

Institutionalists vs. Disruptors

Navigating the New Politics — and How to Create Consent

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January 2026



It's less "left vs. right" — more "system-builders vs. system-breakers."

BUILD

INSIDE the system

OUTSIDE the system

Institutionalists

"Create governance."
Rules, process, legitimacy.

Disruptors

"Create movement."
Attention, conflict, speed.

Your job: create consent at the intersection

Technocrats

Solve problems; struggle with permission.

Insurgents

Break consensus; struggle with delivery.

BREAK

Same arena. Different incentives.

Institutionalists

- Prefer predictable rules, stable coalitions, and negotiated outcomes
- Optimize for legitimacy (process) and durability (implementation)
- Use hearings, agencies, committees, stakeholder tables
- Fear: chaos and loss of control

Disruptors

- Prefer speed, clarity (oversimplification), conflict, and asymmetry
- Optimize for attention (narrative) and leverage (veto points)
- Use primaries, ballot measures, litigation, viral media
- Fear: co-optation and irrelevance

The “Consent Gap”: policy is hard to pass — and harder to legitimize.

TRUST IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
(MOST/JUST ABOUT ALWAYS)

22%

Near historic lows →
disruptors gain oxygen.

Information fragmentation

Many “publics,” many truths. Consent must be built, not assumed.

Veto-point politics

A small actor can stop a big bill. Disruptors hunt chokepoints.

Anti-partyism & hollow parties

People reject parties BUT our system forces two big tents.

Creating Consent = building permission for action (across institutions and publics).

1

Name the reality

Define the problem in plain English — with stakes at play.

2

Map power & process

Who can say yes/no? Where are the veto points?

3

Build validators

Recruit credible messengers across the aisle & map.

4

Make the deal legible

Turn complexity into a simple “fair trade.”

5

Lock it in

Implementation plan, measure constantly, enforcement, and a win narrative.

Measure EE (LAUSD parcel tax): turning an “inevitable” YES into a NO.

OUTSPENT

6:1

RESULT

54N-46Y

APPROACH

**Challenge Teachers Union:
“It’s not what is claims”**

Targeted to 7 voter groups + synced earned media + digital + cable.

Institutionalist vs. disruptor dynamic

YES side: “establishment stack” (unions + elected endorsements + strike sentiment) → legitimacy play.

NO side: asymmetric targeting + narrative reframing → leverage play.

Consent move: redefined the tax as a *trade-off* voters could feel (not an abstract good).

Result: shifted salience and turnout among persuadable segments.

Tactics mix: direct mail + CTV/cable + digital ads + earned media (editorial boards/op-eds) + texting/email.

SCAQMD Rules 1111 & 1121.

Rule of thumb:

Environmentalists and EJ groups win in “green” California, despite of costs to business and consumers.

Science and health defeats cost...unless...

Creating consent — what worked

- Translate the policy into everyday consequences (who pays, who loses, who wins).
- Synchronize earned + paid so validators repeat the same “trade-off.”
- Build cross-sector coalition to avoid “industry self-interest” framing.
- Stay relentlessly values-based: fairness, supply, affordability, accountability.
- Tactics mix: earned (validators + press) + paid (digital/CTV) + direct advocacy + email/SMS/texting + rapid response.

Simple narrative defeats regulatory complexity.

Policymaking: a multi-front contest.

Same issue can be fought in four arenas — often simultaneously:

Legislature

Committees, floor rules, leadership deals

Executive / Agencies

Rulemaking, guidance, permits, enforcement

Courts

Litigation, injunctions, standing and venue strategy

Ballot / Public

Initiatives, referenda, narrative + turnout

Creating consent means running an integrated strategy across arenas — with one narrative and many validators.

Why “institution vs. disruption” is accelerating

Statement:

Parties are essential institutions for collaboration and compromise — but our “two big tents” struggle to represent fluid coalitions.

What disruptors exploit

- Winner-take-all incentives
- Anti-party sentiment + negative partisanship
- Hollow parties: fundraising vehicles more than civic institutions

What institutionalists must rebuild

- Coalition governance that moderates hostility
- Structures that make compromise legible to voters
- Credible local validators (not just national brands)

November 3, 2026: the disruptor–institutionalist test will show up first in primaries, then in governing majorities.

Scenario A — “Governance fatigue”

Voters reward candidates who signal competence, stability, delivery.

Scenario B — “Permission crisis”

Low trust + high anger drives outsider challengers and purity tests.

Scenario C — “Split-screen politics”

Institutionalists win general elections; disruptors dominate agenda-setting and primaries.

Practical bet: prepare for *primary volatility* even when general elections stay competitive.

Watch the signals that predict *permission* — not just polling.

Indicator	What it signals
Primary challenger quality	Whether incumbents face real “permission threats.”
Small-dollar share vs. institutional money	Movement energy vs. establishment network strength.
Local validators (sheriffs, mayors, labor, faith)	Legitimacy in the voter’s “trust radius.”
Procedural fights (rules, ballot access, committees)	Where veto points are shifting.
Digital velocity / message discipline	Disruptor advantage if speed outruns rebuttal.
Cross-pressured coalition size	Who is willing to be seen with whom.
Issue “trade-off” acceptance	Whether the public accepts costs for benefits.
Litigation posture	Policy risk moving to courts and injunctions.
Agency implementation capacity	Durability after the vote (delivery).
Trust trendlines by subgroup	Where resentment (or fatigue) is concentrating.

A dual-track playbook: win inside institutions *and* outside them.

Institutionalist track (process)

- Co-design: be in the room early; shape definitions and standards
- Procedural map: committees, agencies, deadlines, rulemaking windows
- Regulatory muscle: comments + data + implementation plans that survive court fights
- Proof points: compliance + third-party audits + real-world results
- Validator bench: local first, national second (unexpected allies matter)

Disruptor track (permission)

- Narrative: one simple trade-off, repeated everywhere
- Speed: rapid response + pre-bunking before opponents define you
- Channel sync: paid + earned + owned/digital tell the same story, same week
- Mobilization: treat stakeholders like voters (email, SMS, peer texting)
- Own your list: build and maintain it as campaign infrastructure

Conclusion

**Don't just respond to politics.
Create the consent for the reality you want.**

3 questions to take back to your team:

- What *permission* is missing right now?
- Who are the validators we haven't recruited yet?
- What would make our “deal” legible in 30 seconds?

Q&A

Question | Comments

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