

There Must Be More: Communication to Close the Cultural Divide

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Abstract

To many, the growing politicization and ideological polarization around climate change even in the face of an ever-clearer scientific consensus is disturbing. This polarization is particularly apparent in the U.S. (bearing international ramifications), but deep divisions in attitudes, opinions, and political support for or against climate change policies are also apparent elsewhere. Insights from the cognitive, behavioral, and social sciences have helped explain these trends through foci on aspects such as information processing, sense-making, cultural worldviews and belief systems, social organization, and political organizing. These insights have made apparent the complexity of the adaptive challenge that would be involved in overcoming the existing stalemate. This chapter has two main objectives: first, it draws together the existing scholarship to situate the challenge. Second, the chapter explores how understanding public attitudes and responses from cultural and psychological perspectives may open up new possibilities for public engagement – both on mitigation and on adaptation, and maybe ultimately on the need for deeper transformational changes necessary to deal with rapidly progressing climate change. It explores these possibilities through dialogue with both the majority of currently less engaged or even disconnected publics, and with the highly polarized and vocal factions of the population. While these possibilities require extensive testing and scaling up, success in the U.S. would not only invite broader application and cross-cultural comparisons, but may be essential for political progress nationally and globally given the important role of the U.S. in international climate policy.

1. Introduction

Politicization of science and polarization of public opinion is a common phenomenon around climate change. Many countries have seen their share of hardening of opposing positions on climate change, accompanied by considerable cynicism, distrust, blame and negative sentiment spread around (e.g., Norgaard 2006; Rose 2007; Hulme 2009; Poortinga et al. 2011; Whitmarsh 2011; Leviston and Walker 2011; Reser et al. 2012). Arguably nowhere is the phenomenon as severe and of such devastating global significance, however, as in the U.S. This chapter focuses thus on the toughest of all cases – the political and ideological divides on climate change in the U.S. – to explore what lessons it may hold for communication and engagement across cultural and ideological divides more generally. Overcoming this impasse, we would argue, constitutes an adaptive challenge *par excellence*: forward movement will only happen if significant actors and segments of the population reach out to each other, engage, and mobilize for dialogue and action.

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The premise from which we launch our argument is a seemingly intractable situation: The growing politicization of science and ideological polarization in the U.S. around climate change appears to become nearly as solidly established as the ever-clearer scientific consensus on human-caused climate change. To those who are convinced that climate change is a serious problem, this dismal state of public discourse is caused by powerful political influences intentionally distorting public understanding and aiming to stall policy progress (e.g., Lahsen 2005; Oreskes and Conway 2010). To them this is deeply frightening in light of the climate crisis they perceive. From the other end of the political spectrum, accepting climate change as a fact looks like the beginning of the end of personal freedoms; it is to give in to the left's alleged attempt to control all aspects of our private lives; and so climate change is declared a "hoax" (Inhofe 2005) or at least an unproven theory, maybe a natural phenomenon, and in any event too uncertain to demand serious attention or action. As Harper Magazine columnist, Thomas Frank, an expert on U.S. right-wing conservative groups noted, conservatives view the state of the world and of national politics in an equally apocalyptic way as the left. Each side, however, sees different problems and different villains at work causing them (Frank 2011).

A large number of public opinion polls and analyses over the last few years have confirmed this polarizing trend in U.S. climate change opinions (Dunlap and McCright 2008; Jones 2010; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Antonio and Brulle 2011; Hamilton 2011; The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press 2011; Hoffman 2011; Leiserowitz et al. 2011a; Leiserowitz et al. 2011b; Mooney 2012). It must be seen in the context of a broader trend toward polarization in American politics (e.g., Poole 2012; Poole 2008) and considerable changes in the economic and media landscapes in the U.S. (Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins 2012; Boykoff 2011). Serious analysts, unconscious communicators, and intentional polemicists on all sides have felt free and justified to brand those on the other extreme with unfortunate labels, if to no other end than to inflame animosities and harden the polarization further (e.g., O'Neill and Boykoff 2010; U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works 2010; Nature Editors 2011; Powell 2011; Washington and Cook 2011; Clynes 2012). For example, former U.S. Vice President Al Gore has been defamed and ridiculed for his stance on climate change; climate scientists are receiving death threats and hate mail; those wishing to see climate action have been called "Communists" or "water melons" – green on the outside, red on the inside; meanwhile those questioning the reality, human causation, or need for action on climate change have been labeled skeptics, contrarians, deniers, and criminals. Thus, economist and social scientist, Andrew Hoffman (2011, p.3) concluded, "the debate appears to be reaching a level of polarization where one might begin to question whether meaningful dialogue and problem solving has become unavailable to participants."

In this chapter, we are primarily interested in exploring – quite pragmatically – the openings for, and the possible ways in which, meaningful and constructive communication can be (re)established. We summarize the range of explanations for the current deplorable state of affairs. Our main goal, however, is to identify communication approaches based on the insights they offer. In particular, our interest is in exploring the opportunities for dialogue as a way of coming together, bridging across deeply engrained differences and finding solutions that preserve safe and sustainable lives in the face of climate change. While dialogue may not be possible with everyone, and some almost certainly will not be interested in sincere exchange, we believe that further diatribe and debate between the extreme factions will only fortify the political stalemate, and additional one-way delivery of information will not fundamentally change the disturbingly low levels of public understanding accomplished over the past 20 years (Leiserowitz, Smith, and Marlon 2010). Instead, we believe that greater engagement of the American public, especially of those holding less extreme views, through dialogue is possible and that this engagement can scale up and change the social and political climate to enable action.

Below, we summarize findings from recent opinion polls to first establish in concrete terms the existing polarization. We also make the case that polarization is not all there is, even if the media

coverage and recent scientific work could make one believe in only two camps of convictions. In Section 3, we explore the opportunities and goals of communicating with those who are not heard in public discourse or who don't have enough forums to explore the climate change issue, along with their own views and those of others. In Section 4 we then turn to the currently opposed sides in the climate debate and ask what possibilities exist for them to come together. Section 5 explains how dialogue may be the most appropriate forum for deliberate attempts in finding common ground and describes both the forms and ways in which we may move from cultural and ideological divides to interpersonal opening and understanding. Section 6 offers a brief conclusion, emphasizing the common denominator we see in engaging all segments of the population, whether they are currently not or not productively engaged.

