SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT 10

Navigating Sustainability Headwinds through Effective Communication

Randall Solomon | Executive Director, Sustainable Jersey
Dr. Emily Schoerning | Founder and CEO, American Resiliency
Joshua Low | Partnerships Director, Yale Program on Climate Change Communications

May 9th, 2025

Agenda

Randall Solomon | Sustainable Jersey

- **Welcome and Introduction**

Dr. Emily Schoerning | American Resiliency

- **Having Difficult Discussions about Sustainability**
- **Combating Misinformation**

Joshua Low | Yale Program on Climate Change Communications

- **Effective Climate Communications**
- **Storytelling**

Q & A

Climate Action: Everyone to the Table

Emily Schoerning, PhD: Founder & CEO, American Resiliency

Climate Communication: What is the Goal?

AR's Goal : Driving Action on the Ground

-Not focused on belief or identity

Specific Interest: Land Use Change

-Who owns land? Who makes land use decisions?

-Conservative-leaning landholders are critical stakeholders

Climate Communication: Regard & Joy

Climate Communication can Exclude Conservative-Leaning People:

-Popular messaging paints Conservative or Traditional leaning people as the problem

-Landholder arguments (no solar on farmland) are disregarded

-Why would they come to the table?

Research on Climate Communication:

-Importance of informality, regard, and positive emotion (citations at end)

-Connect in love of the land

-Connect on shared goals with direct benefits for all stakeholders

-Connect with **humor, play, courage, and hope**

People Want a Way to the Table

"I've been waiting for years for somebody to talk with my dad about climate the way AR does."

"AR cares about communities like mine."

"Because of AR, I feel ready to respond to change."

Audience is primarily rural & not otherwise climate-aligned

AR is entirely donor-funded

	21-22	23-24	24-25	25 to now
Subscribers	1,312	2,178	8,003	11,772
Total Audience	10,000	42,000	275,000	325,000
Donations & In-Kind	12k	42k	80k	55k by April

Climate Communication: Conflict & Fear

Climate Communication can be a Cultural Flashpoint:

-Don't Play The Game

-Avoid known/scripted dichotomies

-Redirect, find ways to connect, and remain (even weirdly) positive

De-escalating and Connecting Works:

-My experience: tens of thousands of public interactions, no physical contact

-Overall rate of conflict is very low- for both myself & trained volunteers

-I can get you training on communication, de-escalation, and relationship-building

-I do get scared. These emotional skills are a practice & require grounding

The Future of Climate Communication

Move beyond the negative

-actions to DO rather than actions to STOP

-CHALLENGES as well as OPPORTUNITIES

-COURAGE rather than GRIEF

-GENERATIONAL FUTURE rather than LOSS

Selected References & Workshops

Schoerning, E. 2025. Connecting on Conservation: Tools to Build Relationships. WI Lakes & Rivers Convention, 2025.

Schoerning, E. 2024. Communicating Socially Sensitive Science to the Public: Skill-Building Workshop. WI Land+Water Conference, 2024. Green Bay, WI.

Schoerning, E. 2023. Communicating Socially Sensitive Science to the Public: Tips on Climate. Midwest Climate Resilience Conference 2023. Duluth, MN.

Schoerning, E, M Neiman, 2019. "Science Outreach and the Community: An Example of Private/Public Partnership" in As Far as the Eye Can See, edited by Stephen Pradarelli & Rebekah Tilley, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City.

Schoerning, E, 2018. Language, Science, and Power in America. Palgrave MacMillian. ISBN 978-1-349-95813-9

Schoerning, E. 2018. Community Science Literacy: Engagement and Learning with Conflict. Journal of Science Communication. DOI 10.22323/2.17030205

Schoerning, E. 2018. Sociocultural Theory, Power, and Education. Collection edited by Mercedes Nino Murcia. University of Lima, Peru.

Schoerning, E., B. Hand. 2015. Language, access and power in the elementary science classroom. Science Education. 99(2), 238–259.

Schoerning, E. 2013. The linguistic development of non-threatening learning environments. Education and Poverty: Theory, Research, Policy and Praxis. American Educational Research Association (AERA 2013). San Francisco, CA.

Schoerning, E.., B. Hand. 2013. Using Language Positively. Science and Children. 50(9), 42-45.

When you think about climate change, what do you **feel**?

