	The market	A complex system embedded in social & ecological systems
What's the economy for?	Maximising growth in output	Delivering good lives for all whilst sustaining ecological systems
What makes the economy tick?	Wealth is created by self-made entrepreneurs; economic outcomes depend on people's free choices in the marketplace	Wealth creation is a collective endeavour; economic outcomes depend on who has power over resources and decisions
How does innovation happen?	Through the creativity of exceptional individuals, usually motivated by profit and enabled by private investment	When people are free to exercise their creativity in collaboration—often enabled by public investment
Inequality	Inequality is the price we pay for high growth—if the pie is growing, everyone gets more	Inequality matters: a growing pie doesn't help most people if the rich get all the extra pie. It's also a drag on economic activity
Debt / investment	Private investment is the driver of growth—government's role is to get out the way. Public debt is too high and must be cut	Public investment helps drive and shape economic progress. It's private debt we should be worried about, not public debt
Migration	Migrants are a drain on the economy. They take jobs and drive down wages for British-born workers	Migrants contribute to the economy. It's footloose capital and the war on organised labour that has kept wages down
Trade	Free trade benefits everyone. The UK has a competitive advantage in finance services, and pursuing this benefits all	Relying solely on finance has helped destroy good jobs outside London, produced inequality and a huge trade deficit
The environment	The environment is external to the economy. We can deal with environmental problems by making sure their costs are included in market prices ('internalised'), or by creating new markets (e.g. carbon markets).	The environment is our life support system and the source of everything we build and use: it can't be separated from the economy. Sustaining this life support system is non-negotiable—it's not something we can put a price on and trade off against other things.



audience

## CHAPTER 2

# UNDERSTANDING OUR AUDIENCE: HOW DOES THE BRITISH PUBLIC THINK ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

### WHAT WE DID

We conducted forty two-hour interviews with people up and down the country to understand how they thought about the economy. The interviews were analysed not to look at people's attitudes and opinions, but to uncover the deep patterns structuring *how* they understood economic issues: the metaphors they used, the connections they drew, the things they assumed to be true, and so on.

The aim was to identify shared patterns of thinking that were generally available to people in the UK, rather than to analyse differences between people from different demographic and geographical backgrounds. This is not to deny the important differences in opinion that exist on the economy, but rather to look to the level of culture at which there are common assumptions that shape thinking across differences. It is only by examining these common aspects of culture that we can understand how to create a different conversation about economic issues at the national level. From these common aspects, we built cultural models—these are the shared, durable assumptions and understandings of the economy within British culture.

**For more info about the cultural models methodology, see Appendix 1.**

Alongside this analysis, we reviewed the existing literature on economic framing and collated this into a library for our Network to draw on. Below we have indicated where and how the cultural models we identified relate to findings from previous work.

### WHAT WE FOUND

The British public draws on a number of 'powerful but thin' models to think about what the economy is and how it works. They are powerful in the sense that they structure people's understanding of the economy in important ways, bringing certain aspects of the economy into view while obscuring others.

Yet they are thin in the sense that they provide only the sketchiest ways of understanding the mechanisms behind economic outcomes. Indeed, what is missing from these models—what they do not provide people with the resources to think through—is itself a key finding.

Below, we summarise the key models that emerged in three domains: what the economy is and how it works; why the economy works the way it does; and how the economy should work. We also list the values that came up during interviews.

### WHAT THE ECONOMY IS AND HOW IT WORKS

#### ECONOMY AS MONEY

Discussions of the economy were *always* about money. People often understood this through the metaphor of circulation—money circulates through the economy. A good economy is one where money moves to the places it should go. This model is limiting because it obscures things that are not linked to the exchange of money—like care work and use of natural resources.



**Participant:** *On this planet money is how we purchase and make things happen because we have to pay for getting on a bus, we have to pay to drink a glass of water, to have a cup of coffee, a meal, to buy food to eat. You have to actually go out to work to earn money.*

**Researcher:** *If I say the word economy, what kind of things do you think about?*

**Participant:** *Money.*



## EDGE OF DISASTER

The economy was thought of as volatile, unpredictable and difficult to manage, with language like ‘tumbling’, ‘falling’, and ‘rocketing’. Although this may have been amplified by the fact that the interviews were conducted soon after the Brexit vote.



It also reflects a common cultural tendency, identified in previous work, to talk about the economy using metaphors of natural or nautical disasters (weathering storms, being buffeted by headwinds, waves, tides, aftershocks etc).<sup>3,4</sup> It has previously been suggested that these models are unhelpful for progressives since they suggest that the economy is a self-governing natural force rather than something actively shaped by humans—a way of thinking that lends itself to a laissez faire response, however disastrous the consequences.<sup>5</sup>

**Participant:** *I think within that time it [the economy] will implode at some point. I think it has to. It's a system that isn't working. It's a system that is on life support already but being well maintained until the next big crisis. Anything could tip it over, anything. But I think it's in such a fragile state that people are pumping money into it.*

## ECONOMY AS CONTAINER

People saw the economy as functioning like a national pot, with people putting in (contributing) or taking out (draining). The government was assumed to control what goes in and out of the pot, as well as how its contents are distributed. At a societal level, the goal is to keep the pot full. At an individual level, being a responsible member of society means not taking out more than you put in.



This leads people to a very limiting understanding of fairness, reinforcing the demonisation of groups who are portrayed as draining the pot, like immigrants and benefit claimants. People also used this model to talk about the need for a better balance between imports and exports.

**Participant:** *If we're going to say [the economy is] a system of distributing resources, then we are all feeding or taking things from the same pot, I suppose.*

**Participant:** *You've got people that are contributing to the economy and people that aren't. You've got a lot of people coming to stay in the country who are contributing to the economy. But we've also got a lot of our own people who aren't—who are draining the economy.*

## MYSTERIOUS MARKET FORCES

While people had some limited ways of understanding the economy, many areas were in a black box. People have no meaningful ways of understanding how markets interact globally, for example, or what leads to recessions or periods of economic growth. They also lack an understanding of the sources of British wealth in the colonial past.



This reinforces previous research which has found that only around a third of British people feel comfortable engaging with economics,<sup>6</sup> only 17% think they have a good understanding of how big businesses work,<sup>7</sup> and most could not accurately define key economic concepts like GDP<sup>8</sup> and the deficit.<sup>9</sup> This poses both a huge challenge and a real opportunity for progressives seeking to communicate how and why the economy should be different.

**Participant:** *I want to know why my ten bob's not going to be worth as much in the morning as it was last night? Why has the economy dropped? What makes it drop? That's what I want to know. What makes the economy go up and down and up and down? I don't understand enough about it to know why it drops.*

## ECONOMY VS. ENVIRONMENT

The environment is assumed to stand outside the economy, and economic and environmental interests are thought of as opposed. What is good for the environment is thought to be bad for the economy and vice versa. Many people thought that environmental imperatives *should* constrain what happens within the economy, but the fact that this is a model of *constraint* is important: people don't see the environment as the necessary bedrock of economic success, but as something separate.

**Participant:** Sometimes the environment loses out to the economy ... The M54 that goes out to Shrewsbury, they've built a big engine plant I think it is, Rover or Land Rover have. But you couldn't build on there until they wanted that plant.

## WHY THE ECONOMY WORKS AS IT DOES

### SYSTEM IS RIGGED

People widely suggested that the economy is manipulated by elites in government, business, and the media who pull the strings of the economy for their own benefit. This model assumes that elites have almost complete control over what the economy and that outcomes are the direct reflection of their intention.



This supports previous findings that most British people think the economy is stacked in favour of the wealthy,<sup>10</sup> and that people generally find it hard to understand the economy as a complex system and so default to explanations focussed on individual intentions.<sup>11</sup>

The 'System is Rigged' provides a useful starting point to communicate ideas about rebalancing wealth and power in the economy, but because the model lacks an account of the mechanisms by which wealth and power shape outcomes, it makes it hard for people to recognise how outcomes can be changed through public pressure and changes to policy. This on its own does not lead

people to think of solutions. Past research has shown that even if people believe that the gap between rich and poor is a problem, they will not necessarily support policy measures to close the gap.<sup>12</sup> In our interviews we found that System is Rigged thinking tends to result in tremendous fatalism—if elites control everything, and they have no interest in creating a fair system, what can ordinary people do?

**Participant:** The government aren't working class are they, so they don't see anything. Just make their own rules.

**Participant:** I think politicians forget that we live on one planet and it's all about their own greed. I think the economy is set by men in suits basically and they will always profit from it, and profit enormously.

### HIDDEN AGENDA

The public displayed remarkable distrust of the media. Participants consistently suggested that they do not trust media sources at all. This distrust is grounded in the idea that the media have some sort of hidden agenda, whether that is an ideological agenda or a business agenda (e.g. sensationalist news sells papers).



This has the effect of generating scepticism about economic news and claims made in public discourse—with the Brexit debate sometimes invoked to make this point. This model is challenging for communicators who may assume that the way to win the public argument on issues like austerity and climate change is to raise the profile of expert voices in the mainstream media.

It's important to note, however, that distrust of media does not mean that people are immune to its influence. We spoke to several people who said they distrusted all media sources but then gave arguments that corresponded with popular news frames.

**Participant:** *There's a lot of spinning tales on both sides, like saying—as if the whole world was going to collapse if people vote a certain way. Then another saying suddenly the streets are going to be paved with gold again if we do it this way. Both were a lie just meant to spur up emotions of people.*

**Participant:** *I wouldn't trust anything in a paper, in the newspaper. Put down media, generally. I don't believe anything that's written or said on the television, the radio or in the papers. I form my own opinion.*

### GREED = HUMAN NATURE

Participants sometimes assumed that greed is a basic part of human nature: all people are motivated by a desire to enrich themselves, even at the expense of others. This model comes through when people are asked how the economy might change or what it will be like in the future.



People assume that there will always be inequality because human nature will not change and there will always be people getting rich at the expense of others. This reinforces fatalism and makes it hard to imagine alternatives. This model may also work against the idea that we can build a more sustainable economy by reducing over-consumption.

**Participant:** *I suppose it's human nature, it's greed isn't it? When we were trading in stones I would imagine that somebody had two stones more than that person with half a stone. I think you'll always get that.*

## HOW THE ECONOMY SHOULD WORK

### NATIONAL SELF-RELIANCE

This model assumes that, ideally, Britain would be more self-reliant, producing key products at home and able to meet its basic needs without relying on other countries. Globalisation and, to a surprisingly small extent, Europe are the foil for this model. The model is coloured by the imperial past, as people have a definite sense that the nation used to be greater and more important on the world stage. The loss of self-reliance seems to be experienced, in part, as a symptom of the loss of imperial status.



Although this model could be leveraged to support ideas about boosting manufacturing and relocating production, this is a dangerous strategy: the model is built around a backward-looking concept of the nation which threatens to 'other' many groups in modern British society and reinforce racism and xenophobia.

**Participant:** *So if we grew it, bought it, sold it, that would be better for us, wouldn't it? We would be growing our own things, our own beasts, our own animals. We would be eating our own meat, our own produce, whereas we buy too much from abroad.*

### IDEAL PAST

People often idealised an earlier time—typically the post-war period—when wages were high, jobs were more secure, inequality was low, there was a greater sense of community, and 'we did more manufacturing'. This was contrasted with the current situation where it is difficult for ordinary people to live a good life.



Of course, there will likely be generational differences here. Previous research has found that people born before 1939 are much more likely to regard the welfare state as 'one of Britain's proudest achievements' than people born after 1979.<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, this gives people a reference point for how the economy could be different which could be used to help imagine a different future. On the other hand, if seen as a past that cannot be recaptured—or linked to ideas about empire or immigration—it could be counterproductive.