2. American Attitudes on Climate Change: Polarization and Silence

Evidence of polarized views on climate change is easily found by scanning recent news or exploring the topic on the internet. Twenty or more years into public awareness of this problem, the portrayal found there would lead one to believe that there is nothing but extreme pro or con opinions on the topic. Opinion polling that asks about climate change attitudes and political party affiliation indeed finds that Americans largely occupy two increasingly separate camps, the Democratic, liberal-leaning, climate-change accepting wing and the Republican, conservative-leaning, climate-change skeptical wing with a quiet, seemingly unimportant contingent in the middle (Dunlap and McCright 2008; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Hamilton 2011).

In actuality, it is more accurate to state that the two polarizing camps in the U.S. make up the extreme ends of a more diverse opinion spectrum. Since 2008, Anthony Leiserowitz at Yale University and colleagues at George Mason University have tracked public opinion and divided the American public into six distinct opinion segments, "Global Warming's Six Americas", based on their underlying cultural value commitments and beliefs: the Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious, Disengaged, Doubtful, and Dismissive.² These six segments vary by degree along the more egalitarian/communitarian vs. hierarchist/individualist value spectrum at the heart of cultural theory (e.g., Leiserowitz et al. 2009; Kahan 2007; Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990). While segment sizes have varied in important ways in the last five years, according to the latest data available (September 2012) the Alarmed, constituting 16% of the population, fall on one of the extreme ends of the spectrum. People in this category are those most engaged on the issue of climate change. They are strongly convinced global warming is happening, human-caused, and a serious and urgent threat. This segment of the American public is also most likely to be behaviorally, civically, communicatively, and politically involved in climate change and – either through votes or support for pro-action interest groups to support an aggressive national policy response (Leiserowitz et al. 2012).³ The next, and currently largest segment – that of the Concerned

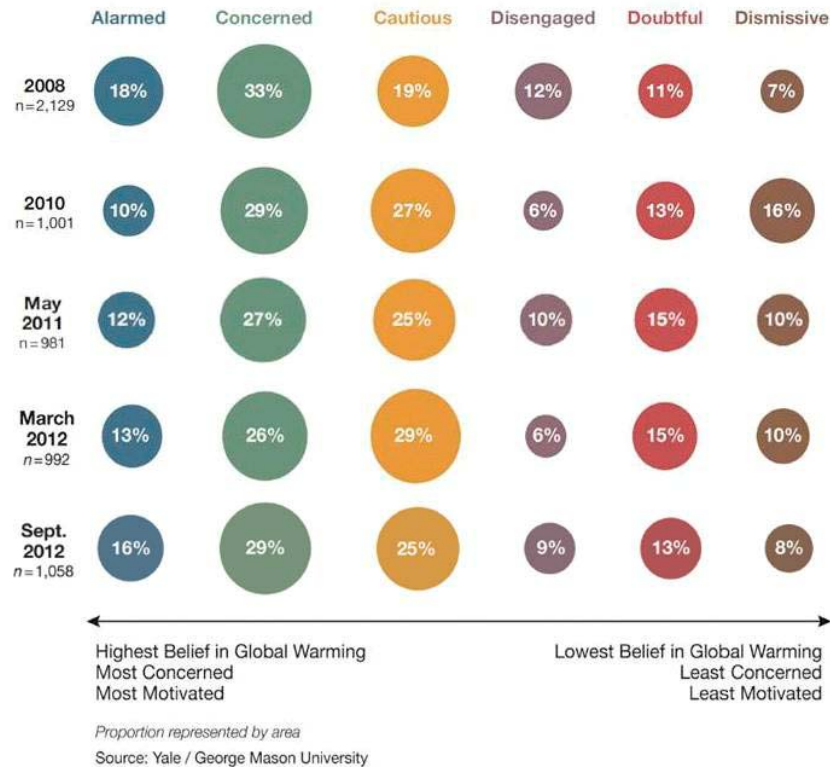
² Audience segmentation research in the UK – based on a different underlying theory of people's values and motivations – has developed a different set of labels but has similarly found distinct differences within the population (e.g., Rose 2011; Rose, Dade, and Scott 2007). Opinion research in Australia has not used values, but the more common socioeconomic demographics to find distinct differences among the population's attitudes and opinions on climate change (Reser et al. 2011; Leviston and Walker 2011).

³ It is important to note that being categorized as "Alarmed" does not mean that everyone is publicly vocal about their views and concerns, out in the streets demonstrating, or alarmist in their public rhetoric. The segmentation underlying the Six Americas is based on value commitments and beliefs, not on actions. Climate-relevant behaviors (such as energy savings, transportation choices etc.) vary remarkably little across all segments of the Six Americas (Leiserowitz et al. 2011a; Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf 2009). However, the Alarmed, like the Dismissive (discussed below), are more likely than all others to be civically and politically active on the issue. These groups are

(29%) – is also convinced that global warming is a serious problem and supports a strong policy response but individuals in this group are less personally involved in the issue and are taking fewer actions. The third segment is referred to as the Cautious representing 25% of Americans. The Cautious believe global warming is a problem, but they are less certain that it is happening than the Alarmed or the Concerned, are less certain that it is human-caused, and they do not view it as a personal threat or feel a sense of urgency to respond. The Disengaged currently constitute 9% of the public. As the label implies, individuals in this group do not know much about the issue, have not thought much about it, and not surprisingly hold no firm beliefs about climate change. The fifth category is made up of the Doubtful (13%). Interestingly, it is a group split among those who think global warming is happening, those who think it is not, and those who do not know. Those who lean toward believing that global warming is happening, assume it is caused by natural causes and do not believe it will be a problem for people for many decades. Certainly, they think, America is doing enough to respond. Finally, currently the smallest (but highly visible and outspoken) segment with 8% of the population – at the other end of the spectrum – constitute the Dismissive. People in this category, similar to the Alarmed, are also very engaged in the issue but insist that global warming is not happening. Moreover, they argue that even if it exists, it is not a threat to either people or the environment, and strongly believe that it does not warrant a national policy response. Figure 1 is a composite of findings from Leiserowitz and colleagues on how the proportions of the “Six Americas” have changed over the past five years. It illustrates how there have been repeated shifts over time into and out of the middle of the spectrum, with politically significant shifts in the proportion of the most visible segments – the Alarmed and the Dismissive. While statistically the situation at present is an almost complete return to the status in 2008, prior to the scandal of stolen emails from the University of East Anglia, the discovery of several mistakes in the Fourth Assessment report of the IPCC, and the global economic crisis of 2009, the similar numbers hide that the stances taken on both ends of the spectrum have hardened and seem politically and culturally more distant than five years ago.

most likely to actively support leaders, NGOs, and policies in line with their values. This is one of the reasons why their voices are more readily represented in the mass media.