Adapted from Elizabeth Villano, National Park Service

When you think about climate change, how do **want** you feel?

Adapted from Elizabeth Villano, National Park Service

Telling stories that drive climate action!

Presentation for MassEnergize, April 30, 2025

Joshua Low, Partnerships Director

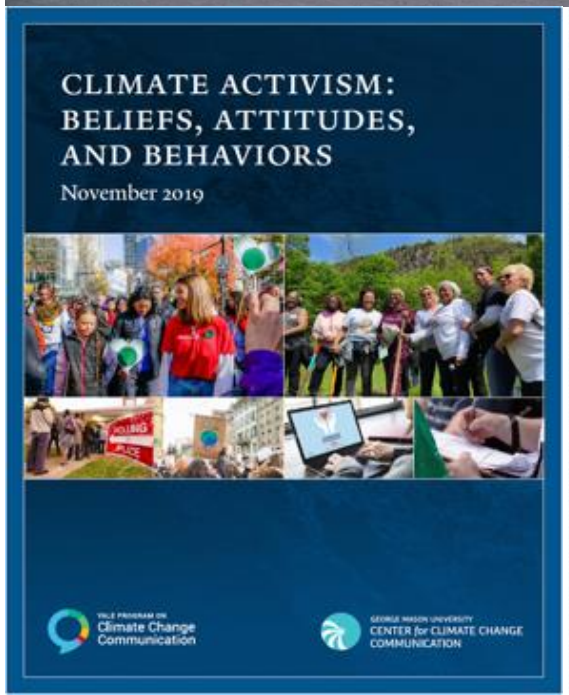
Yale Program on Climate Change Communication

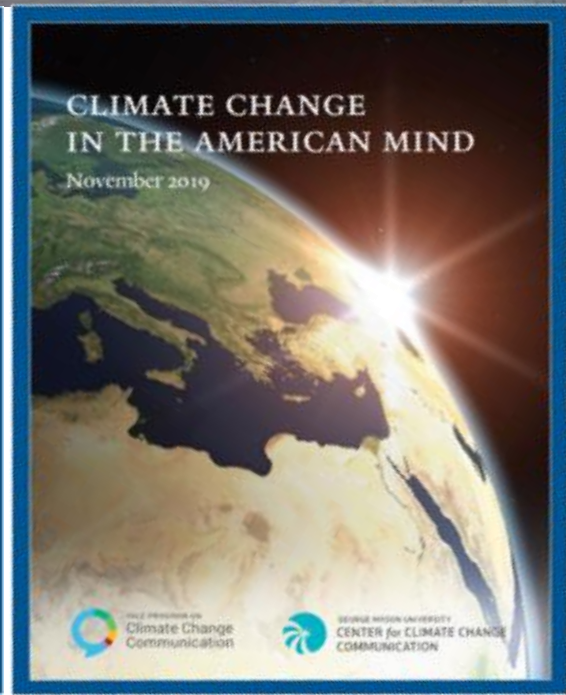
YALE PROGRAM ON
Climate Change
Communication

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

- **Research**: Scientific studies on public beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behavior

- **Partnerships**: Help advocates, businesses, educators, and governments build public and political will for climate action