**Participant:** *Everybody helped everybody, especially just after the war years, when I was a child, like in the '50s and that. Late '50s, early '60s, when I was little, people looked after each other.*

**Participant:** *In my lifetime, I've seen things change. [...] We had a car industry in my lifetime where British cars were made and manufactured around here and there's barely any of them left now.*

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Despite cynicism about elites who are seen as nefarious or out of touch—and despite generally seeing individuals as responsible for their own economic problems—people widely assumed the government was responsible for managing the economy and making sure people's basic needs are met (reinforcing the findings of previous research looking specifically at welfare<sup>14</sup>).



This is seen as uncontroversial 'common sense'. This means that communicators do not need to devote energy to arguing for government's role in solving economic problems: instead they should focus on helping people understand *what* exactly government should be doing and *how* this would help.

**Researcher:** *Whose responsibility do you think it is to address these sorts of problems?*

**Participant:** *Well it's the government, isn't it?*

*I think it's the government's job to address it.*

## VALUES PRESENT IN PEOPLE'S TALK

As well as revealing the cultural models people engage to understand the economy, cognitive interviews also revealed the values people consider to be important. We define values as fundamental organising principles that people use to evaluate social issues and reach decisions. They are:

- \* **Self-reliance.** People consistently stressed the importance of being individually self-reliant and of the nation being self-reliant.
- \* **Equality of Opportunity.** There was a great deal of criticism of existing inequalities in the opportunities that people have, and corresponding appeal to the value of equality.
- \* **Fair Exchange.** When thinking about what people contribute to and take out of the economy, people use the value of fairness: people should not take out more than they put in. Exchanging a minimal contribution for a substantial benefit is unfair.
- \* **Fair Competition.** When thinking about the economy, people typically assumed that competition is inevitable, but it should be on terms that give everyone a fair chance.
- \* **Interdependence.** People recognise that people's economic fortunes are connected and think this interdependence should be recognised and valued.
- \* **Community.** When drawing on the *Ideal Past* model, people invoked a communitarian ideal. The value of community is used to criticise the perceived atomistic life of today.
- \* **Honesty and Transparency.** People drew upon these values in their criticisms of government and media.
- \* **Democracy.** The British public is highly critical of the unequal distribution of power within British society. While it is unclear what, precisely, the positive value behind these criticisms is, it is some version of an egalitarian-democratic value, which holds that everyone within society should have a say over what happens.

## MAPPING THE GAPS: KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

So what do the above findings mean for progressive communicators talking about a new economy? We've discussed the implications of individual cultural models above. But we also analysed the key opportunities and challenges posed by the models as a whole, comparing them to the content of the *Common Agenda* (see Chapter 1).

### KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Like the progressive communicators we worked with, many British people:

- ★ Recognise that inequality is a real and growing problem and understand that regional inequality exists
- ★ See that different people and groups have different opportunities in society
- ★ Stress the importance of manufacturing within the UK
- ★ See the trade deficit as a problem to be addressed
- ★ Assume that there is a place for common ownership of goods and services
- ★ See the government as responsible for managing and improving the economy
- ★ Aspire to the values of 'interdependence' and 'cooperation' in society

### KEY CHALLENGES

Unlike the progressive communicators we worked with, many British people:

- ☆ Think human nature is selfish and greedy rather than social and co-operative
- ☆ Think the economy is just about money, rather than a system for meeting people's needs and delivering good lives

- ☆ Don't think of the economy as a complex, interconnected system, but as a national container—or just a collection of forces they don't understand
- ☆ See economic problems in terms of nefarious individuals rather than broken institutions and social structures
- ☆ Don't see the government as having a central role in creating wealth through public investment and regulation
- ☆ See migrants as a drain on the economy rather than as contributors, or indeed as human beings whose value should not be measured in economic terms
- ☆ See the environment as opposed to the economy, rather than as the essential bedrock of economic success
- ☆ Are deeply fatalistic about the possibility of fundamental economic change, rather than believing that we can build a more co-operative, democratic and sustainable economy

### IMPLICATIONS

Based on this analysis, we worked with our Network to identify the key tasks our frames needed to accomplish in order to change attitudes on the economy. (see Appendix 1 for more detail on how we did this.) There was general consensus that the central challenge was the belief that the economy cannot be controlled or changed by collective action.

If we could overcome this fatalism, drawing on people's existing understandings of what's wrong with the economy and of their shared past, it could unlock possibilities for change on all kinds of issues, from climate change to economic democracy.

**The key tasks for our frames were therefore to enable the general public to believe that the economy is a product of design which has created inequality and concentrated power, and that change is possible to build a more democratic and sustainable economy.**



story



## CHAPTER 3

# CHANGING THE STORY: IDENTIFYING AND TESTING NEW FRAMES

### WHAT WE DID

To develop a new strategy for communicating about the economy—a new story to tell—we developed a set of possible reframing strategies and then tested these frames using both qualitative and quantitative research. The frames were designed to overcome the key communications challenges we identified when we mapped the gaps. Our hypotheses about which reframing strategies might work were informed by our understanding of the public's existing ways of thinking about economic issues, as well as by previous research and the Network's input about what might work in shifting thinking about the economy, how it works, and what needs to be done to fix it.

In brainstorming possible reframes to test, we considered a range of different types of frame elements, including values, explanatory metaphors, policy exemplars (that is, exemplar policies that communicate our vision), and responsibility frames. Different types of frame elements are suited to different purposes. We developed frames suited for the tasks identified in phase 1 & 2 and by the Network. As we explain below, these different frame elements can be put together into broader narratives that, together, provide people with a new way of thinking about the economy.

### EXPLANATORY METAPHORS

Explanatory metaphors enable people to reason about issues in new ways, by comparing something that is not well understood to something familiar.<sup>15</sup> The new stories about the economy that we have developed include explanatory metaphors that enable people to think in new and different ways. Specifically, the metaphors make it possible for people to reason about how the economy is designed and can be re-designed.

After brainstorming potential metaphors, we tested eight possibilities in on-the-street interviews, and found that four of them—*Reprogramming the Economy* (a computer metaphor), *Economic Tracks* (a railway metaphor), *Economic Network* (a phone network metaphor), and *Renovating the Economy* (a construction metaphor)—held promise in enabling people to think about how the economy is designed. We brought these four metaphors into a survey experiment, to test their capacity to increase understanding of how the economy works.

In the experiment, respondents read short pieces of text, which compared the economy to the metaphor in question. The metaphors compared problems in the economy to problems in a computer programme/railway network/phone network/building, and explained how these problems could be fixed through reprogramming/laying down new tracks/rebuilding the network/renovating the building.

We then tested these in on-the-street interviews and large-scale survey experiments (See Appendix 1 for more detail). In the interviews, researchers asked participants some initial, open-ended questions about the economy and how it works, and then introduced one of several different explanatory metaphors and asked a series of follow-up questions to ascertain whether and how the metaphor shifted people's thinking. The most promising metaphors were brought forward into the survey experiments, which tested refined versions of these metaphors along with other frame elements.

These large-scale experiments used a nationally representative sample. Each respondent read a message or was assigned to a control group that received no message. All respondents were then asked the same series of questions to measure their understandings of and attitudes about the economy (for example, how far they thought the economy was the product of human design, their optimism about the economy changing, or who they blamed for economic problems), as well as how much they favoured or opposed different economic policies (such as environmental regulation or public ownership of utilities). The full set of questions we asked is in Appendix 3. We then analysed the differences in how people in different experimental conditions answered these questions. The analysis helps us understand how exposure to different frames affects people's thinking about the economy.

In crafting narratives to test, we were careful to adhere to several criteria, to ensure that the narratives were inclusive and responsible.

The narratives we developed:

- Avoided appealing to implicitly white British peoplehood, so that they didn't unintentionally trigger nationalist or xenophobic understandings
- In stories featuring corporate elites, explained *how* corporate elites have influenced the economy by shaping economic policy. In other words, the narratives filled in and fleshed out people's accurate but thin sense that the system is rigged, in order to help people see that improving the economy is possible and recognise specific policy changes that need to be made
- Did *not* denigrate government generally, so as not to undermine faith or trust in our ability to solve economic problems through democratic means
- Could not be used to support climate denial, or as part of a story of the economy that implies irresponsible environmental exploitation

## WHAT WE FOUND

We identified two stories—two new narratives about the economy—that are effective in shifting public thinking. These stories offer new ways of reasoning about the economy—how it works, what is wrong with it now, and what can be done to change it—that progressives can use to build support for the *Common Agenda* and progressive economic policy.

Both stories translate core content of the *Common Agenda*. Yet while the stories carry similar content, one story takes a more populist approach by pitching elites against the people. This story explicitly identifies corporate power and wealthy elites as the source of the economy's problems, while the other focuses less on *who* has caused the problems and explains instead how the economy fails to satisfy people's real needs. These differences in tone and emphasis enable the stories to be deployed in different situations, depending on the audience and the strategic intent of the communication.

For example, if campaigners want to press for banking reform, the populist story could be used to argue for new types of bank that are accountable to the public rather than a small elite. If campaigners wanted to argue for a shorter working week, the second story—which focuses on the *purpose* of the economy

and how change would help us to live good lives—might be more appropriate. Below, we outline these two stories and present empirical evidence of their effectiveness.

## THE POPULIST STORY: RESISTING CORPORATE POWER

The populist story—*Resisting Corporate Power*—includes the following elements:

1. The value of *Equality* **or** *Economic Strength*
2. The explanatory metaphor of *Reprogramming the Economy*
3. An explanation that connects the dots and explains: 1) how corporate elites have programmed the economy and how this has undermined *Equality/Economic Strength*, and 2) how the economy can be reprogrammed to promote a strong/equal economy.

The potential power and dangers of 'progressive populist' narratives have been much debated in recent years. People's growing feeling that our economy is broken, distrust of 'the establishment' and readiness for major change has arguably fuelled the Brexit vote, the rise of Trump and the European far-right. This has raised the question of whether progressives can counter these developments by using populist narratives to build mass movements that win. Podemos, Syriza and most recently Corbyn all suggest that blaming elites for economic problems has potential—but some still fear that 'us and them' narratives are inherently divisive and risk playing into the xenophobic nationalism that characterises right-wing populism.

Given this background, we wanted to learn whether a responsible, progressive populist story might be effective in building support for the *Common Agenda*. In other words, should progressives be telling an economic story that highlights the role of corporate elites in shaping economic policy? If so, how can we do this while avoiding unintended consequences?

Because there are many different ways of understanding the term "populism," it is vital to emphasise that when we talk about populism, we have in mind the idea that elites are the source of current problems and that fixing these problems requires returning power to the people.<sup>16</sup> A populist framing strategy is one that highlights this aspect of our current situation.

In a controlled experiment, researchers tested two versions of three different values—*Equality*, *Economic Strength*, and *Fulfilment*. These values-based messages explained how policies made in the last forty years (e.g. privatisation of social housing and policies that promoted financialisation) have undermined equality, weakened the economy, or been detrimental to people’s ability to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. The messages then discussed how progressive policies (e.g. guaranteeing decent wages, restoring public ownership, etc.) can fix these problems and create a more equal, strong, or fulfilling economy. One version of the messages highlighted the role of corporations and banks in shaping economic policy and causing these problems, and called for a decrease in their political power, while the other version did not attribute responsibility for economic problems to corporate elites.

**Equality:** A just society gives equal weight to the needs of everyone. Creating a just society means making sure that the needs of all members of society are treated as equally important.