Figure 1: Proportion of the U.S. Adult Population in the Six Americas (2008-2012)



Source: Composite constructed from findings in (Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf 2008; Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf 2010; Leiserowitz et al. 2011b; Leiserowitz et al. 2012; Leiserowitz et al. 2013)

In late 2012 then, just like any other year this survey has been conducted, a large majority of Americans (76%) does *not* fall into the extreme categories of responses to global warming. Despite important variations by several percentage points over time, the existence and demographic makeup of the Six Americas has been remarkably stable over time. However, the 24% of the currently most engaged and most vocal Americans, sometimes called the issue public (Converse 1964; Krosnick 1990; Han 2009), is the portion of the population whose views are heard most frequently in the media, while the less extreme, more malleable views of the majority are not represented and thus essentially absent from public discourse (Balbus 2012).

Mainstream news media as well as internet-based blogs and news services provide a welcome echo chamber to the opposing viewpoints and positions. While the specifics of these debates have varied over time, the main areas of contention have hinged on the following fundamental questions, all of which are reflected in the fundamental beliefs, opinions and preferences of the Six Americas (see Figure 1)⁴:

⁴ Others have paid extensive attention to the specific arguments and counterarguments as they evolved over time, either in ongoing scientific blogs (e.g., Real Climate, <http://www.realclimate.org/>), in periodic syntheses of the state of science (such as the IPCC assessments), in "Frequently Asked Questions" sections of science-focused government or NGO websites, or in dedicated efforts by NGOs such as Greenpeace (2013) or the Union of

- **Problem existence:** Global climate change is or is not happening (presenting or contradicting any number of lines of evidence, with particular media potential around extreme events and counter-intuitive climatic phenomena such as snow-heavy winters);
- **Causation/attribution:** Climate change is or is not caused in substantial ways by human action (maybe the most profoundly contested aspect in discussion);
- **Climate models:** The existing or missing sophistication, and thus believability, of global climate models to project the future;
- **Degree of danger:** The risks from climate change are significant, dangerous, and urgent vs. The risks are negligible, manageable and distant ;
- **Scientific consensus:** Climate scientists do or don't agree on that climate change is happening, dangerous, and mainly human-caused;
- **Scientific uncertainty:** The degree of uncertainty in projecting future climate changes and related impacts is cause for action vs. reason to justify delay (or no action at all);
- **Cost:** It is too expensive and potentially ruinous to national or local economies to take mitigation or proactive adaptation actions vs. it is more expensive and potentially ruinous not to take preventative and preparatory action; and
- **Policy alternatives:** The acceptability or unacceptability of different types of policy interventions (apart from cost), due to, for example, the degree of government involvement, the locus of control, the manner of implementation, or the risks and benefits involved in alternative technologies.

In addition to the virtually endless opportunities for debate involved in these key science and policy issues, the nature of the media industry is another key factor in the state of affairs. Most mainstream media outlets are for-profit businesses invested in finding news that sells. One implication of that vested interest is that they report on what they believe the public is most interested in (e.g., the immediate and tangible troubles of the economy), probably one of the key reasons why overall coverage on climate change in mainstream media has actually declined in recent years (Boykoff 2012; Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins 2012). Another implication of the for-profit nature of the media is that they look for the extremes, the sensational, and the controversial. For them, controversy in opinion – when there are no weather disasters to exploit – may well be the most interesting aspect of climate change to report on. As long as the two extreme ends of the climate change opinion spectrum are slinging mud at each other, that battle is more newsworthy than the incremental progress of climate change or the science of it.

Meanwhile, social scientists have taken up the issue of polarization, in no small part driven by the fact that those most vocal and engaged on the dismissive end of the spectrum have had an undeniably chilling impact on public policy and action at all levels of government (e.g., Peach 2012; Kaufman and Zernike 2012; Yale Climate Media Forum 2011; Fears 2011; Davidson 2008). Coming from a variety of disciplines and theoretical backgrounds, analysts have put forward a range of explanations. We deem these complementary, rather than mutually exclusive explanations of the polarization and, particularly, of “contrarian” and “denialist” opinions:⁵

Concerned Scientists (2007) attempting to summarize scientific knowledge and analyze climate contrarian tactics and arguments to help others counteract them.

⁵ With the exception of research driven by an interest in cultural values, notably less attention has been paid in social science circles to why certain individuals or groups hold “alarmist” or “green extremist” views. Remarkably little has been said about how to broaden the issue public and engage those with less strongly held views.

- the political organization of powerful industry interests, particularly in the context of neoliberal globalizing goals (McCright and Dunlap 2003; Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman 2008; Oreskes and Conway 2010; McCright and Dunlap 2010; Dunlap and McCright 2011; Lahsen 2005, 2013);
- the role of the media in creating controversy and skepticism (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Carvalho 2007; Butler and Pidgeon 2009; Painter 2011; Fitzsimmons and Fong 2012);
- the importance of the social organization of belief systems held by different groups in society (Norgaard 2006, 2011);
- the significance of human psychological development and movement toward greater maturity for explaining the deeper psychological structure underlying attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Cook-Greuter 2008; Hedlund-de Witt and Hedlund-de Witt 2012; Plotkin 2008)
- the psychological responses to existential threats (Dickinson 2009; Fritsche et al. 2010; Pienaar 2011; Fritsche and Häfner 2012);
- the psychological and cognitive underpinnings of strongly held beliefs, particularly "motivated reasoning" (e.g., Roseman 1994; Jost et al. 2003; Jost, Ledgerwood, and Hardin 2008; Jost, Kay, and Thorisdottir 2009; Whitmarsh 2011; Hart and Nisbet 2012; Mooney 2012; Hoffman and Jennings 2012; Myers et al. 2013); and, closely related,
- the cultural value commitments (and possible evolution in cultural values) that allow or prevent us from accepting certain information and beliefs (Kahan 2006, 2008, 2010; Kahan et al. 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012 Kahan and Braman 2008; Hulme 2009; Lahsen 2008, 2013; Baxter 2009; Kasser 2009; Crompton 2011; McIntosh et al. 2012).