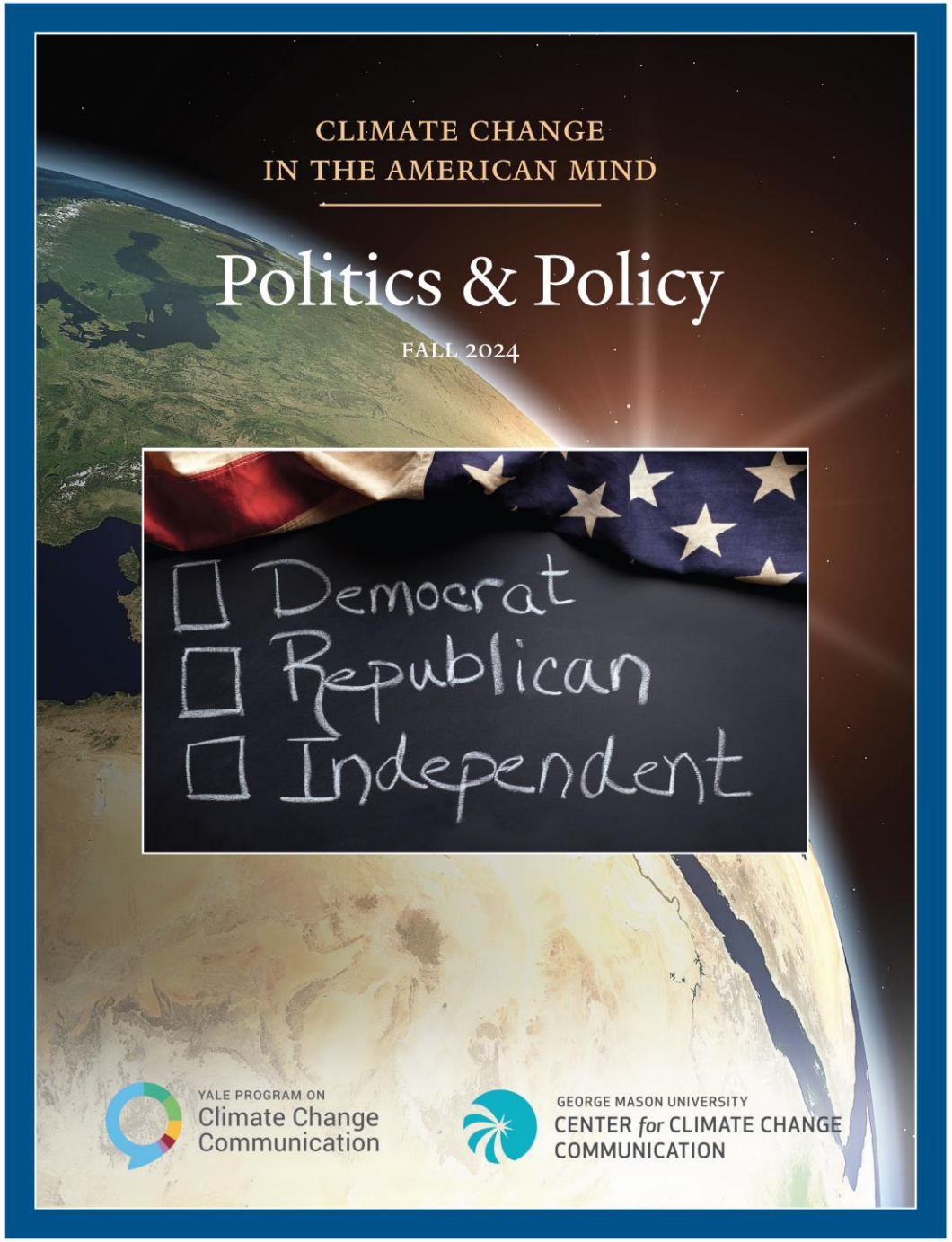




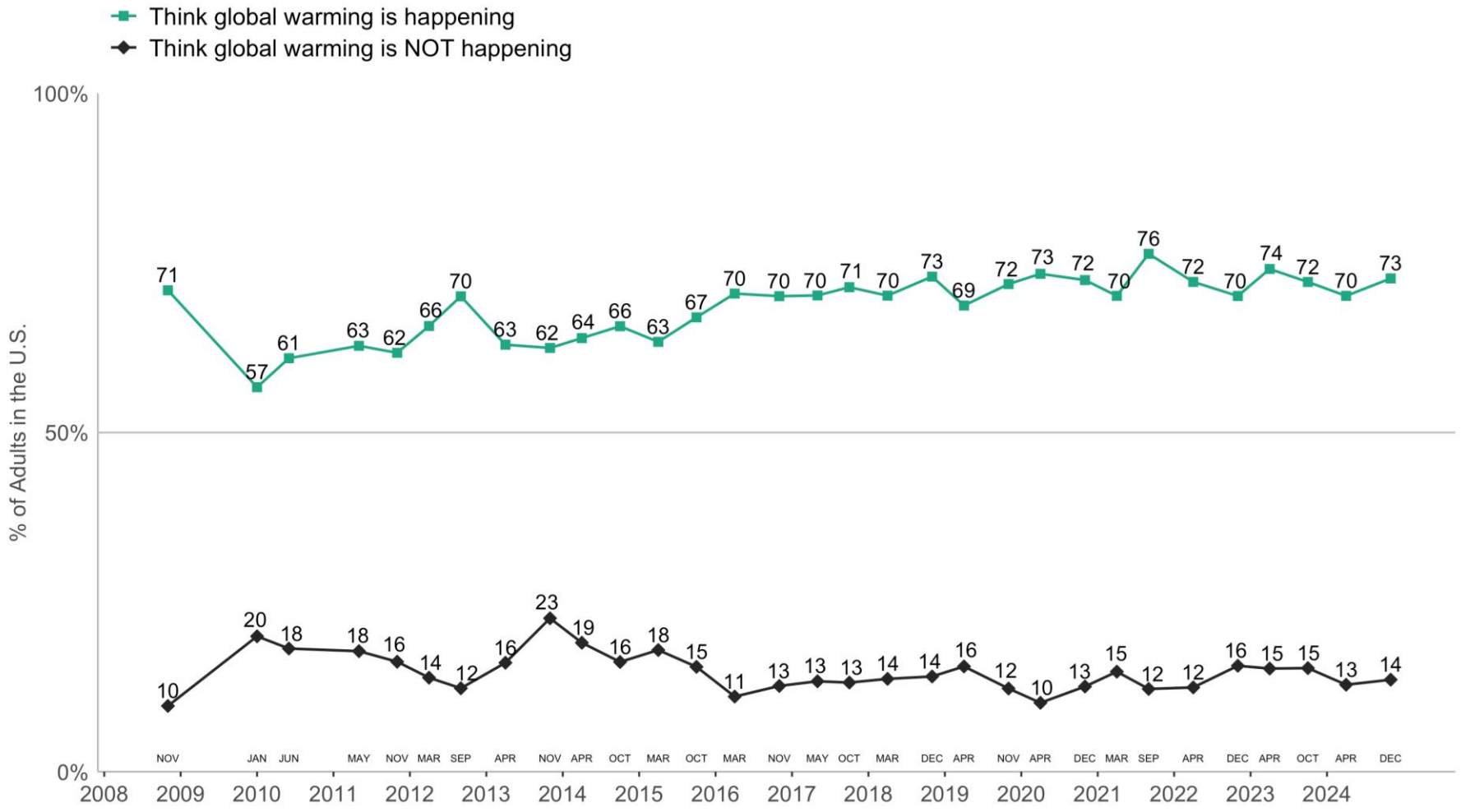
Your audience will not, and may not need to, think about climate change the way you do