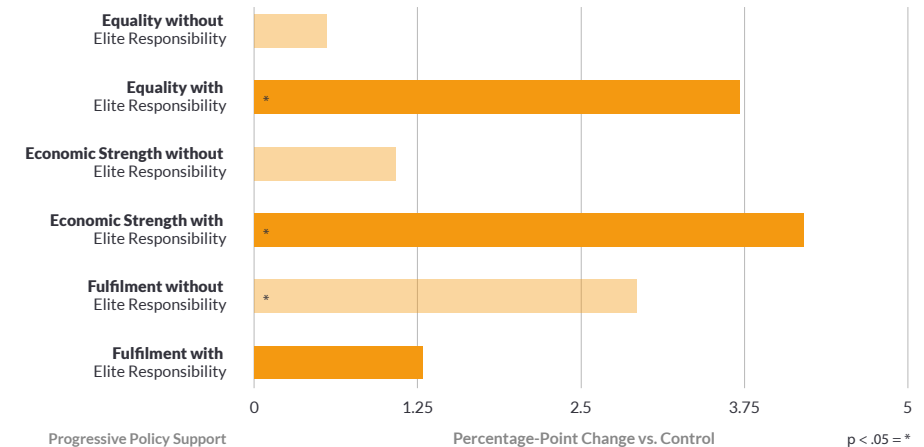
**Economic Strength:** A good society requires a strong and durable economy. Strengthening the economy will make sure that everyone can have a good life.

**Fulfilment:** We need to make it possible for everyone to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life, rather than simply chasing profit. Creating a good society means prioritising common happiness over profit.

We found that a populist narrative, properly executed, can work, but only when used with particular values. Specifically, the values of *Equality* and *Economic Strength* are effective in boosting support for progressive economic policies when coupled with explicit denunciation of the influence of corporate power. These values were not effective when deployed without highlighting the role of corporate elites.

By contrast, the versions that did not place responsibility on corporate elites were ineffective in moving policy support. As we will discuss below, the opposite pattern held for the value of *Fulfilment*—the populist version was not effective while the version of that value that did not highlight corporations’ role in politics was effective.

### Effects of Values



Why do *Equality* and *Economic Strength* require a populist focus on corporate elites to be effective? While we would need to conduct further research to answer this conclusively, cultural models findings provide useful clues for interpreting these results. These values likely work by productively leveraging the *System is Rigged* model.

When thinking with this model, people already recognise that the system is both unfair and broken. By coupling these values with references to corporate elites, we effectively activate this model. The idea that corporate elites have undermined equality, or, alternatively, have weakened the economy, echoes and cues people’s existing recognition that the economy is unfair and broken due to the influence of elites who manipulate the system for their own benefit.

After cueing this productive orientation, these values frames fill in this model by explaining *how* elites rig the system. The values messages inoculated against one danger of this model—its tendency to produce fatalism—by making explicit *the role of policy and institutions*. By helping people understand that elites rig the system *by influencing policy*, it becomes possible to see that the status quo is not inevitable and that certain types of policy change would un-rig the economy and produce a more equal economy, or a stronger one (depending on which value is being used). The versions of these values that don’t include this populist

thrust fail to activate and capitalise on the productive features of the *System is Rigged* cultural model. (The value of *Fulfillment* appears to work through a different cognitive pathway; it is the non-populist version of this value that works. We return to this point in the next section.)

The values of *Equality* and *Economic Strength* thus work for similar reasons, but the values provide slightly different arguments for progressive policy change and should not be run together. Communicators can select the value that best resonates with their organisation's mission. We recommend that, when talking with a rightwing audience, communicators use *Economic Strength*, which was especially effective among Conservative voters, producing a statistically significant 5.1 percentage-point increase in support for progressive policies among these voters.

While these values messages were effective in boosting support for progressive policy, fully explaining the role of policy in shaping the economy requires an additional tool: an explanatory metaphor. The values messages used specific examples to illustrate how policy shapes the economy and to enable people to recognise how policy change might help, but research found that explanatory metaphors are the most effective way of enabling people to reason in a full way about how policy influences the economy.

## EXPLANATORY METAPHORS

The experiment found three metaphors—*Reprogramming*, *Tracks*, and *Network*—to be generally effective. *Reprogramming* had statistically significant positive effects on three outcomes, helping people understand that the economy is designed and the role of policy in shaping the economy, and boosting people's sense of collective efficacy—the sense that we, collectively, can do things to fix the economy.

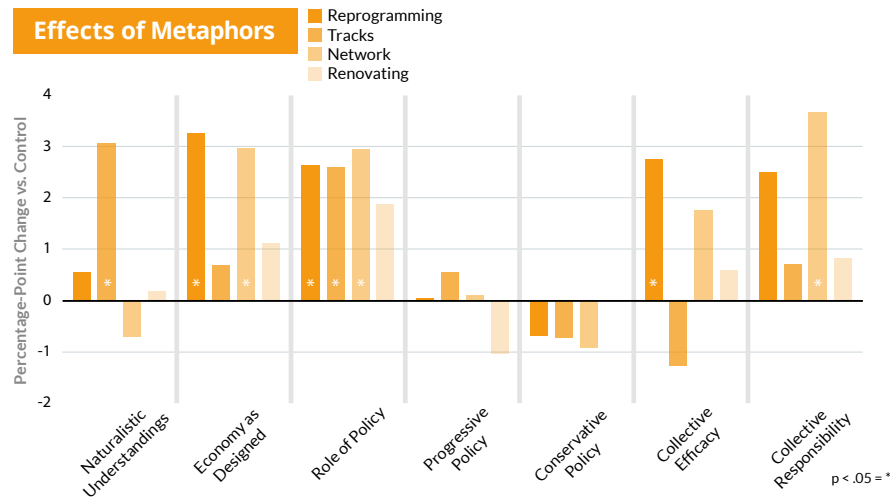
The metaphor of *Renovation* was ineffective on all of our outcomes and we therefore would not recommend it for communicating about the economy.

**Reprogramming the Economy:** Our economy is like a programme that is constantly being revised and updated. Laws and policies are the code that determines how the economy runs—what it can be used to do, and for which users. The economy has been programmed for corporate interests, while most of the public have been locked out. We need to reset the password so that we can reprogramme the economy to work for everyone.

**Economic Tracks:** Our economy is like a railway network—it's built to take people to particular places. The laws and policies that we make lay down tracks that determine where the economy takes people. Right now, our economic tracks don't get most people to their needs and wants. We need to lay down economic tracks that get everyone where they need to go.

**Economic Network:** Our economy is like a phone network. The laws and policies we make determine how this network is constructed—where coverage is strong and the economy is easy to tap into, and where it's patchy. Right now, our economic network leaves some areas without reliable access to the economy. We need to build an economy that is reliable for all users.

Of these metaphors, *Tracks* produced statistically significant gains on two outcomes, generating an understanding that the way the economy works is not the result of natural forces and increasing understanding of the role of policy in shaping the economy. *Network* had statistically significant positive effects on three outcomes, helping people recognise that the economy is designed and shaped by policy, as well as increasing people's sense that improving the economy is a collective responsibility.



Because all three metaphors proved effective on similar outcomes, we must return to qualitative evidence from on-the-street interviews to determine which metaphors fit best within the two broader stories of the economy that emerge from the research.

The *Reprogramming* metaphor is a strong fit for a populist story about resisting corporate power. Within the conceptual architecture of the metaphor, there is a slot for policy—it is the code that determines how the programme runs. And there is a slot for corporate elites—they have gained the password to the economy, and so can programme it as they want. In on-the-street interviews, we found that the populist elements of the metaphor—language about elites holding the “passwords” and the public being “locked out” of the economy—were especially sticky.

The metaphor is conceptually suited to being paired with values to constitute a populist story, and has proven effective in helping to further broaden and fill out the *System is Rugged* model that this story productively leverages. The image of regaining control of the password yields the increased sense of collective efficacy that we found in the experiment. (As we discuss below, qualitative evidence suggests that *Tracks* and *Network* function differently from *Reprogramming* and are a better fit for the alternative, second story we are recommending. We return to the findings on these metaphors below.)

This story is not a set message, but a flexible narrative that can be used in many different ways. Below, we offer sample messages, which show how these elements can be put together into a narrative to generate a story about the economy. It is important to emphasise that we have included specific policies here to illustrate the need to explain how policies have undermined valued goals and how solutions would address these problems, but that communicators can talk about a range of specific policies within the framework of this story.

Here’s a sample message that uses the value of *Equality*:

Over the last forty years, our government has become a tool of corporations and banks, prioritising the interests of the wealthy rather than giving equal weight to the needs of everyone. We need to repair this injustice by reprogramming our economy.

Our economy is like a programme that is constantly being revised and updated. Corporate elites have gained the password to the economy, and have programmed the economy for corporate interests, while most of the public have been locked out. By reducing taxes, privatising social housing and railways, and allowing the financial services industry to operate unchecked, the government, under the influence of powerful corporations, has programmed the economy to prioritise the needs of the wealthy and neglect the needs of most people. Cutting taxes and privatising industries has profited business while locking most of the public out of economic gains. And by programming the economy for financial services rather than manufacturing at the urging of big banks, we’ve destroyed the types of good jobs that make a good life possible for everyone.

As a society, we need to prioritise equality over the desires of corporations and wealthy elites. We need to reset the password and give control of the economy back to the public. That way, we can reprogramme the economy to work for everyone. We can create an economy that treats all members of society as equals by guaranteeing decent wages for the least well-off, investing in local communities, and restoring public ownership of common resources like energy and transport. Creating a just society means taking back the password to the economy from corporate elites and reprogramming the economy to treat the needs of all members of society as equally important.

Here's a sample message that uses the value of *Economic Strength*:

Over the last forty years, our government has become a tool of corporations and banks, and as a result our society has served their interests while failing to provide the broad-based supports that our economy needs to work well. This has weakened our economy, so it doesn't meet people's needs.

Our economy is like a programme that is constantly being revised and updated. Corporate elites have gained the password to the economy, and have programmed the economy to work well for corporate users. But the public have been locked out, so the parts of the economy they rely on have been neglected. As a result, many users of the economy experience constant glitches, and the economy as a whole doesn't run well.

By programming the economy for financial services rather than manufacturing, we've destroyed the types of good jobs that put money back into the economy. And cutting taxes and privatising industries has undermined our ability to invest in ways that strengthen the economy and keep it running smoothly.

As a society, we need to prioritise a strong economy over the desires of corporations and wealthy elites. We need to reset the password and give control of the economy back to the public. That way, we can reprogramme the economy so it works better. We can create a strong and durable economy by guaranteeing decent wages for the least well-off, investing in local communities, and restoring public ownership of common resources like energy and transport. Creating a good society means taking back the password to the economy from corporate elites and reprogramming the economy so it runs smoothly and makes a good life possible for all users.

## THE COMMON GROUND STORY: MEETING OUR NEEDS

The common ground story—*Meeting Our Needs*—includes the following elements:

1. The value of *Fulfilment*
2. The explanatory metaphor of *Economic Tracks*
3. An explanation that connects the dots and explains: 1) how our economic tracks have made it difficult for people to reach fulfilling lives, and 2) how the economy can be rebuilt to get people to their real needs.

While the right type of populist story is highly effective, a populist strategy may not be appropriate for all communicators or in all situations. It is a strategy that focuses attention on disparities of wealth and power, which is an important but not complete account of the nature of problems and solutions in the economy.

There are situations where audiences need no reminding of this, and situations where it might alienate groups in society (e.g. business leaders) who are more closely identified with corporate elites.

### FULFILMENT

The results of our research indicate that there is an effective, viable alternative to the populist story. This alternative centres on the value of *Fulfilment*. As we noted above, the populist version of *Fulfilment* is ineffective, while the version that does not highlight elites' culpability is effective. Why is this?

Again, while further research would be needed to know for sure, the value of *Fulfilment* makes a different type of argument than *Equality* and *Economic Strength*. Whereas these latter values do not explicitly broaden people's focus beyond money, and primarily critique how policy shapes an economy that produces and distributes money in particular ways, *Fulfilment* makes an explicit argument for thinking about a broader set of goods, beyond money, when thinking about the economy. The argument is that our focus on profit is a distortion of proper priorities and undermines our ability to have fulfilling and meaningful lives. This critique applies across participants in society, not just to elites. This helps to explain why the populist version of the value did not work: blaming elites is at odds with the deeper argument being made, which encompasses all aspects of society and applies to all of us.