In our reading of that literature, we find little in the way of concrete ideas of how to continue to communicate once an issue has become so polarized, so ideologically driven, and involving such high stakes literally and psychologically. Remarkably, there has also been only limited attention to the communication needs of the three quarters of the "silent", overlooked population in the middle. Thus, we see a need to connect with the ignored middle while fostering the collective capacity to retain a functioning democracy, to collaborate and find solutions together, and rebuild a civic and humane conversation (Palmer 2011). Our own assessment of the situation leads us to prioritize the reengagement of the less-ideologically committed (as we do in the next section), and then explore how to bring the more extreme voices into a civil exchange (Sections 4 and 5).

3. Communicating with the Missing Middle: Possibilities of Greater Engagement

Nothing opens up the mind like the glimpse of new possibility.
John O'Donohue (2004, p.139)

Taking the existence of the "Six Americas" seriously, it is obvious that the largest opportunity for an expanded and fuller conversation among Americans of different persuasions lies with the three quarters in the middle. But where to start?

Developing possibilities to reach and engage the "silent middle" – that is those not represented in the ideologically driven public debate as articulated in the media – begins with two fundamental questions all communicators must grapple with: *who* are we communicating with, and *what is the goal* of that communication? Leiserowitz and colleagues have developed a compendium of insights into the Six Americas – their demographics, values, political identifications, voting preferences, levels of pro-environmental behavior, civic engagement, energy and climate policy support, beliefs, concerns, key questions, climate literacy, and emotional responses to climate change. Here is not the space to

summarize all of that and develop adequate engagement strategies for four of the Six Americas. What we know from this body of work, however, is that the Six Americas are quite complex. Assuming, for example that the Alarmed are always highly informed, knowledgeable, and politically, civically or behaviorally active – while true by comparison to the Cautious or Disengaged – would disregard the finding that the Dismissive are sometimes even better informed on factual knowledge, they just draw different conclusions from it; it would equally discount that almost all of the subgroups take at least some pro-environmental actions (but even among the Concerned and Alarmed surprisingly few), yet many do so not necessarily because of their concern with climate change but to save money or because “it’s the right thing to do” (Leiserowitz et al. 2011a; Leiserowitz, Maibach, and Roser-Renouf 2009).

There is one thing, however, the Four Americas in the middle all have in common: they are not heard from in the media. Their opinions, concerns and viewpoints are not mirrored and their questions are not addressed in the cross-fire of heated debate. Their level of science literacy in general and climate literacy in particular is rather low, leaving them uncomfortable or unable to participate effectively in a debate – supposedly – over facts (Hill 2010; Leiserowitz, Smith, and Marlon 2010). Many have not bothered to learn more because the issue has long been presented as a scientific, uncertain, and complex one best left to the experts (Marx et al. 2007). Even those who tried have found it difficult, depressing or overwhelming to contemplate (Myers et al. 2012; Moser 2007; Meijnders, Midden, and Wilke 2001). Still not enough understand just how compelling the scientific consensus has grown over the past 20 years (Ding et al. 2011). To the extent global warming is caused by humans, it would require responses beyond the reach of individual actions, and what those large-scale, comprehensive responses are is unclear to many (Leiserowitz et al. 2011a). Moreover, if it were a truly urgent problem, the argument goes, political leaders would address it; and to the extent it is not, there surely must be more immediate matters to attend to (Brulle, Carmichael, and Jenkins 2012). In short, there are personally compelling reasons *not* to engage.

This then raises the question, what would be the goal of “engaging” the middle Four Americas? And what do we really mean by “engagement”? This is not a simple question to answer. The Six Americas segmentation study – based on cultural value commitments and beliefs – is not primarily about behaviors, but rather about convictions, attitudes and opinions. That’s why we see few even of the most alarmed and dismissive Americans out in the streets protesting, though some of them are; few of the Alarmed have given up all fossil fuel consumption, and equally few of the Dismissive are actively feeding the disinformation campaign. Some of the Concerned or Cautious may not want to learn more or let themselves be any more disturbed by the facts, but if they saw people like themselves speak out in favor of climate action and were told what to do, they might take or support the right actions. Some of the Doubtful may well come around to believing that human-caused climate change is real, but would never vote for a carbon tax or a Democratic candidate who promises climate action. In other words, engagement can mean many things, and what one may wish to achieve is specific to the group in focus and the intention behind the communication effort.

Table 1 lists key types of engagement that one may wish to achieve. Clearly, these forms of engagement differ in depth and direct impact on climate-relevant actions, yet may still be considered important either as indicators or preconditions of deeper forms of engagement. Importantly, they are not necessarily hierarchical or sequential (i.e., one kind of engagement being a pre-condition for the next), though it is highly unlikely that any one-time engagement would achieve more than superficial and impermanent goals. Repeated engagement is often necessary to achieve more significant shifts. And while the types are listed separately, many can and do occur simultaneously.