vays

Americans on Climate Change



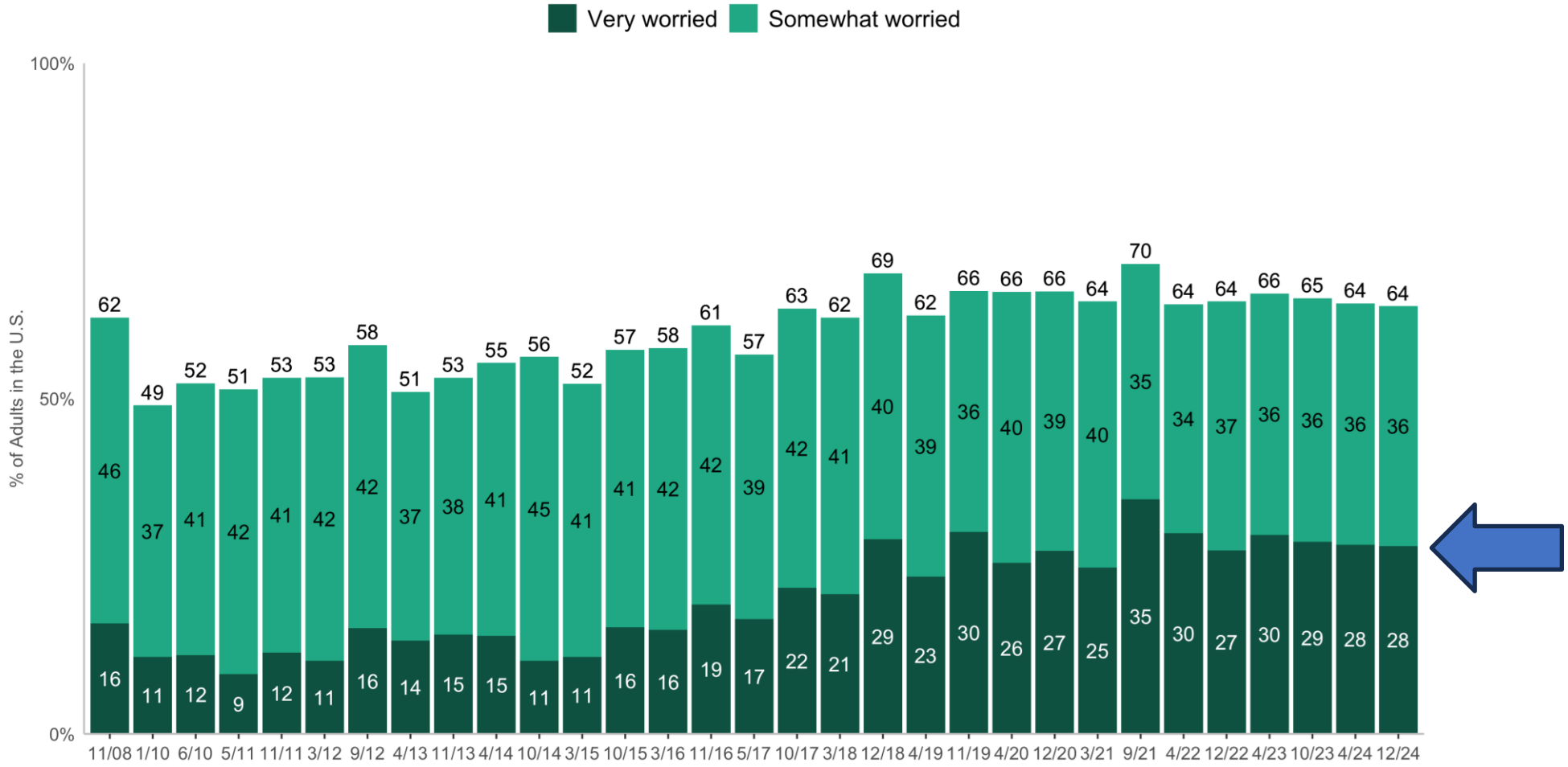
7 out of 10 think global warming is happening