*Fulfilment* provides a different rationale for progressive policy change than *Equality* and *Economic Strength*. According to the value of *Fulfilment*, corporations need to be restrained to avoid an overly profit-driven society, and people need material resources not as ends in themselves but as means to accomplish deeper needs. Rather than leveraging the *System is Rigged* model, the value works by broadening people's understanding of what the economy is about (it's not just about money). It likely leverages a latent sense that our society has the wrong priorities.<sup>17</sup> Rather than critiquing the inner workings of the system—who exercises power and how this shapes outcomes—the value of *Fulfilment* offers a new way to think about what the system is *for*—what the purposes of the economy are and should be.

## ECONOMIC TRACKS

Just as with the *Resisting Corporate Power* story, the *Meeting Our Needs* story requires an explanatory metaphor to fill in gaps in thinking about how the economy works. Based on our analysis of on-the-street interviews, we recommend *Tracks* as the metaphor that fits best within this story.

Unlike *Reprogramming*, the other two metaphors that performed well in the survey experiment—*Tracks* and *Network*—lack a central role for a designer, making them more natural fits for a story that is *not* focused on assigning responsibility for the economy's problems to specific people or groups. What these metaphors do well is help people see how the economy structures opportunities, and, critically, how this results from the way the economy is designed.

In on-the-street interviews, we found that both metaphors helped people see how the layout of the network (railway or phone) determines economic outcomes. People used and extended the metaphors in a variety of ways: the fact that they are inherently spatial made them easy to apply to issues like regional inequality, but they could also be used to talk about wider issues, like whether the economy is really taking us where we want to go. We recommend the *Tracks* metaphor rather than *Network* for two reasons. First, the *Tracks* metaphor was significantly stickier. The metaphor stuck in people's minds and they repeated and used the language of the metaphor much more frequently than with *Network*. This suggests that the metaphor is more likely to have a durable effect on people's thinking and has a better chance of being picked up within public discourse. Second, the *Tracks* metaphor more consistently helped people think about the economy as built or designed. While both metaphors had significant

effects on some of the scales related to design in the experiment (*Naturalistic Forces*, *Economy as Designed*, and *Role of Policy*—see Appendix 3 for full questions), the stronger results from *Tracks* in on-the-street interviews provide better confirmation of effectiveness on this critical task.

As with the populist story, this common ground story is not a set message, but a flexible narrative that can be used in different ways, and to argue for a range of different policies. Here's a sample message that shows how these elements can be put together:

A good society makes it possible for everyone to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. Yet, our society is currently focused solely on profit, and people are forced to chase money rather than happiness.

Our economy is like a railway network—it's built to take people to particular places. The laws and policies that we make lay down tracks that determine where the economy takes people. Right now, our economy is built around profit, rather than being built to get people to their true needs. By allowing businesses to use zero-hour contracts, provide low wages, and require people to work more and more hours for the same pay, we have built economic tracks that move profit forward but leave people without the things they need to achieve wellbeing and realise their potential. When people don't have decent wages or stable jobs, this undermines wellbeing in all sorts of ways. And for those of us who do have stable jobs, the need to work more hours means less time with our families and to pursue our goals in life outside of work.

As a society, we need to prioritise happiness and fulfilment over profit. We need to lay down economic tracks that make it possible for people to arrive at a meaningful life. We can build an economy that gets people to happiness by guaranteeing decent wages for the least well-off, banning zero-hour contracts, and reducing working hours. Creating a good society means laying down economic tracks that enable us to get to our real needs rather than keeping us all on a train whose only destination is profit.

## HOW TO USE THESE STORIES: DOS AND DON'TS

The above findings generate some clear recommendations for communicators. Below, we outline a set of do's and don'ts. These recommendations explain when and how to use the two stories outlined above.

### USE THE **MEETING OUR NEEDS** STORY TO CONNECT ECONOMIC ISSUES TO SUSTAINABILITY BROADLY

While the experimental results suggest that both of the above stories are effective on similar outcomes—in helping people understand how the economy is designed and can be re-designed, and in boosting support for progressive policy—the internal logic of these stories and the different cognitive pathways suggest slightly different practical uses.

The Meeting Our Needs story provides a way of broadening the conversation, so that discussion of the economy isn't just focused on money, but includes a wider set of needs and goods. It thus provides a natural and easy way of talking about sustainability more broadly. This will enable communicators to easily connect traditional “economic issues” with other domains that require sustainability, including the environment.

### USE THE **MEETING OUR NEEDS** STORY WHEN A NON-OPPOSITIONAL TONE IS NEEDED

As noted above, this story is well-suited for engaging audiences who might be put off by the populist story, such as business leaders or other elites. When progressives are trying to engage such groups as allies, the *Meeting Our Needs* story provides an appropriate and more easily usable alternative.

### USE THE **RESISTING CORPORATE POWER** STORY TO TALK ABOUT POWER—AND NOT JUST WITH FRIENDS...

The *Resisting Corporate Power* story provides a natural and effective way of talking about power in the UK and of calling for a redistribution of power. Communicators should use this story to talk about how power structures the economy, and how power can and must be rebalanced as part of the process of redesigning the economy.

It is important to note that while the tone of the *Resisting Corporate Power* story is oppositional, this story—especially when used with *Economic Strength*—proved effective with Conservatives. The story should be used with a wide range of audiences, any time that communicators want to take head on the issue of power.

### WHEN USING THE VALUE OF **ECONOMIC STRENGTH**, EMPHASISE THAT A STRONG ECONOMY INVOLVES BROAD-BASED SUPPORT THAT SERVES EVERYONE'S NEEDS

Because the *Economic Strength* frame is reminiscent of recent conservative rhetoric, it is important to execute this value in the right way. While this frame is likely effective with rightwing voters because it leverages familiar ideas and applies them in a new way, the language of building “strong economy” must be explained to make sure it is understood in ways that advance a progressive project.

Specifically, communicators should emphasise that a strong economy is one that meets everyone's needs and makes a good life possible for everyone. A strong economy should not be conflated with economic growth. By talking about a strong economy as one that works for everyone, communicators can leverage the existing recognition the economy is broken and doesn't function well while making clear that fixing the economy requires broad-based supports that make all parts of the economy function properly, so as to meet the needs of everyone.

### WHEN USING THE **RESISTING CORPORATE POWER** STORY, HIGHLIGHT ASPECTS OF THE ECONOMY THAT ARE NOT MONETISED

While the *Resisting Corporate Power* story does not explicitly try to broaden people's understanding of what the economy is intended to provide, as the *Meeting Our Needs* story does, communicators using the *Resisting Corporate Power* story should be careful not to unintentionally reinforce an overly narrow conception of the economy. To counter the *Economy = Money* cultural model, communicators using the *Resisting Corporate Power* story should find ways of connecting non-monetised activities—leisure, unpaid care work, use of natural spaces—to the economy. Communicators might, for example, use unpaid care work as an example of how the economy has been programmed for the interests of some

and not others. Or they could explain how corporations' ability to extract natural resources has created a range of costs—both monetary and non-monetary—and that, as a result, the economy doesn't really function or work well. By using these less prototypically “economic” activities, communicators can avoid reinforcing a narrow understanding of the economy and potentially help to broaden people's understanding of what the economy's purpose is.

## WITH BOTH STORIES, ALWAYS CONNECT THE DOTS BETWEEN THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

As we explained above, the successful values messages that comprise the core of our tested stories were explicit in spelling out how policies have undermined a strong, equal, or fulfilling economy, in order to make clear how specific types of policies could fix the economy. While we have already touched on this, it is important to reiterate that this an *essential* part of the story, and communicators must be explicit about how current policies have caused problems, and connect the dots for people between these problems and proposed solutions.<sup>18</sup> This recommendation applies to both the *Resisting Corporate Power* and *Meeting Our Needs* stories.

## AVOID USING THE POLICY AS THE WHOLE MESSAGE

By providing an example of a signature policy that represents their broader orientation, communicators can signal to the public how they will approach a broader problem. This approach is often used in electoral politics. For example, Donald Trump used “the wall” to quickly communicate his approach to governing more generally. This exemplar not only signalled a policy orientation (anti-immigration policies, protectionism, etc.), but communicated an identity orientation (pitting “real” Americans against foreigners) and a political posture (aggressive action to protect narrowly defined national interests). The policy in this case served not primarily as a substantive proposal but rather as a framing device for communicating a particular approach.

Given the power of exemplars, we explored, in an initial survey experiment, whether or not particular policies might be capable of serving as effective exemplars within a new progressive story about the economy in the UK. We tested four exemplars—investing in green industries, a programme to create new social housing, requiring worker representation on corporate boards, and universal basic income—against the same set of outcome measures we used to test other

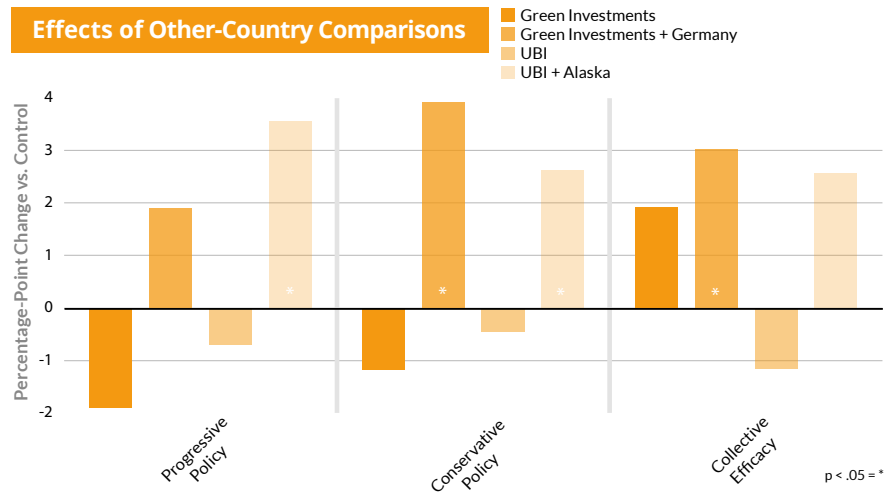
framing strategies. We found that none of the exemplars was effective. There were no significant effects on core outcome measures on the economy.

Why didn't these exemplar policies work? One possibility is that we tested the wrong exemplars—or that compelling exemplar policies simply aren't out there yet. This may reflect the need for deeper thinking about precisely what policies can help make the new economy a reality (see Chapter 5). It is possible that other policies might be more effective in communicating a broader agenda that opens up new thinking about the economy. But it is also possible that policy exemplars on the economy are ineffective because people lack adequate information about the economy to generalise from one policy to policies that would be similar to it. In order for a policy exemplar to be effective, members of the public must be capable of quickly grasping the general approach the policy embodies and of extending this approach to other policies. Because members of the British public lack a full understanding of how the economy works and the role of policy within it, it is likely that people cannot easily generalise from specific exemplars to a broader approach.

## USE OTHER-COUNTRY COMPARISONS WITHIN WELL-FRAMED STORIES TO INCREASE COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

To further explore if and how policy exemplars can be used, we paired two of the policies—universal basic income and investments in green industries—with other-country comparisons, to see if it is useful to explain how other countries have enacted similar policies and benefit from them. For universal basic income (UBI), we explained how Alaska has implemented a version of UBI and suggested that the UK would benefit from doing something similar. For green investments, we explained how Germany has invested in green energy and explained benefits to the UK of adopting a similar policy.

The results were striking. The other-country comparisons made the exemplars effective in moving policy support—but not progressive policy specifically. Both exemplars, when coupled with an other-country comparison, increased support for *conservative* economic policies, while the message about UBI that included a comparison with Alaska also increased support for *progressive* policies. The other-country comparisons lead people to conclude that policy change is necessary, but do not create a clear preference for a specific *type* of policy change.