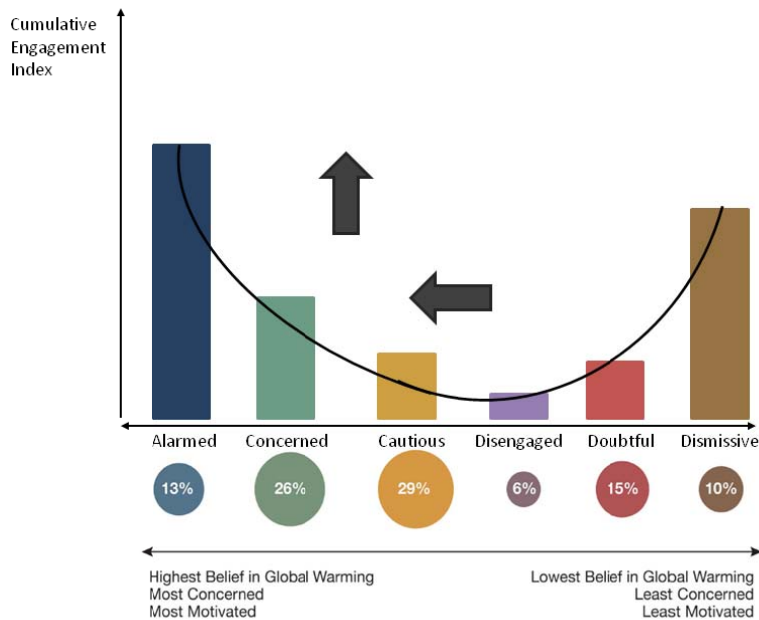
Table 1: Typology of Engagement with Climate Change

Type of Engagement	Description with examples
Cognitive	Focus of engagement is internal, in one’s mind <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about climate change • Seeking information and learning/teaching about the issue • Grappling with the complexities of climate change (solutions)
Emotional	Focus of engagement is mostly internal, in one’s psyche, but may be shared with others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing emotional responses (e.g. fear, anxiety, concern, grief, anger, guilt, passion, disappointment, despair, hope, empathy) to surface • Consciously or unconsciously coping with the emotional impacts of climate change
Behavioral	Focus of engagement is mostly on actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making periodic or permanent changes in energy consumption in one’s home • Shifting travel and transportation-related behavior • Shifting food and eating habits • Reducing material consumption
Professional	Focus of engagement are climate-related decisions in one’s professions, business, work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making periodic or permanent changes in energy consumption in one’s work place • Developing and implementing strategic plans to guard against negative impacts of climate change (or policy) • Developing and implementing strategic plans to take advantage of business opportunities arising from climate change (or policy) (in mitigation and adaptation)
Social	Focus of engagement is with known others, peers, or a social reference group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with others about climate change • Enacting solutions together with others, supporting each other • Making one’s publicly visible behavior help shape new social norms
Moral/spiritual	Focus of engagement is driven by the transcendent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being motivated to take action by one’s belief system • Developing a sense of responsibility toward nature, others, the future • Finding solace in a moral/spiritual conception of the world • Prayer
Civic	Focus of engagement is primarily on the commons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking out about climate change in public • Attending hearings or public meetings • Writing letters to the editor of a newspaper • Participating in protests
Political	Focus of engagement is on the political process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting for candidates representing one’s climate-related position • Voting for local/state climate-related initiatives • Running for office to influence policies and decisions

One could develop a “cumulative engagement index” (CEI) from empirical data that reflect these eight fundamental types of engagement. Because some but not all of these types of engagement have been surveyed for the Six Americas over the years, we can only offer a *hypothetical* depiction of such a CEI in Figure 2 (partial information available in the Six Americas citations listed above). Such a graphic serves as an aid in answering the question – at least generically – what one might want to achieve with communication in terms of “engagement.” For example, if the overarching goal is to shift toward a broad, widely visible social norm that accepts and demands more action on climate change, one might want to help elevate the CEI overall to a higher level for the Alarmed, Concerned, Cautious and

Disengaged (arrow pointing upward). The primary focus of effort might be on the cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral dimensions of engagement. If by contrast (or in addition) the goal is to generate a political momentum for climate action (generically or a particular policy), the focus would be on moving more people into the Alarmed and Concerned columns (arrow pointing toward the left), activating particularly in the political, civic and moral dimensions of engagement. This is not to make any judgment about the inherent goodness or preference for any particular climate solution (e.g., regulation of CO₂, a market-based cap-and-trade system, or a particular set of energy technologies), but simply to reflect the general preference of the Alarmed and Concerned for action rather sooner than later. We see both of these goals as essential for large-scale climate policy in light of the history of social movements and environmental policy-making in the U.S.: it never started in Washington, but in local communities and state capitols, where progressive ideas were developed first and eventually “trickled up” to Congress when a patchwork of different policies across the nation made business cumbersome (Rabe 2004, 2009; Isham and Waage 2007).

Figure 2: Shifts in the Level of Engagement for the Six Americas Based on a Hypothetical Cumulative Engagement Index (see text for explanation)



Source: Concept developed by authors; “Six Americas” data from Leiserowitz et al. (2012)

Source: Concept developed by authors, informed by Leiserowitz et al.’s findings on the Six America’s engagement around climate change

Pragmatically, (re)engaging the middle Four Americas might begin by simply recognizing them, paying attention to them. If the immediate goal is a “good conversation,” looking for cognitive, emotional, social and moral forms of engagement, disengagement can be effectively countered by sincerity and genuine interest in the other: interest in them as individuals, in their lives, their local concerns and worries. Not only does such an approach offer a glimpse of “new possibilities” (as John O’Donohue in the epigraph says) and thus open the door to real connection; it offers insights into the

values and issues that can help make the connection to climate change. It offers possible alternative ways to frame the issue, make the problem more salient and the possible solutions more prominent and relevant. It also opens the floor for a values-based conversation – something we all can participate in (compared to a conversation about atmospheric science). In fact, the point has been made before that the tit-for-tat debate over scientific facts is often no more than a thinly disguised debate over the underlying values debaters hold (Sarewitz 2004).

Once people are engaged in a conversation over local concerns and values, no one is “right” or “wrong,” but a possibility arises to explore commonalities, differences, and ambiguities. Of course, such conversations can be messy and heated, but at least they can be had directly. By practicing foundational skills of dialogue such as being fully present, deep listening, respect, self-responsibility, clarity, authenticity, speaking one’s own truth, and suspending judgment (Bohm 1996; Isaacs 1999; Brown, Isaacs, and World Cafe Community 2005), a real exchange and learning from and about each other becomes possible. In fact, the likelihood for having such an open and engaging conversation is larger for the middle Four Americas as their values are closer to each other, less stuck, and more inclusive and compatible than those who hold more extreme positions.