Do you think global warming is happening?

Fall 2024

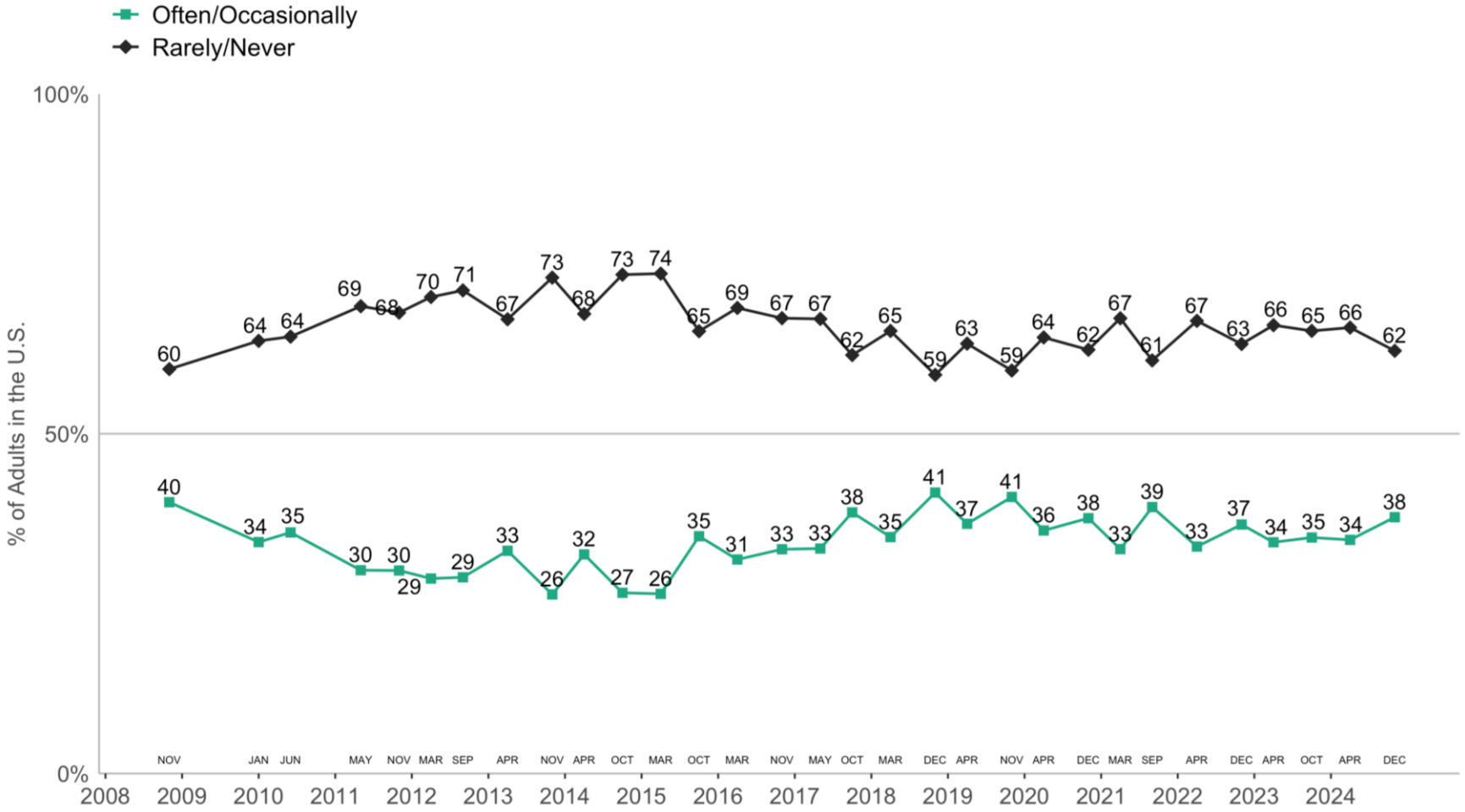
A majority of Americans are worried about global warming