What is going on here? The clue lies in the results on the efficacy outcome. The green investments + Germany message had a statistically significant positive effect on collective efficacy (i.e. the belief that we can change the economy through our collective efforts), and the UBI + Alaska message approached significance ( $p = .051$ ) on this outcome. These messages appear to convince people that policy change would make a real difference, which leads them to conclude that policy change is a good idea. But because people lack a clear understanding of economic policy and how it shapes the economy, this creates a preference for policy change generally, rather than for specific policies.

Other-country comparisons are, thus, useful in overcoming people's deep fatalism about the economy, but because people struggle to generalise from particular exemplars, policy exemplars alone—even with other-country comparisons—cannot be used to tell a broader story about the economy, at least not without laying significant groundwork to help people think more generally about how the economy works. To avoid these unpredictable effects, other-country comparisons should be used within the *Resisting Corporate Power* or *Meeting Our Needs* stories. Once a frame is set that does effectively orient people in a progressive direction, examples of how other countries have used specific policies to promote a strong, equal, or fulfilling economy can be used to boost efficacy and overcome fatalism.

## AVOID RULES OF THE GAME METAPHORS

Progressives often use game metaphors to argue for changing economic policies, arguing that in the UK today, the playing field is tilted, the dice are loaded, or some people break the rules rather than playing by them. Given how widely these metaphors are used, we conducted research to determine whether they are effective. We found that they are not only ineffective but reinforce unproductive patterns in people's thinking.

In on-the-street interviews, we tested two different rules of the game metaphors—*Tilted Playing Field*, and *Breaking the Rules*. We found that the metaphors had a common, fatal flaw—both reinforced people's sense of fatalism. Unlike the metaphors that proved effective, neither metaphor fleshed out people's understanding of *how* the economy is designed through policy, and, in turn, fixing the problems with the economy continued to seem impossible. Absent a clear understanding of how the playing field could be levelled, participants exposed to this metaphor assumed this was unrealistic, and saw a tilted playing field as an inevitable fact of life. *Breaking the Rules* cued a sense that the economy is unfair, but people assumed that wealthy elites will always be able to game the system.<sup>19</sup>

We also found that these metaphors tended to lead people to talk about instances of elites literally breaking or bending the law—such as tax avoidance and evasion—rather than thinking about the economic system more generally. Communicators should avoid using these game metaphors, and instead utilise the metaphors that proved effective—*Reprogramming* and *Tracks*.

## AVOID APPEALS TO NATIONAL SELF-RELIANCE

As we discussed in the previous section, when thinking with the *National Self-Reliance* cultural model, the public values economic independence and self-reliance. Because the model leads people to support investment in the United Kingdom, it may be tempting for progressives to try to leverage this value to boost support for certain policy goals, but this is dangerous and should generally be avoided. Because the model is bound up with exclusionary conceptions of the nation, this line of argument is likely to reinforce xenophobia and impede an inclusive, egalitarian agenda.



# application

## CHAPTER 4

# APPLYING THE FINDINGS: TWO CASE STUDIES

In the final phase of the project, we ran workshops with campaigners who communicate on housing and regulation from a wide range of organisations and groups. The goal of these workshops was to explore how our research could be used in everyday campaigning work.

The housing workshop was attended by people from housing associations, researchers, tenants' rights campaigners and council workers. The regulation workshop was attended by people from financial regulation NGOs, consumer interest groups, and environmental policy watchdogs. Below we summarise campaigners' reflections on how people think about their issue, including ideas for how to use the Framing the Economy findings. We include them as responses to respond to the research and very much encourage readers to do their own work to explore and test their ideas. For more information about the exercises we ran in these workshops go to Appendix 4.

### 1. FRAMING HOUSING

These reflections come from campaigners who are interested in increasing social housing provision in the UK, and for protecting renters with secure tenancies.

#### MAPPING THE HOUSING NARRATIVE

##### BARRIER BELIEFS

When reflecting on all the different ways they hear people talking about housing issues, campaigners spontaneously raised some examples that we also found in our cultural models research. Campaigners thought these were barriers to communicating effectively:

- ✘ **Human nature is greedy and people inevitably exploit the housing system.** People who use social housing and receive housing benefit are trying to get something for nothing, while it's 'common sense' that landlords are always going to charge the maximum market rent they can.

- ✘ **Fatalism and failure to envision alternatives.** While people do have ideas about what might solve the housing crisis (i.e. building more homes or filling vacant homes), there is very little imagination on how the system could be changed. Campaigners felt, for instance, that the public had little knowledge of different housing models historically and in other countries.

And a number of other barriers, more specific to housing:

- ✘ **Everyone should aim to own their own home.** Home ownership is seen as the ultimate goal, partly because it gives people and families security in later life. 'Getting on the housing ladder' is a metaphor that strongly implies that private ownership is the direction of progress.
- ✘ **If you work hard you can get results.** Housing campaigners thought there was a strong belief that individuals are ultimately responsible for their housing situation. The meritocratic idea that you can work your way up ('dishwasher to millionaire' / 'rags to riches') implies also that individuals are to blame if they are homeless or cannot save to buy a home.
- ✘ **Social housing is undesirable.** It is thought to be part of broader social problems (e.g. because 'sink estates' encourage crime). People seem happy to accept that we should provide for people in acute need, but not that we should aspire to have more people in social housing. Related to this, people think social housing is a drain on scarce resources, rather than an income-generating asset (a misperception campaigners think is very difficult to shift).
- ✘ **Immigrants and outsiders are to blame for our housing problems.** By increasing our population, putting a strain on housing stock and claiming housing benefit. This links to the *Container Model* (see page 28), where the UK is seen as a pot of resources that can be drained if people take too much.

##### ENABLING BELIEFS

In mapping the beliefs they thought were helpful for their communication work, campaigners identified the following cultural models:

- ✚ **Government is responsible for addressing the problems of homelessness and poverty.** By filling empty homes, ensuring safe standards in buildings (particularly after Grenfell Tower) and providing social housing for people in need, especially children.



+ **The housing market is rigged.** Such that wealthy landowners accumulate capital easily while renters are trapped paying extortionate rent.

And a number of other enabling beliefs:

+ **We have the resources to meet everyone's needs.** Campaigners sense that people are angry about the wastage of vacant homes and would agree that land ownership is unfairly distributed—supporting the belief that it's possible to have 'the right amount' of housing.

+ **Private renting is exploitative.** Campaigners do not feel that people need persuading that renters get a raw deal, or that landlords can neglect their properties and tenants (e.g. "slum landlords"). Campaigners also think that people are receptive to the idea that rent is unearned wealth compared to other sources of wealth.

+ **Community is part of housing.** Despite the perception that this is on the decline, campaigners still thought that people valued having contact and community with their neighbours and could appreciate that this is important to others.

## REFLECTIONS ON FRAMING STRATEGY FOR HOUSING

In a workshop on the Framing the Economy research, housing campaigners had these initial reactions on what they could mean for their framing strategies.

*These are reflections rather than tested recommendations.*

? Draw on metaphor of *Reprogramming* to talk about the need for a redesign or re-boot of the housing system. Campaigners reflected that computer metaphors are helpful because they convey that the housing system is complex but can be hacked with relative ease. They can also be used to suggest tweaks to the system, or a complete overhaul.

**Idea:** "The economic crash showed how important it is to programme our housing system properly. Instead of programming it to crash, we need to reprogramme it to last for future generations."

? Use *Tracks* metaphor with care. Campaigners found it easy to use a tracks metaphor to talk about the national planning system, but not for local planning issues. When using tracks to convey a journey to a better place, they thought it was important to be clear what the destination is, because people will tend to assume that the destination is private ownership.

**Idea:** "We're helping people get off the rental rollercoaster. It's time for a different ride. Get on board for better and more affordable tenancies."

? Emphasise the value of *Fulfilment* and use this to meet the anxiety (particularly in middle class renters) about needing to own a home to have security.

**Idea:** "Access to safe, affordable housing options helps everyone lead a happy and fulfilling life. We need to prioritise happiness over profit."

? Address fatalism by illustrating alternative models. One strategy to help people imagine alternatives might be to show how housing is approached differently in other countries, and therefore how the UK could do better.

Campaigners also reflected that they could test framing strategies that:

- Q Build efficacy rather than explain the problem. They reflected that their audience (in this case, London renters) was sufficiently aware of the problems of the London rental market and they needed instead to persuade people that change is possible (e.g. through joining a renters union).
- Q Frame social housing as future proof and self-sustaining, addressing the misperception that it is a drain on public resources by stating the opposite.
- Q Avoid characterising all landlords as elites. While it's tempting to pitch renters and landlords against each other "renters lose out while landlords gain", campaigners thought this approach could be unhelpfully polarising. Unlike the elites that run the country, landlords are a large and more relatable group: most landlords will have been renters themselves at some point in their lives. Instead, campaigners wanted to focus on "making housing better for renters."

## 2. FRAMING DEREGULATION

These reflections come from campaigners who are working to promote and defend regulation for high standards of public health, labour rights, environmental protection.

### MAPPING THE REGULATION NARRATIVE

#### BARRIER BELIEFS

Regulation campaigners identified a number of cultural models as barriers to communicating effectively on regulation. In particular:

- ✘ **Human nature is greedy.** People will inevitably find loopholes and ways to manipulate the system in their own interest. Campaigners felt that this negative perception of human nature fuelled a fatalistic attitude towards regulation, i.e. regulation is doomed to fail so why fight the deregulation agenda?
- ✘ **The system is rigged.** Regulation is seen as technocratic and expert-led. Due to widespread cynicism about the motivation and actions of elites (and the conflation of experts and elites), campaigners thought regulation was seen as mechanism that is used to rig the system in the interests of a few powerful people and against the interests of 'ordinary people'.
- ✘ **Cognitive hole.** Campaigners thought that the belief that the free market is the best (or at least a *necessary*) regulator is underpinned by little or no understanding of how the economy actually works. It was also identified that the general public have a limited understanding of the mechanisms of regulation.

Campaigners perceived another key barrier, specifically on deregulation:

Regulation limits personal freedoms and is meddling and restrictive. Rather than offering protection, regulation is seen as infantilising, preventing people from doing what they want to do. Campaigners linked this to two ways regulation encroaches on freedom:

- ✘ **Regulation is an attack on tradition and difference.** It undermines knowledge and practices developed over many years and passed down over generations. Campaigners thought that regulation was seen as a way

to impose a 'one size fits all' approach to legislation.

- ✘ **Regulation gets in the way of progress and stunts innovation by impeding growth and job creation.** Campaigners thought people saw regulation as cumbersome: slowing down otherwise efficient and nimble practices with unnecessary 'red tape'.

### ENABLING BELIEFS

- + **Cultural Model of Government Responsibility.** In laying out the ways of thinking that seem helpful and productive for communicating about regulation, campaigners thought that the government is still considered to play a key role in regulating the activities of businesses, protecting the environment and keeping citizens safe.
- + **Regulation protects the most vulnerable in society.** Campaigners reflected that there was a strong belief in a duty of care to the most vulnerable in our society. This was seen as being the case both on a personal level (caring for our own children, family and friends) as well as on a societal level (caring for people who are homeless or struggling). For most people, campaigners believed, a good society is one that is able to offer protection.

### REFLECTIONS ON FRAMING STRATEGY FOR REGULATION

Better regulation campaigners focused on following recommendations from Framing the Economy as strategies they would like to develop and test:

- ? Use Tracks metaphor to talk about a regulation journey—campaigners found this metaphor useful for talking about direction of travel (to a society that allows us to realise our values) and for characterising the deregulation agenda of the EU (as 'digging up' the tracks).
- ? Avoid the rules of the game metaphor until tested—this is a natural metaphor to draw upon when communicating on regulation, and the concepts of fair play, rules, equal playing field are frequently used. Campaigners reflected that it was useful (and surprising) to hear that this metaphor might reinforce fatalism, and that it should therefore be avoided.