A practical example may help illustrate that possibility. One of us (SM) has been involved in a project entitled “Climate Conversations” (held in four locations around the country in 2012) with individuals who can be described as falling in the Concerned and Cautious of the Six Americas (see: <https://www.keystone.org/policy-initiatives-center-for-science-a-public-policy/environment/climate-conversations.html>). Belonging to these segments was not formally assessed prior to participation, but was judged on the basis of the questions and concerns participants raised during the events (e.g., few if any were truly convinced climate change is happening, but had noticed changes; the human causation was questioned; people generally knew very little about the strength of climate change science or of the magnitude of the scientific consensus). Participants were recruited through The Keystone Center (<https://www.keystone.org/>), typically with the help of local partners. In a “World Café” style conversation (Hurley and Brown 2009; The World Cafe 2008) with about 40-50 participants per event, individuals attended who were neither already persuaded of climate change’s importance or urgency nor did they think of it as a political Trojan horse, hoax or conspiracy. Attention was paid to achieving gender, racial, professional and sectoral diversity (e.g., people from local governments, the military, garden clubs, farmers, clergy, private firms). Participants came out of curiosity or because of rising concerns over extreme events; some came because a trusted source convinced them to join, while others saw an opportunity to participate in a conversation they do not otherwise get to have. A small number of experts were on hand to answer questions and relate some basic scientific information about historical and projected climatic changes in the region. This helped place people’s tacit experience into a broader, credible context, and as such was validating to participants. They were deeply appreciative for the questions they could ask (mostly focused on observed changes, climate science, and expected impacts) and get answered in an open, inviting and non-judgmental environment. They were glad to be able to voice their concerns and unease about climate extremes and changes observed, and for the connections they could make with others in their region. They asked for credible sources to learn more, they wanted to stay connected with each other beyond the event, and were eager to discuss possible mitigation and adaptation strategies. As is common for conversations among non-experts, these questions were not particularly technical, but reflected concerns over costs and more generally participants' values such as "doing our part", "responsibility" and "stewardship." Conversationalists also wanted to know how to “talk about climate change without mentioning climate change,” altogether clear indications of the frustration they shared about the loaded term and a strong desire to find ways to enact the right responses regardless (see also Furth and Gantwerk 2013). Maybe most importantly, participants expressed a hunger to have a “real” conversation about the issue (see project Facebook

page at the above link). The facilitated conversation events lasted ca. 4 hours, were conducted during the work day, and participants lingered long after the official adjournment.

The experience highlights some important insights about both the opportunities and challenges of attempting to reach those currently less involved in the climate debate. First, the greatest challenge with this project was to bring people in. Significant effort was required to make the issue resonant in locally relevant ways and non-inflammatory language. Recruitment to the events was easier when done by a locally trusted partner who was not perceived as having a particular agenda. Logistical challenges can make participation difficult as well (e.g., not getting time away from work or family) even when travel support or stipends are offered. Second, at least with those in the population that lean toward accepting climate change's reality and seriousness, there is potential to have a very engaged, meaningful conversation. Once involved in dialogue, people pay attention and process information carefully. They get the questions addressed they most care about, and walk away more educated and empowered, particularly through the connections they made with others. Third, the importance of moving quickly from the "problem" to "solutions" cannot be overstated. This became quickly apparent in the Climate Conversations and has been documented in countless studies (e.g., Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, and Whitmarsh 2007; Moser 2007; Gifford 2011; Swim et al. 2011; Weber 2011; Dietz 2013). It suggests that the Four Americas may well be "tuning out" because it is psychologically challenging to stay in a conversation about an increasingly worrisome problem, when solutions seem ineffectual, out of reach, or infeasible and when leadership is elusive. This then points to the need for scaling up. While challenging, it is not impossible to reach far more people with such events. This has been done with hundreds of people per event and – via television, internet, and other forms of deliberative engagement – extended to thousands (e.g., Lehr et al. 2003; Tan and Brown 2005; Involve 2008). Hundreds of individuals were involved in such a deliberative process in Texas, which ultimately led to greater understanding of the opportunities and challenges around wind energy. At the end of that process, strong support emerged for wind power, providing the needed public signal to move state policy forward which, in turn, contributed to Texas becoming a leading developer of wind energy in the U.S. (Lehr et al. 2003).

4. Possibilities for A New Start

As we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to include a new and strange ally – our willingness to be disturbed.

Margaret Wheatley (2002, p.34)

To create change we must find and confront our biases, blindness, fear and our own power, both to create and to destroy.

Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton (2007, p.94)

Clearly, developing communication channels to the middle Four Americans is not easy. The example described above, however, provides good evidence that it is possible to bring many of the currently disengaged into the climate change conversation, and there is no doubt that this opportunity is underutilized. It is also quite possible that the difficulty of doing so fades in comparison with bringing the most extreme sides of the opinion spectrum – for the first time or maybe again – into true dialogue. Here, we turn to that more difficult challenge.

By "true dialogue" we do mean much more than bringing people together for a shouting match or debate (e.g., Malone 2009), as opposed to the more common monologues held in largely separate living rooms, policy circles, or blogospheres. By dialogue we mean "a process for talking about tension-

filled topics” (Schirch and Camp 2007, p.5), “that aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas, and information about a common concern” (ibid., p.6). It is fundamentally different from discussion or debate, which aim at analyzing and breaking apart a big issue into smaller parts, but about exploring issues and meanings together (Dietz 2013). It is not about persuasion (by rational argument or savvy moral claim), but about understanding. Or, as David Bohm says, “in a dialogue, each person does not attempt to *make common* certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him [or her]. Rather, it may be said that the two people are making something *in common*, i.e., creating something new together” (1996, p.3). Dialogue is also first and foremost not about problem-solving, though often finding commonly accepted solutions to a problem can arise organically from the relationships, trust, and understanding that were developed. Figure 3 illustrates a continuum of discourses, where dialogue is the most involved, most demanding, and potentially most fruitful and rewarding for all involved.