How worried are you about global warming?

Fall 2024

Most Americans “rarely” or “never” discuss global warming with family and friends



How often do you discuss global warming with your family and friends?

Fall 2024

Global Warming's "Six Americas"

Fall 2024
N = 1,013

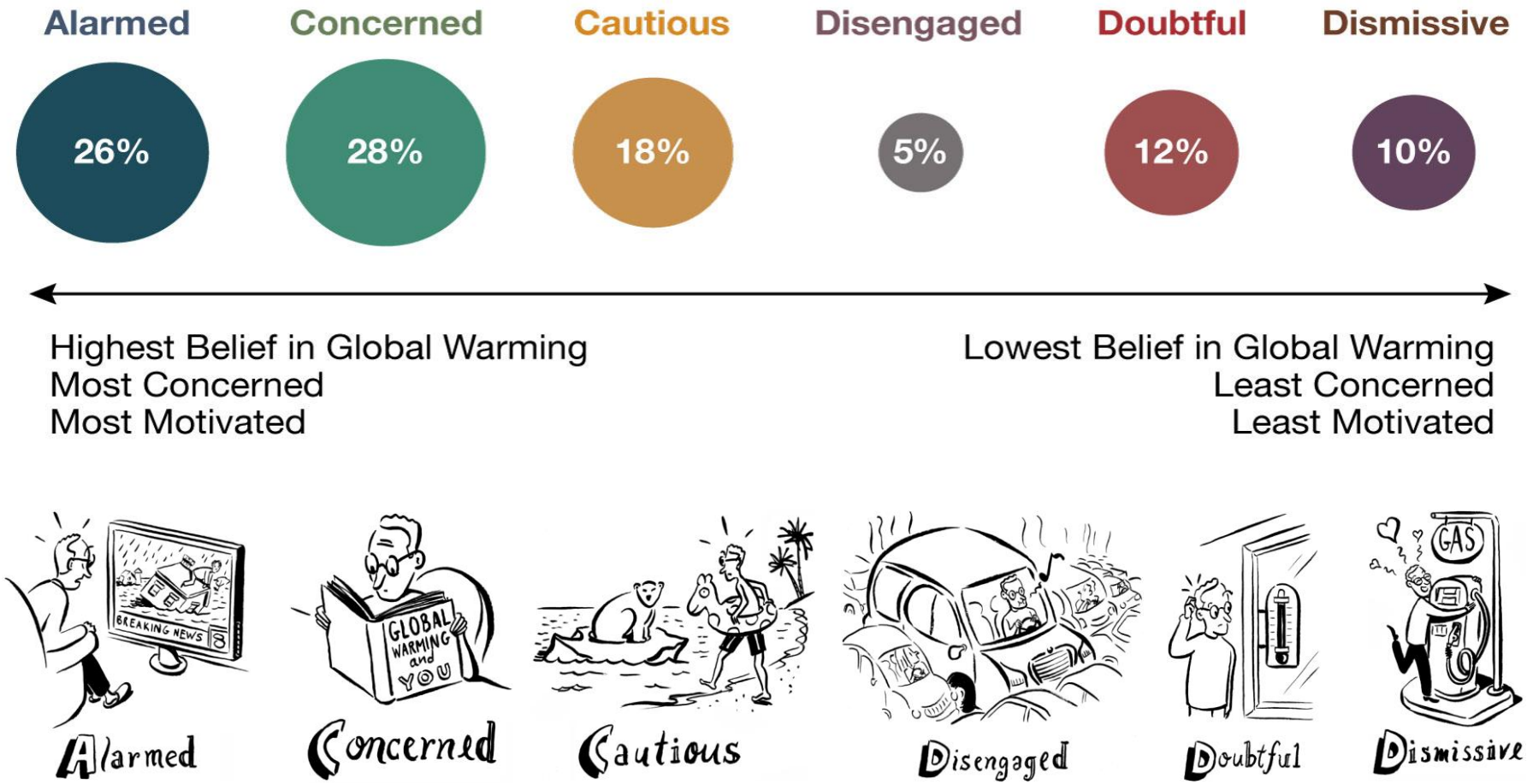


Illustration by Michael Sloan

YALE PROGRAM ON Climate Change Communication

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY CENTER for CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION

Rule: Tell Human Stories

dots.

Photo Credit: Wild Center

Why stories?

Why stories?

Personal Stories Can Shift Climate Change Beliefs and Risk Perceptions: The Mediating Role of Emotion

Abel Gustafson , Matthew T. Ballew , Matthew H. Goldberg , Matthew J. Cutler , Seth A. Rosenthal & Anthony Leiserowitz

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To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2020.1799049

What is a story?

Plot:

Challenge, Choice, Outcome

Setting

Character

Point of View

Theme












Fewer ducks are wintering in the Deep South

Some migratory ducks are finding suitable winter habitat farther north than in the past.

Jeff Harris of Starkville, Mississippi, loves watching birds. In winter, he enjoys seeing ducks on ponds or flooded farm fields.

“And the reason I like ducks so much is ducks are just so beautiful and athletic. It’s funny, when we see a lot of birds in the wintertime, they’re not in their best duds,” he says. “They’re not in their breeding plumage. When we see ducks in the wintertime, they’re in their breeding plumage and they are sexy. So they’re very pretty.”

But Harris has noticed that fewer ducks seem to be spending the winter in his region.

“I know the habitat and where to find them. And I really have to look harder sometimes to find ducks,” he says. “So that’s sort of my general impression is it’s just harder to find them, and there are fewer of them when I do find them.”

His observations align with a larger trend.

Biologists from the National Audubon Society recently analyzed 50 years of data collected during the group’s annual Christmas Bird Count. They found that as the climate has warmed, many North American ducks are wintering farther north than in the past.

So some duck species are becoming less abundant near Harris’s Mississippi home.
“It’s just sort of heartbreaking to lose that value,” he says. “You have to see it to appreciate it, but it’s beautiful and it’s natural, and we just seem to be losing it from right before our very eyes.”

Fewer ducks are wintering in the Deep South

Some migratory ducks are finding suitable winter habitat farther north than in the past.

Identifiable and relatable person. We all know a birder or enjoy seeing ducks.

Title and subtitle clearly state the topic and pique the listener's curiosity

Jeff Harris of Starkville, Mississippi, loves watching birds. In winter, he enjoys seeing ducks on ponds or flooded farm fields. "And the reason I like ducks so much is ducks are just so beautiful and athletic. It's funny, when we see a lot of birds in the wintertime, they're not in their best duds," he says.

Include authentic moments of humor or vulnerability.

"They're not in their breeding plumage. When we see ducks in the wintertime, they're in their breeding plumage and **they are sexy**. So they're very pretty."

Make clear that real lived experience is at stake. Identify the challenge.