Campaigners also reflected that they could test framing strategies that:

- Q Show that human nature is good, but that markets and institutions need rules, i.e. when talking about individuals and citizens, presenting them as being inherently respectful, co-operative and kind, while emphasising that markets and institutions need rules so that people can live by these values.
- Q Emphasise how regulation enables a better future, i.e. frames that overcome the perception of regulation as being something inherently restrictive that stops people from doing what they want to do. One idea was to talk about how regulation allows us all to enjoy 'everyday freedoms', enabling us to live in safe houses, drink water from our taps and enjoy the countryside.

In Appendix 4, we include a summary of campaigner perspectives on the research, as well as exercises to help readers apply the findings to different issues.



next

## CHAPTER 5

# TELLING THE STORY: NEXT STEPS

Over the course of our research, we learned many valuable lessons on what progressives need to do—not just in terms of telling the right story, but also in terms of what infrastructure we need to build to ensure we can communicate as efficiently as possible, and the intellectual work that needs to be done to expand our research into other areas.

In this respect, the findings of Framing the Economy could be considered a tool for further work on training progressives in how to communicate, both with the public at large and with one another. This chapter focuses on the practical steps we believe progressives need to take beyond the findings of this project.

### BUILDING OUR CAPACITY TO COMMUNICATE

The last few years have seen dramatic shifts in the national political picture. A resurgent right populism and unexpected election results have created a confusing and contested space around key issues like climate, inequality and migration. In each of these dramatic shifts, the role of narrative, communications and story-telling has been central. Each of these cases show us that a good story is worth nothing without the capacity to tell it.

Throughout the project, the role of “communications infrastructure” as we call it has been central to our thinking about impact. We’ve taken special care to build and work alongside an unrivalled Network of 50 thought leaders, journalists, communicators and civil society actors providing research-based recommendations to improve the effectiveness of their framing over the long term. The result is that we’ve already seen over 700 TV/Radio interviews secured by NEON’s Spokesperson Network (which trains and books people into the media on a daily basis) and have seen members of the Network coordinate civil society responses to the way economics was treated in the election debate alongside planning new communications approaches to issues like deregulation or how to defend the NHS.

As an adjunct to the main project, NEON led a review of progressive communications infrastructure attempting to analyse the relative strengths, weaknesses and opportunities progressives in the UK. Speaking with over 30 interviewees across the UK political spectrum with several international trips to the US and Spain we found the following relative weaknesses in progressive communications:

- ✘ We lack spokespeople and do not nurture communicators
- ✘ Our institutions silo communications and do not tell wider stories
- ✘ We do not unite our infrastructure—to build off one another and set the agenda
- ✘ We do not have enough press and comms expertise
- ✘ We are not making the most of new communications tools
- ✘ We are not strategic enough at countering regressive infrastructure or influence
- ✘ We do not separate policy from communications
- ✘ We don’t use wider cultural messengers or tactics
- ✘ We don’t keep our base strong with a clear central message
- ✘ We don’t pick the right messengers for the right issues

These weaknesses stop us communicating effectively even when we’ve got the right story to tell. We’ve got to fix these problems if we’re serious about advancing the cause of a just, sustainable economy.

Through a series of workshops we went on to identify a long list of organisations, practices and alliances that will help make decisive shifts in our ability to communicate effectively. From this, NEON is now in the process of setting-up a new Communications Hub in collaboration with PIRC whose goal will be to:

### GOAL 1: RECRUIT, NETWORK AND DEVELOP THE CAPACITY OF PROGRESSIVES TO COMMUNICATE

- 🧩 Recruit communicators across progressive sectors and skillsets
- 🧩 Run Introduction to Framing workshops and capacity building courses for key skillsets like press officers or video producers
- 🧩 Promote framing and strategic comms within organisations
- 🧩 Host discussion forum(s) by issue and topic

## GOAL 2: DEVELOP AND PROVIDE A BANK OF RESOURCES ON HOW TO FRAME KEY ISSUES

- ✚ Create central polling and resource library to allow people to share across organisations and issues
- ✚ Produce and disseminate messaging guides on key issues
- ✚ Organise strategy sessions and scenario planning for known upcoming issues (e.g. financial crash)

## GOAL 3: COORDINATE REAL TIME CAMPAIGNING AND FRAMING

- ✚ Organise rapid response “huddles” to plan message and strategy on breaking stories
- ✚ Coordinate stories as they play out using an expanded Spokesperson Network with better regional press and the networks the Network builds amongst social media platforms and civil society groups
- ✚ Circulate week and month ahead planning papers
- ✚ Raise funds for new projects, snap polling and similar necessary communications infrastructure

This hub will, funding dependent, launch in spring 2018 to provide a space to Network communicators, develop joint messages and shift the narrative on a short and long-term basis. We hope this will form the base for radically improving progressive communications proficiency—and help us to answer these questions in the right way providing a legacy to the current project.

## BUILDING OUR AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Going through this process has left us more convinced than ever that reframing the economy is about intellectual renewal and political alignment as well as about improving the effectiveness of our communications. This is not just about tweaking our messaging, but about communicating a compelling new vision for how the economy can be different.

There were some areas where it was difficult to move forward to framing testing because there just wasn't enough consensus in the community on what we want to say. These are precisely the areas that are becoming more and more central to our politics in the world of Brexit and Trump: about how the national economy should relate to the global economy; about trade and globalisation; about borders and immigration. We found a significant intellectual gap amongst progressives in some of these areas—in the sense that there have been too few debates on these issues to really be able to determine what the shared progressive stance is. This proved challenging in terms of crafting a story, because the foundational ideas upon which our communication was built were lacking. We need to create communities to discuss these issues if our story is going to stay relevant in a tumultuous and fast-changing political environment—and is going to speak to the dangers we confront from aggressive nationalism and racism. It is difficult to tell a convincing story to the public if we have not yet puzzled out that story within our own movement.

We also found that finding consensus was possible at the level of general principles, but gets harder as we move towards specific policy priorities. Generating ideas for ‘flagship policies’ that could help to communicate a wider story was one of the hardest tasks we undertook with the Network, and ultimately didn't produce any highly successful results in our survey experiment. The fact that progressives have not developed these priorities ten years after the financial crisis is a failing that needs to be addressed. Is it down to individual campaigners to make the links between our general frames and their specific policy priorities—or do we need to do more as a community to align around a shared agenda for change, like the Leap Manifesto in Canada? These are some of the questions we'll need to discuss and debate as a movement to ensure our story continues to evolve and achieve real change.

Finally, progressives could consider working on public education as part of a drive to give people the tools to think about how the economy works and how it could work better. One of the most striking findings from our cognitive interviews was the “cognitive hole” held by many of our interviewees—in other words, that they have limited tools with which to understand how the economy works. This made on-the-street interviews challenging at times, because some of our interviewees simply had too little understanding of the economy to engage with the frame elements at all.





# APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

## PHASE 1: CULTURAL MODELS ANALYSIS

The cultural models findings presented in this report are based on 40 in-depth interviews with members of the public in August 2016 in five locations: Wolverhampton, Hull, Glasgow, London, Newport (Wales). Cultural models interviews—one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately two hours—allow researchers to capture the broad sets of assumptions, or ‘cultural models’, which participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area. These interviews are designed to elicit ways of thinking and talking about issues—in this case, issues related to the economy. Interviews covered thinking about what it means to do well in life before turning to an extended discussion of the economy that touched on what the economy is, how it works, how it affects people, problems with it, and solutions to these problems. The interviews also explored people’s thinking about the economy now versus in the past; wealth, need, and ownership; and the relationship between the economy and the environment. The goal of these interviews was to examine the cultural models that participants use to make sense of these issues, so researchers gave them the freedom to follow topics in the directions they deemed relevant. Therefore, researchers approached each interview with a set of topics to cover but left the order in which these topics were addressed largely to participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants’ written consent.

Recruiting a wide range of people, as well as facilitating talk about concepts introduced by both the interviewer and the interviewee, allowed researchers to identify cultural models that represent shared patterns of thinking across Britain. Participants were recruited by a professional marketing firm and were selected to represent variation along the domains of gender, race, age, level of education, disability, political identification, marital status, parental status, whether living in urban or rural areas, sexuality and religion. We excluded people who had expertise in economics and people who had not spent significant time (at least 5 years) living in Britain.

To analyse the interviews, researchers used analytical techniques from cognitive and linguistic anthropology to examine how participants understand issues

related to the economy.<sup>20</sup> First, researchers identified common, standardised ways of talking across the sample to reveal organisational assumptions, relationships, logical steps and connections that were commonly made, but taken for granted, throughout an individual’s talk and across the set of interviews. In short, the analysis concerns patterns discerned from both what was said (how things were related, explained and understood) and what was not said (assumptions and implied relationships). In many cases, analysis revealed conflicting models that people brought to bear on the same issue. In such cases, one of the conflicting ways of understanding was typically found to be dominant over the other, in the sense that it more consistently and deeply shaped participants’ thinking.

Analysis centred on ways of understanding that were shared across participants. Cultural models research is designed to identify common ways of thinking that can be identified across a sample. It is not designed to identify differences in the understandings of different demographic, ideological or regional groups (this would be an inappropriate use of this method and its sampling frame).

## PHASE 2: MAPPING THE GAPS

In February 2017, over 40 members of the Framing the Economy Network gathered in Farnham for a weekend retreat to hear the results of the first phase, respond to our initial analysis of the gaps between the cultural models findings and the *Common Agenda*, and agree on a way forward.

The scope of this project is enormously broad, and so the findings from phase 1 were correspondingly rich. It would be impossible to design and test framing strategies covering all possible avenues and issues raised, so we needed to focus our efforts on the key challenges to be overcome. We wanted this focus to be driven by the communicators who would ultimately use the research.

We therefore asked the Network to discuss and vote on the most important aspects of our story which needed to be conveyed in order to shift attitudes on a range of issues, from climate change to migration. See ‘Democratic Design for the Common Good’ on the opposite page.

We then used this input to finalise a set of ‘framing tasks’ which our hypotheses would be designed to accomplish, along with a narrative summary of the key content we wanted to communicate—the subset of our ‘untranslated story’ which the testing would focus on. These are summarised below.

**Framing tasks:**

- ✔ Generate understanding the economy is a product of design
- ✔ Foster understanding of how specific policy choices have created an economic system in the UK that promotes competition, rewards greed, concentrates power, and increases inequality. Generate support for democratic social change to create good lives for all
- ✔ Cultivate efficacy

At the retreat, the Network also began brainstorming possible framing strategies which could help to achieve these tasks—which the research team developed and augmented to produce a final set of ‘frame elements’ for testing.

**DEMOCRATIC DESIGN FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

**Main Idea:** Our economy is the way it is because of human design and decisions. At the moment these decisions are taken by a small elite and serve their interests, but we can remake them democratically so the economy works for everyone.

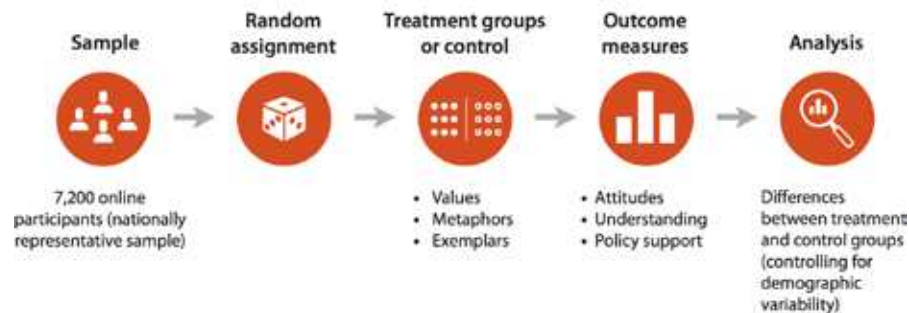
**Problem:** We have a system that has been designed to promote competition, reward greed, concentrate power and increase inequality. This concentration of power is not natural or inevitable: it’s the result of policy that can be changed. Divisive discourses encourage people to blame migrants and benefit claimants for our economic problems rather than fostering a sense of common good or a belief that we can take on elites.