Figure 3: Discourse Continuum from Orwellian Manipulation to True Dialogue

Orwellian Language	Pronouncements	Polemic	Debate	Discussion	Dialogue
Involves lying and reframing so as to deceive or manipulate and thus gain control over others, achieve one's own ends	Authoritarian one-way messaging where power inequality is maintained, there is no intention for exchange	Argumentation is the goal; there is only one truth; use of aggression and intimidation, no listening, effort to discredit the “opponent,” sometimes by all means, whether true or false	Battle among fixed positions; goal is to establish winners and losers, right and wrong; reasoned, logical efforts at “winning”; legalistic (courtroom argumentation), lack of ambiguity	Civil discourse, some give and take; negotiation, problem-solving, efforts at persuasion; search for conciliation and consensus; examination and “breaking apart” of issues; exploration of elements	True exchange; requires trust; based on listening, respect, self-reflection, equality among partners; questioning of assumptions; exploring ambiguities and the unknown; goal is discovery, insight, creativity, innovation, appreciation, action, common ground
<p>Silence – an indication of avoidance, paralysis, numbness, distraction, denial, secrecy, confusion, stress, or fear.</p>					<p>Silence – an indication of spaciousness, thoughtfulness, openness to the unknown, collective wisdom.</p>

Source: Adapted from Buie (2010, pp.100-101).

The obvious question arises then, what would make it possible for those currently wildly opposed to come together for true dialogue? What in the world could occasion them to come together to do the hard work of dialogue? For those who believe the climate policy stalemate can be reduced to fossil fuel interests stalling progress, or to environmentalists aiming to establish an all-empowered world government this question may invite only ridicule. It seems quite impossible to even imagine that the two sides would want to come together to be in dialogue. Clearly, the politics of climate change cannot be understood without a clear-eyed look at the influence of money in U.S. policy-making. On the other hand, well-organized social movements and public pressure can shift policy. Moreover, outside capitols

and beyond policy circles, Americans also have deep differences in values and opinions that currently prevent them from productive exchange. What then are the possibilities for people on the extreme ends of the opinion spectrum to even consider coming together for the demanding work of dialogue?

We see essentially three reasons that could open possibilities for a new start. By themselves they are not the way to overcome deep cultural divides, but they constitute necessary pre-conditions for a dialogue to even take place. The first is maybe the most likely: necessity. More and more weather- and climate-related crises are such necessities. Whether or not they would change any skeptical or dismissive person's mind and bring a revelation or recognition of something previously denied is not the point; rather, crises may simply necessitate that people communicate and collaborate directly to figure out pragmatic solutions. Another form of necessity may arise from a legal mandate (e.g., a state law requiring local adaptation planning or mitigation actions). And a third may arise from the stalemate itself: if positions are so deeply dug in that progress on anything (not necessarily climate related) becomes impossible, political leaders at any level may be at risk of losing their political mandate, and thus feel compelled to come together with previous opponents.

A second reason is marginalization. This may occur, for example, as a result of the turn-over of leadership in political and business organizations, the defection of key voices, or the loss of financial support of the increasingly marginalized camp. Deeper structural changes such as improvements in education, changes in the voting system, or loss of certain media echo chambers could also foster marginalization, even if such processes are slow and less likely at present. Maybe most likely is that climate change manifests in increasingly notable ways and public opinion shifts toward greater awareness and acceptance, thus making doubt and denial simply the marginalized position to hold. The increasingly marginalized then might feel increasing pressure to join the new social norm. While innovation studies suggest that there are always some that will not adopt the new norm, their influence will be lessened as the new majority grows.

The final reason why those in hardened positions may come together is less tangible, less driven by external forces, and yet can be even more compelling and has precedent in historical conflicts: an awakening or revelatory shift in stance, a higher calling. This may not be a "conversion experience" in terms of coming out on the other end of the opinion spectrum, but simply a compelling personal reason to at least talk to each other. Someone may feel compelled to do so "for our grandchildren" or because of who they wish to be and how they wish to be seen by others.

Whatever the reason, there simply comes a point when the experienced benefits of stalemate are overpowered by the potential benefits of talking with each other. It will be very challenging to come together for dialogue given previous self-righteousness, name-calling (and sometimes threats), hostile sentiments on both sides, and the still very strongly held opinions and underlying values. In some cases it may be necessary to begin or have such a dialogue with a neutral and trained facilitator. Regardless, it requires at least a "willingness to be disturbed," as Margaret Wheatley says, to be shaken out of our solidly held convictions, and to acknowledge the possibility that we may be biased, blind, afraid, yet also hold the power to create or destroy the civic fabric of society.

5. From Cultural Divide to Interpersonal Opening: The Case for Dialogue

It is in the common good to hold our political differences and the conflicts they create in a way that does not unravel the civic community on which democracy depends.

Parker Palmer (2011, p.32)

We have an obligation to have difficult dialogues in a way we really never

had before. That obligation is deep and [...] acute.
Cynthia Enloe (2008, p.65)

True dialogue – difficult dialogue – is a psychologically demanding, time-consuming investment that requires commitment, perseverance, and vulnerability (Figure 3). It may take years or even generations to bridge across and ultimately close cultural divides. But interpersonal opening to each other and forming connections with direct personal and sometimes collective benefit can happen in one meeting, one day, or over the course of continuous interaction over several months or years. This has been shown in compelling cases in the past, ones that seemed entirely intractable at the outset, e.g. in the case of abortion, same sex marriage, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, race relations, electoral and educational reforms, and over retaliatory violence against Muslims after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Gastil, Kahan, and Braman 2006; Schirch and Campt 2007; The Public Conversations Project, <http://www.publicconversations.org>). The longer the interaction among dialogue participants, the more profound and lasting the effect will be. Such dialogue may occur in a number of formats: one-on-one, one-on-many, several-on-several, and several-for-many. The higher the stakes and the pre-existing animosities, the more helpful it will be to have the dialogue facilitated by a neutral person.

Surely, as in the Climate Conversations described above, specific questions about climate science and action can be addressed (e.g., is it happening? How do we know? How much scientific agreement is there? What are the causes for the changes observed? What risks are we facing in the future? How certain are those to manifest? What can we do to mitigate and adapt to the risks? and so on). Dialogue gives people an opportunity to explore their emotional responses to climate change impacts, as well as their feelings and thoughts about different mitigation and adaptation strategies. A Climate dialogue will also allow people to explore their different degrees of tolerance vis-à-vis risk. They might also examine the different pros and cons they see, and how the trade-offs may be addressed of taking certain types of actions. For example, if people come to see how their needs can be met in new ways, they may come to accept a new policy; if they see their livelihoods assured, or better understand how different things they hold dear are protected, they might come to agree to share the cost or responsibility for a given action.