But Harris has noticed that **fewer ducks seem to be spending the winter in his region**. "I know the habitat and where to find them. And **I really have to look harder sometimes to find ducks**," he says. "So that's sort of my general impression is it's just harder to find them, and there are fewer of them when I do find them."

Relate the character's lived experience to the broader scientific story.

Fewer ducks are wintering in the Deep South

Some migratory ducks are finding suitable winter habitat farther north than in the past.

His observations align with a larger trend. Biologists from the National Audubon Society recently analyzed 50 years of data collected during the group's annual Christmas Bird Count. They found that as the climate has warmed, many North American ducks are wintering farther north than in the past. So some duck species are becoming less abundant near Harris's Mississippi home. **"It's just sort of heartbreaking to lose that value,"** he says. "You have to see it to appreciate it, but it's beautiful and it's natural, and we just seem to be losing it from right before our very eyes."

Re-engage the listener's emotions

What Makes Yale Climate Connections Stories Work

- Tell **personal stories** that connect with people through shared values and emotions.

- **Connect the dots** for your listeners. Relate lived experiences to the reality of climate change.

- Feature voices from **diverse communities.**

- **Share stories of hope** that emphasize the fact that every listener can make a difference.

Richard Mode

Why is Richard Mode so great?

Human stories outperform a series of facts…

And we all have a climate story.

PERSONAL STORY WORKSHEET

We grew up with the stories like the story of David and Goliath, so we know how stories can be a powerful force for good. We all have a climate story to share. We just might not know it yet.

Goal: This worksheet will walk you through how to create a powerful personal story to share. Your personal story is a powerful tool to connect with others in advocacy and service.

**** If you are unsure where to start, skip to the end to read an example story! ****

Personal Story

Tell a story: about how you've seen or experienced the impacts of climate change in your own life. Paint a picture! Give the details! Describe how this story made YOU FEEL. Why did it feel that way? What is the challenge, choice, and outcome of the story? (4-6 sentences)

Helpful tips

- *Start with what you love. Your family, your community, or a special place.*
- *Focus on local changes you see that impact everyday life (not catastrophic problems or hypotheticals)*
- *Describe how something used to be and how it is now because of climate change.*
- ***PEOPLE! PEOPLE! PEOPLE!** Your story needs to be about how the changes you see directly impact people AND about how those people (you and/or the people you love) **FEEL** about those changes.*

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TYeBWex9IQRW962GbR5VYt7iBOEMjc7w/copy

When you tell stories about climate change, what do you want your audience to feel?

… and what do you want them to do?

Access Personal Story Worksheet

Adapted from Elizabeth Villano, National Park Service

Practice

Keep in touch.

climatecommunication.yale.edu

Joshua Low
joshua.low@yale.edu

TWO ACTIONS and a Prompt

1) Work on your personal climate story.

2) Will you have a conversation with a neighbor, friend, or family member about taking climate action together?

Tip: Make sure to actively listen!

GRANTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

☐ SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES GRANT PROGRAM WEBINAR

Monday, May 19, 2025, 1:00pm-2:00pm
Register: bit.ly/2025SCGPWebinar

Application Deadline: ***Monday, June 30, 2025***

☐ HOW TO START A MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY SOLAR AUTOMATIC ENROLLMENT PROGRAM WEBINAR

Wednesday, May 21, 2025, 1:00pm-2:30pm
Register: bit.ly/4jgkUau

☐ NORTH JERSEY'S TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AUTHORITY'S PROGRAMS FOR MUNICIPALITIES WEBINAR

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 11:00am-12:00pm
Register: bit.ly/4m7QjOh

☐ TRI-COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 7:00pm-8:00pm
Register: bit.ly/Tri-CountySustainability

☐ BERGEN COUNTY SUSTAINABILITY HUB MEETING

Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 7:00pm-8:00pm
Allendale Community Center, 210 W Crescent Ave, Allendale, NJ

☐ TREES FOR SCHOOLS: TREE-PLANTING GRANTS

Learn More & Apply: bit.ly/TreesforSchools
Application Deadline: ***Tuesday, May 13, 2025***

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER FOR AN UPCOMING EVENT VISIT:

Municipalities:
bit.ly/SJMunicipalEvents

Schools:
bit.ly/SJSchoolsEvents

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