**Solution:** We can act collectively to spread power more widely in our economy: key decisions about how the economy works can be taken democratically for the common good. E.g. via: greater public ownership, more public investment, greater role for democratic governments (local and national) in constraining markets through laws and regulation, devolving power to local communities.

In doing this it is vital that the democratic ‘us’ that we construct is inclusive of everyone, including migrant communities.



## PHASE 3: CHANGING THE STORY



### ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS

We used a series of 55 on-the-street interviews conducted in May 2017 in London, England, Colchester, England, Nuneaton, England, and Aberystwyth, Wales, to test candidate explanatory metaphors. All participants in these interviews signed written consent and release forms, and interviews were video recorded by a professional videographer. Efforts were made to recruit a broad range of informants.

These interviews were used as an initial way of testing eight explanatory metaphors (*Economic Roads*, *Reprogramming the Economy*, *Toll Booth Economy*, *Renovating the Economy*, *Breaking the Rules*, *Economic Tracks*, *Economic Network*, and *Economic Playing Field*) that were designed to help the public understand that the economy is designed and is shaped by human decisions, and to generate understanding of the role of policy in structuring the economy. In the interviews, researchers began by asking participants a short series of open-ended questions designed to gather information about people's top-of-mind thinking about the economy and how it works. Participants were then verbally presented with one of the candidate explanatory metaphors, and were then asked a series of follow-up questions to ascertain whether and how their thinking had shifted as a result of exposure to the metaphor.

Researchers analysed the resulting video data, looking for patterned ways in which each of the candidate metaphors affected thinking and talking about the economy. The analysis also focused on isolating the reasons *why* each of the tested metaphors was having its respective effects. Analysis revealed that four of the metaphors (*Reprogramming*, *Renovating*, *Tracks*, and *Network*) displayed

strong potential in shifting public thinking in productive directions, so these four metaphors were brought into the survey experiment for further testing.

### SURVEY EXPERIMENT

The survey was conducted online in August-September 2017. It included 6,600 respondents. Demographic quotas were used to render the sample as representative as possible of the UK public. Respondents were adults (over 18) matched to national demographic benchmarks for gender, race/ethnicity, income, age, and political party.

The experiment was conducted in three waves or rounds. The first wave tested twelve frames, or message “treatments,” to understand how exposure to these frames affects public opinion. We tested four values (*Interdependence*, *Equality/Justice*, *Democracy*, and *Fulfilment*), four explanatory metaphors (*Renovating the Economy*, *Economic Network*, *Economic Tracks*, and *Reprogramming the Economy*), and four exemplar policies (*Social Housing*, *Universal Basic Income*, *Worker Representation on Boards*, and *Green Investments*).

In the second wave, we tested six values messages and two metaphor/exemplar combination messages. The values messages differed from the first-wave values messages in describing more fully how economic policies have created problems and how policy changes can solve these problems. We tested three values (*Equality/Justice*, *Fulfilment*, and *Economic Strength*) in two different forms—one version attributed responsibility for problems to corporate elites, and the other did not. The metaphor/exemplar messages combined the *Reprogramming* metaphor with two exemplars—*Universal Basic Income* and *Social Housing*.

In the third wave of the experiment, we tested versions of two policy exemplars that explained how the policies were implemented in another country and produced benefits for the economy. The *Green Investments* exemplar was framed using a comparison to *Germany*, while the *Universal Basic Income* exemplar was framed using a comparison to *Alaska* in the United States.

In each wave of the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of these message treatments or to a null control. After reading the message (or, in the null control group, no message), respondents were asked a series of questions designed to measure attitudes toward the economy, understandings of how it works, and support for progressive economic policy. All questions

were Likert-type items, and support was measured using five-point scales (for unipolar outcomes) or seven-point scales (for bipolar outcomes). All questions were randomised, except for policy questions, which were randomised within a group.

For analysis, outcome measures were grouped into eleven batteries—or sets of outcomes related to a common idea. Each outcome battery consisted of multiple questions. Outcome batteries represented the following issue areas (full questions in Appendix 3).

- The Economy as Determined by Natural Forces (reverse coded)
- The Economy as Designed
- The Role of Policy in Shaping Outcomes
- Support for Progressive Policies
- Support for Conservative Policies
- Collective Efficacy
- Collective Responsibility
- Attribution of Responsibility to Specific Groups
- Immigration
- Environment / Economy Relationship
- Support for Environmental Regulation

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether or not there were differences between the treatment groups and the control group. Regressions controlled for demographic variables and determined statistical significance of differences between the treatment and control groups. A threshold of  $p < .05$  was used to determine significance. Significant differences between the treatment and control groups were used as an indicator that the messages have an effect on people's opinions.

## APPENDIX 2: MEMBERS OF FRAMING THE ECONOMY NETWORK AND ADVISORY GROUP

*N.B. All members participated in an individual capacity; organisational affiliations are provided for information only.*

### NETWORK

Emma Howard **EnergyDesk**  
 Lola Okolosie **Teacher, Guardian writer and trustee of nia**  
 Debbie Weeks-Bernard **Joseph Rowntree Foundation**  
 Sirio Canós Donnay **Podemos**  
 Mubin Haq **Trust for London**  
 Emily Kenway **Fair Tax Mark**  
 Ann Don Bosco **Public Health England**  
 Ellen Gibson **350.org and Reclaim the Power**  
 James Robertson **NUS**  
 Laurie MacFarlane **NEF**  
 Chris Gale **Ben & Jerrys**  
 Ana Castior-Arendar **Oxfam**  
 Kevin Smith **Global Justice Now**  
 Liam Purcell **Church Action on Poverty**  
 Chloe Darlington **Children England**  
 Pauline Doyle **Unite the Union**  
 Alice Bell **10:10**  
 James Schneider **Labour Party**  
 Zoe Williams **Guardian**  
 Tom Miller **Open Labour**  
 Elly Baker **GMB**  
 Kennedy Walker **Goldsmiths**  
 Maya Goodfellow **SOAS**  
 Alex Bryce **Ed Miliband Office**  
 Alex Jones **GMB**

Polly Trenow **Fawcett Society**  
 Michael Walker **Novara Media**  
 Suki Ferguson **LSE LU**  
 Stefan Stern **High Pay Centre**  
 Osian Lewis **Plaid Cymru**  
 Ros Wynne Jones **Mirror**  
 James Asfa **Citizens UK**  
 Tim Nichols **TUC**  
 Clifford Singer **Social Spark**  
 Miriam Brett **SNP**  
 Lucy Hardy **Ellen McArthur**  
 Nicola Putnam **Friends Provident**  
 Mushtaq Khan **New Charter Group Housing Association**  
 Tom Hunt **SPERI**  
 Sanjiv Lingayah **Racial Justice Specialist**  
 Eleanor Thompson **Royal College of GPs**  
 Prateek Buch **Social Liberal Forum**  
 Sado Jirde **Black South West Network**  
 Jacqui Howard **RSA**  
 Will Brett **NEF**  
 Abi Wilkinson **Freelance journalist**  
 Rosie Baines **NEON**

### ADVISORY GROUP

Faiza Shaheen **Class**  
 Gary Younge **Guardian**  
 James Morris **Edelman**  
 Laura Pidcock MP **Labour Party**  
 Matthew Butcher **Green Party**  
 Carys Afoko **SumOfUs**  
 Robin McAlpine **Common Weal**

## APPENDIX 3: SURVEY OUTCOME MEASURES

In our survey experiment, participants read a message (communicating a value, metaphor or policy example), and then answered the following questions. These are the questions we used to measure whether or not the message was helpful.

### A. THE ECONOMY AS DESIGNED

1. The economy is shaped by forces outside of our control [reverse]. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
2. The laws and policies we make determine how the economy works. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
3. Inequality in wealth is natural. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) [reverse]
4. In your view, how much of a role do you think each of the following has in influencing how our economy works? (No role, a little role, a moderate role, a large role, an extremely large role)
  - a. Laws and policies
  - b. Human nature
  - c. World events (e.g. wars, other countries' economies, etc.)
  - d. Random events or chance

### B. ROLE OF POLICY IN SHAPING OUTCOMES

For each of the following statements, participants had to place themselves on a scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree.

5. The laws and policies we make determine people's opportunities to succeed.
6. The way our economy is designed makes it difficult for all of us to meet our needs.
7. The choices our government makes determine who has power in our economy.
8. The choices that our government makes determine who does well in our economy.

### C. SUPPORT FOR PROGRESSIVE POLICIES

For each of the statements in C and D, participants had to place themselves on a scale: Strongly oppose, oppose, somewhat oppose, neither favour nor oppose, somewhat favour, favour, strongly favour.

Please indicate the extent to which you personally favour or oppose of each of the following changes to the economy:

9. Nationalise railways and utility companies so that they are owned by the public.
10. Taxing anyone making over £70,000 the top tax rate of 45%, up from the current threshold of £150,000.
11. Increase the tax rate paid by corporations, from 19% to 26%.
12. Put in place policies that increase the power of trade unions and strengthen workers' rights.

13. Significantly increase the minimum wage from £7.50 per hour to at least £10 per hour.
14. Increase government investment in infrastructure and new industries.
15. Put in place a maximum wage that sets a ceiling on how much high earners (like corporate executives) can make.
16. Change government regulations so that workers need to be paid overtime if they work more than 4 days a week.

#### **D. SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATIVE ECONOMIC POLICIES**

17. Eliminate the deficit by significantly reducing government spending on public services.
18. Lower the corporate tax rate to encourage businesses to invest in the UK.
19. Loosen regulations on banks and large corporations.
20. Place stricter limits on immigration.
21. Shift ownership and management of public services to private companies.

#### **E. COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

22. How much can we, as a society, do to create an economy that meets everyone's needs? (Nothing at all, a small amount, a moderate amount, a large amount, an extremely large amount)
23. There's always going to be greed in our society, so we're never going to get rid of inequality [reverse]. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)

24. How much can the government do to create an economy that meets everyone's needs? (Nothing at all, a small amount, a moderate amount, a large amount, an extremely large amount)
25. How much can members of the public do to force the government to take steps to create an economy that works for everyone? (Nothing at all, a small amount, a moderate amount, a large amount, an extremely large amount)
26. How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel that the public can get the government to take major steps to improve the economy? (Extremely pessimistic, pessimistic, somewhat pessimistic, neither optimistic nor pessimistic, somewhat optimistic, optimistic, extremely optimistic)

#### **F. COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

27. If there is inequality in our society, our country has failed in our responsibilities. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
28. How much of an obligation does our society have to make sure everyone has the opportunity to succeed? (No obligation, a small obligation, a moderate obligation, a large obligation, an extremely large obligation)
29. How much responsibility does our government have to deal with economic inequality? (No responsibility, a small responsibility, a moderate responsibility, a large responsibility, an extremely large responsibility)
30. How much responsibility does our society have to make sure that everyone can do well in life? (No responsibility, a small responsibility, a moderate responsibility, a large responsibility, an extremely large responsibility)



## G. ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

31. In your view, how much responsibility does each of the following groups have for our society's problems? (No responsibility, a small responsibility, a moderate responsibility, a large responsibility, an extremely large responsibility)
- People on benefits
  - Immigrants from the EU
  - Immigrants from outside the EU
  - Large corporations
  - Banks
  - Politicians

## H. IMMIGRATION

32. Placing greater limits on immigration would improve our economy [reverse]. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)
33. Overall, how would you say immigration affects the economy in the UK? (continuum ranging from 'weakens our economy' to 'strengthens our economy')
34. The United Kingdom should welcome immigrants from around the world. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)

## I. ENVIRONMENT

35. What is good for the economy is bad for the environment. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) [reverse]
36. What is good for the environment is good for the economy. (Strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither disagree nor agree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree)

37. Overall, how would you say environmental regulations affect the economy in the UK? (continuum ranging from 'weakens our economy' to 'strengthens our economy')

## J. SUPPORT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION

*For both questions, participants had to place themselves on a scale: Strongly oppose, oppose, somewhat oppose, neither favour nor oppose, somewhat favour, favour, strongly favour.*

38. Put stronger environmental protections in place.
39. Reduce environmental regulations to cut costs for UK businesses.