But of far greater significance is the potential for dialogue to shift participants' entrenched positions, and particularly their views of each other. Thus, what can happen in a dialogue is almost on every score opposite to what we usually do that keeps us apart: While we now have minimally informed but strongly held pre-conceived notions of the "other," dialogue asks us to become curious. While we only minimally or superficially listen to others now, dialogue asks first and foremost to listen intently to the other while withholding judgment of what is being said. If we allow silence at all in our current debates, it is typically an indication of withdrawal, whereas in true dialogue, silence is a space for ambiguity, thoughtfulness, taking something in deeply, and for letting feelings rise and settle again. If we are used to quickly forming opinions, responses and judgments in most day-to-day exchanges, dialogue asks that we consider the other's perspective, maybe even empathetically understand it, even if we do not accept it as true for ourselves. Typically, we maintain our differences and separation with anger, cynicism, disdain, name-calling and language that further feeds inflamed responses, yet in dialogue we are asked to begin from a place of goodness, truth and respect – allowing a more humanized picture of the other to arise and ourselves to become more vulnerable. It involves recognizing that the thing that inflames us most about the other is most likely our own unconscious, unexplored shadow. Thus, instead of either-or, black-and-white thinking, dialogue makes space for the finer grey shades of our lives and convictions, allowing us to move from defensive posturing to reflective openness and empathy. Ad hominem attacks are set aside for non-violent speech and action. It is from this openness that change in

thinking, opinion, and attitudes can occur. When we truly commit and engage in the emotional and cognitive work it takes to be in true dialogue, we evolve, grow up, and irrevocably change somehow.

These basic rules of engagement are not unique to climate dialogues (as the examples from different issue areas given above indicate), but common to all attempts to come into true connection through deep conversation (Bohm 1996; Isaacs 1999; Stone, Patton, and Heen 1999; Patterson et al. 2002; Regan 2007; Schirch and Campt 2007; Brulle 2010; Palmer 2011; Lohmann and Til 2011).⁶ As Gastil, Kahan, and Braman (2006) argue, contrary to what many believe, most people do not want to impose their views on the whole of society, they simply want to align with the "policy, party, or person [who] will best help them make ends meet and keep them reasonably safe" (section 2, paragraph 9). Since most people lack time and experience to become experts on the science and policies related to climate change, they tend to turn to leaders of their cultural group for guidance. In other words, "citizens use cultural affinity as a heuristic, or mental shortcut, for figuring out which politicians and policies are most likely to put food on their tables" (ibid., section 3, paragraph 1). Dialogue and deliberation counteract the use of such cultural heuristics. When engaged in "earnest face-to-face deliberation under conditions that convey the good faith and trustworthiness of all participants [...] individuals form strong emotional bonds" (ibid., section 3, paragraph 4). "[U]nder these conditions, citizens interested in pragmatic solutions to common problems can achieve a degree of knowledge that relieves them of the need to lean on culture as a heuristic crutch" (ibid.).

Slowly, space is made for questions, reflection and learning, which in turn allows for common understanding to emerge and commonalities in visions, goals, values and strategies to be discovered. As Herzig and Chasin (2006) note, in properly guided dialogues even people who "seem intractably opposed, often change the way they view and relate to each other—even as they maintain the commitments that underlie their views" (p. 1). Eventually, the issue at stake and the divide between groups over it can be reframed.

Importantly, however, dialogue engages not only cognition, but also affect, spirit and imagination and as such is always more generative than debate or monologue. An effective use of the dialogic process thus helps to validate emotional needs (such as one's identity) and passions associated with climate change while promoting empathy and understanding for the motivations of others. When we have a chance to see how our own and others' motivations are influencing positions then those motivations can become less fixed and change becomes possible. Finally, dialogue can help stop the mutual demonizing, because those who hold different perspectives get to actually know each other. It is easy to vilify another via the safe distance of virtual space; it is much harder to maintain such prejudice and judgment when the other becomes a real person with a name, a face, and a story. All of us have stories of pride, love, loss and suffering. Dialogue more than other forms of communication can thus foster deep caring and connectedness. We witness each other in our ethical dilemmas, or – as Parker Palmer says – we stand together in the "tragic gap" between how the world is and how it could or should be (Palmer 2011, pp.26, 189-193). It is from that greater familiarity with each other that defenses can come down, defensiveness makes room for consideration of alternative ideas and perspectives, and spaces for joint problem-solving open up.

⁶ A number of organizations have begun using dialogue as an engagement format around climate change. See, for example, The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (<http://ncdd.org/>); Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD) (<http://www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca/>) uses well-designed citizen deliberations to shift climate change politics; and the National Climate Conversation series of community events (not necessarily facilitated dialogues to bridge cultural differences) was held in 2009 (www.climateconversation.org).

6. Conclusion: There Must be More

In this chapter, we argued that the basic attitude that underlies engaging the unheard majority of Americans is the same as that underlying dialogue across cultural differences: curiosity. We should expect that there is more to the "other" than we previously knew or assumed. None of us are as simple and homogenous in our stances as our loud opinions might make one believe. In this chapter, we tried to make the case for the need and possibility of deeper engagement, one that is driven by this curiosity, driven by the desire to discover more about those currently disengaged, unengaged or wildly engaged on the opposite ends of the opinion spectrum. Everything social scientists have discovered in recent years about information processing, forming and reforming of opinions, the cultural cognition of risk and social psychology tells us that more, faster, and louder one-way messaging will only add to polarization rather than reduce it. We therefore suggest that engagement strategies for the Six Americas need to be rethought and resources redirected accordingly. Continued polarization of some and disenfranchisement of most others will result in the further erosion of the civic fabric, and that in turn will make addressing the challenges of climate change only harder. Given existing polarization, political disenfranchisement and dissatisfaction, it may not be possible or take a long time to completely overcome the cultural divides and bring everyone into a productive conversation. But we do not have to perpetuate conventional communication practices, and circumstances may compel us to change them. The promise and track record of dialogue to engage people, initiated by smart and courageous leaders who are willing to face the adaptive challenge before us, offers a true and promising alternative.

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