## **APPENDIX 4:** **APPLYING THE** **RECOMMENDATIONS:** **MORE DETAIL**

### **APPLYING THE FINDINGS: AN EXERCISE**

In the workshops, campaigners mapped how the public think about these topics and gave us feedback on how our Framing the Economy findings might help reframing efforts.

An initial exercise invited the group to 'Map the Narrative' around housing (or regulation). We asked campaigners to write down all the ways they heard, e.g. housing, being talked about and then sort them into *Barrier Beliefs* (beliefs they saw as a block to their campaign efforts) and *Enabling Beliefs* (beliefs they saw as being helpful or productive in some way).

We then presented the cultural models analysis (found on page 27) to look at whether the research from the Framing the Economy project overlapped or offered new insight into the enabling and barrier beliefs the campaigners had mapped.

Later, we presented our research findings on metaphors and values, collecting campaigners' reactions on their relevance and applicability.

Here we include sample exercises campaigners might wish to use to incorporate the Framing the Economy findings into their own work.

### **ACTIVITY 1: KNOWING YOUR VISION**

Lay out the values that emerged in the cognitive interviews (see Chapter 1) on a table, then encourage the group to focus on those that feel meaningful, and reflect on why. How do these values relate to your campaigning / work?

*Closed eye reflection:* You wake up in the morning and the vision is a reality. What does it look like? What's different from now? What does it feel like? What's on the front page of the paper? What's been enacted in order for this to be the case?

### **ACTIVITY 2: MAP THE BELIEFS**

In groups of three, write on post-it notes what the audience barrier beliefs that emerged from the Framing the Economy research, and what the existing enabling beliefs are. Present these to the group and discuss which of these beliefs is most prominent for your audience

### **ACTIVITY 3: UNDERSTANDING YOUR FRAMING TASKS**

In small groups discuss: what are you trying to communicate? What barrier beliefs are you trying to overcome? What enabling beliefs could you connect with? What thinking are you trying to change/reinforce? Share your thoughts with the group.

### **ACTIVITY 4: DEFINING YOUR FRAMING TASK**

Get into pairs:

First, talk about when, where and how you might be framing your issue: what channels do you use, what specific examples can you give?

Second, take turn to interview each other about your framing task: Who is your audience? What beliefs do they hold? What outcome do you want to see?

Feedback/discussion: What do you think the key framing task is for this issue? Can we articulate that as a group?

## USABILITY OF THE RESEARCH: CAMPAIGNER PERSPECTIVES

These reflections come from the participants of the workshops, do not represent the strategy of any particular organisations, and have not yet been tested.

### CULTURAL MODELS

Housing and Regulation campaigners are already thinking about many of the cultural models in their analysis of their own framing challenges and opportunities. The models of ‘human nature is greedy’, ‘system is rigged’, ‘fatalism’, ‘government responsibility’ and ‘cognitive hole’ were all raised spontaneously by participants before they heard the cultural models research. We saw this as an indication not only that the models are relevant to communications, but that campaigners already have some accurate assumptions about how the British public think about the economy.

The model that ‘human nature is greedy’ was brought up as a key barrier belief in both workshops, which suggests that this could be deep belief that progressives across different sectors should work to address (a suggestion that is backed up by social psychology research, see [valuesandframes.org/survey](https://valuesandframes.org/survey), where the perception that others are self-interested leads people to be more alienated and less civically engaged). Interestingly, housing campaigners thought the ‘system is rigged’ was an enabling belief because it helped explain why renters have a raw deal, while regulation campaigners thought this was a barrier belief because there is a negative association between the regulation agenda and elites controlling the system. We recommend taking care if talking about the rigged system—campaigners can do this responsibly by talking about policy solutions and appealing to values of *Equality* or *Economic Strength* (see page 56).

### VALUES

While campaigners were interested in the finding that *Economic Strength* was a value that could encourage more progressive policy support in conservatives, neither of the groups chose to work with this value in the workshops. We noticed that campaigners felt more familiar with the values of *Fulfilment* and *Equality*, used them easily and saw them as being aligned with their goals.

*Economic Strength* is clearly less familiar territory. But re-framing efforts sometimes require breaking communication habits and reclaiming language that is typically associated with communicators who have different goals. Campaigners may need particular support in appealing to *Economic Strength* in a progressive message on the economy (we suggest how to do this on page 55).

### METAPHORS

*Tracks* was a metaphor that both groups found helpful when talking about a direction of travel from problem to solution, as long as there was a clear and appropriate definition of a solution (or destination) in the frame. Tenants rights campaigners noted, for instance, that they would have to work quite hard if they didn’t want to imply that the ultimate destination for renters was private home ownership. They also found it difficult to put it into a message. We think this might be because it’s not a metaphor that is commonly used at the moment, so the language of tracks and trains does not trip easily off the tongue. Again, successful reframing sometimes requires going into less familiar territory. We hope to evaluate the usability of *Tracks* with people who have tried it for a period of time in their external communications work.

*Reprogramming*, on the other hand, seemed easier for campaigners to work with, and a number of people reflected that they thought it would be useful for progressives to distance themselves from traditional, old-fashioned language and use more modern technological metaphors.

Both groups were surprised by the finding that the ‘rules of the game’ metaphor was ineffective. We recommend that regulation campaigners, who often need to communicate about the concepts of rules and fair play, avoid using this metaphor until they can test it specifically with a set of messages about regulation.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 NEF, 'Framing the economy', 2013.
- 2 More information about the process and our plans for the future will be included in a separate paper to be released early in 2018.
- 3 Charteris-Black, J., & Ennis, T. (2001). A comparative study of metaphor in Spanish and English financial reporting. *English for specific purposes*, 20(3), 249-266.
- 4 Smith, G. (1995). How high can a dead cat bounce? Metaphor and the Hong Kong stock market. *Hong Kong Papers in Linguistic and Language Teaching*, 18(45-57).
- 5 Shenker-Osorio, A. (2012). *Don't Buy it: The Trouble with Talking Nonsense about the Economy*. Public Affairs.
- 6 YouGov / Post Crash Economics Society 2015. [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/1h0dojy3oj/PostCrashEconomicsSocietyResults\\_150128\\_economics\\_W.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/1h0dojy3oj/PostCrashEconomicsSocietyResults_150128_economics_W.pdf)
- 7 Populus 2015, 'The Multiple Faces of Corporate Reputation.' [http://s3.amazonaws.com/wavecast-production/wavecast-platform/sites/277/2015/07/The-Multiple-Faces-of-Corporate-Reputation-Report\\_28.07.15.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/wavecast-production/wavecast-platform/sites/277/2015/07/The-Multiple-Faces-of-Corporate-Reputation-Report_28.07.15.pdf)
- 8 YouGov / Rethinking Economics 2015. <http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/get-involved/why-democratise-economics/>
- 9 YouGov / Sun on Sunday 2015. [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/2rm33oydgm/SOS\\_Results\\_150115\\_Website.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/2rm33oydgm/SOS_Results_150115_Website.pdf)
- 10 Populus / Centre for Progressive Capitalism 2016. <http://progressive-capitalism.net/2016/04/survey-reveals-the-lack-of-trust/>
- 11 Leiser, D. & Krill, Z. (2015). 'How Laypeople Understand Economics'. In Rob Ranyard (Ed.) 'Economic Psychology: The Science of Economic Mental Life and Behaviour.' Wiley-Blackwell.
- 12 British Social Attitudes Survey, 2013 (p 39) [http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38454/bsa30\\_government\\_spending\\_and\\_welfare\\_final.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38454/bsa30_government_spending_and_welfare_final.pdf)
- 13 BSA, 2014. <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-29/welfare/attitudes-to-the-welfare-state.aspx>
- 14 Park et al, 2013. BSA. [http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38454/bsa30\\_government\\_spending\\_and\\_welfare\\_final.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38454/bsa30_government_spending_and_welfare_final.pdf)
- 15 See Kendall-Taylor, N. (2010). *An empirical simplifying models research process: Theory and method*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
- 16 By "people," we mean people living in British society, whatever their race, gender, class etc and whatever their economic or citizenship status.
- 17 Because the value of *Fulfilment* appears to work by challenging the dominant *Economy = Money* cultural model and broadening people's understanding of what the economy is and what it is for, the value may be useful in moving progressive priorities that are often seen to be in conflict with the economy—most notably, the environment. As noted above, people assume that what is good for the economy and what is good for the environment are opposed. This idea is grounded in a monetarised understanding of the economy. Broadening an understanding of the economy to include goods and needs beyond money potentially opens space for recognising environmental sustainability as a critical part of a good economy.
 

While this idea is admittedly somewhat speculative and requires further research, results from the survey experiment provide some limited evidence for it. In the experiment, we included a couple of batteries, or sets of questions, designed to measure pro-environment attitudes and support for environmental regulation. We did this primarily to make sure that none of our messages inadvertently undermine pro-environment attitudes and opinions (they didn't). We were pleasantly surprised to find that, in an initial wave of the experiment, *Fulfilment* actually had positive effects on pro-environment attitudes that were borderline statistically significant ( $p < .10$ ). It is important to note that these results were not replicated in a later wave of the experiment, which tested a version of the value more focused on specific economic policies. The fact that we saw significant results at all is striking, because these messages did not talk about the environment at all. The version of the value that appeared to have positive effects was more general, and didn't get into as much detail about the economy, which could explain why it produced pro-environment attitudes and the later message did not. In other words, by focusing the interpretation of the value on specific economic policies, the later message may have limited people's ability to extend it to environmental issues.
- 18 This recommendation is not only grounded in the fact that successful values messages included such an explanation, but in the failure of an earlier values experiment. In this earlier experiment, we tested four values—*Equality*, *Fulfilment*, *Democracy*, and *Interdependence*—in a more generic form. These messages briefly introduced the value and then asserted that to realize this value we needed to adopt certain types of policies, without explaining how current policies have undermined the value or caused problems in the economy. We found that none of these values were effective in increasing support for progressive policies.
 

Being explicit about how policies have created problems and connecting the dots between problems and solutions thus appear to be a necessary component of an effective story. If communicators leave out this critical step, they will undermine the effectiveness of their message.
- 19 *Reprogramming* and *Tracks* work by enabling people to see, and to reason about, the role of policy within the economy. *Reprogramming* helps people connect control of policy (who has the password, who is locked out) to the way the economy runs, through the idea of programming. *Tracks* helps people see how policy structures outcomes, and highlights the possibility of reworking the economy by laying new tracks. While the game metaphors aim to bring policy into view through the idea of rules, they fail because they don't, like the other metaphors, clearly bring into view the origin of policy (as programming does) or the outcomes of policy (as a railway network does, through the metaphor of destinations). As a result, these metaphors don't enable people to truly understand how the economy can be re-designed through policy.
- 20 See Quinn, N. (Ed.). (2005). *Finding culture in talk: A collection of methods*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

## NOTES

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We live in capitalism.  
Its power seems inescapable.  
So did the divine right of kings.  
Any human power can be resisted  
and changed by human beings.



**Ursula K. Le Guin**