# Tackling Wicked Problems from Campus: The Critical Role of University Centers, Faculty, and Students as Key Local Resources for Deliberative Engagement

*Martín Carcasson, Ph.D.*
*Director of the Center for Public Deliberation*
*Professor, Department of Communication Studies*



CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

*Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public communication and community problem solving*

*EMAIL: mcarcas@colostate.edu*
*Twitter: @mcarcasson          CPD website: cpd.colostate.edu*

# CPD Projects, 2006-2018

- Civic mission of schools
- Grade configuration of Poudre School District schools
- Statewide dropout rate
- Colorado Health Care Reform
- Student housing
- Improving higher education
- Childhood obesity
- Bicycle safety
- Diversity Dialogues at CSU Diversity Conference
- STEM education in K-12
- Arts Engagement Summit
- UniverCity Connections (CSU/Old Town collaborative project)
- School budgeting issues/school closures
- Medical Marijuana
- Regional visioning process
- Water and growth issues

- Poverty in Larimer County
- PSD Student Think Tank facilitator group
- K-12 school improvement
- Improving higher education through student-faculty reciprocity
- Politics of food
- Issues surrounding aging
- Early childhood education
- On campus stadium proposal
- Senior transportation
- Campus smoking
- School safety
- Bullying
- Mental health
- Nature in the City
- Larimer County Landfill/Wasteshed
- Diversity and Inclusion in Fort Collins
- CSU Innovation and Economic Prosperity
- CSU parking and affordable housing

# Overview: Three Key Arguments

# #1 – The Basic Reality

Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens

# #2 – The Bad News

Human nature and many of our primary institutions and processes are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems

# #3 – The Hopeful News

Once we realize #1 and #2, we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.

# Overview: Three Key Arguments

## #1 – The Basic Reality

**Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens**

## #2 – The Bad News

Human nature and many of our primary institutions and processes are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems
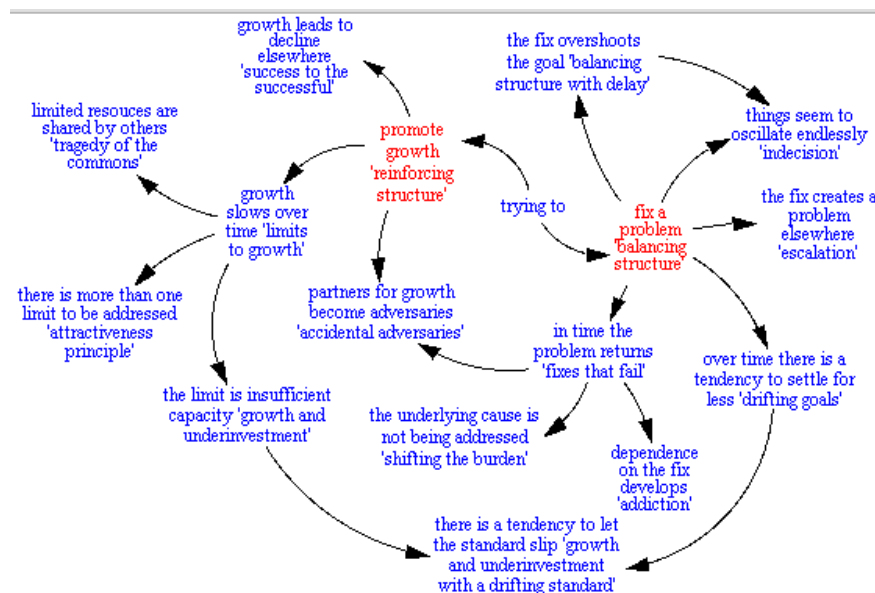
## #3 – The Hopeful News

Once we realize #1 and #2, we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.

*Wicked problems* inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved** by science.

# FOOD AS A WICKED PROBLEM

## WE WANT OUR FOOD TO BE:

Inexpensive

Fresh

Nutritious

Safe

Long lasting

Delicious

Convenient
(Accessible, Easy to prepare)

Ethically grown
(labor/animal welfare)

Our choice

Supportive of a
local economy

Supportive of a
agriculture
community

Grown and
delivered in a
environmentally
responsible manner

Supportive of
efforts to reduce
hunger locally and
globally

# HEALTH CARE AS A WICKED PROBLEM

**High Quality**

**Accessible**

**Low cost**

# Competing Values in Downtown Fort Collins

- Aesthetics/Beauty
- Compassion
- Diversity/Inclusivity
- Economic health/vitality
- Effective use of public resources
- Equality
- Excitement/fun
- Family

- Individual freedom
- Individual responsibility
- Individual rights
- Justice/Fairness
- Public health/ environment
- Respect for law
- Respect for others
- Safety

# Parking at CSU as a Wicked Problem
## Some things we care about:

Low cost    Fairness    Safety    Work productivity    Flexibility

Aesthetics/ Campus beauty    Convenience/ Low time cost    Low community impact/ Good neighbors

Employee morale    Environment    Consistency/Ease of use

Works for staff    Works for faculty    Works for visitors

Works for students    Works for working parents    Works for commuters

# Capitalism or Sustainability as a Wicked Problem

- The "Triple Bottom Line" of
  - Profit (economics, also tied to jobs and taxes)
  - People (social justice, equality, fairness)
  - Planet (environment)

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish **Justice**, insure **domestic Tranquility**, provide for the **common defense**, promote the **general Welfare**, and secure the Blessings of **Liberty** to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

# Key American Values

| Preamble | Current Phrasing |
| --- | --- |
| Justice | Justice |
| Domestic Tranquility/ Common defense | Security/Safety |
| General Welfare | Equality |
| Liberty to ourselves | Freedom (for us) |
| Liberty for our posterity | Freedom (for future generations) |

# Which is most important to you?
## (choose only one)

1. Justice
2. Security/safety
3. Equality
4. Freedom (for us)
5. Freedom (future generations)
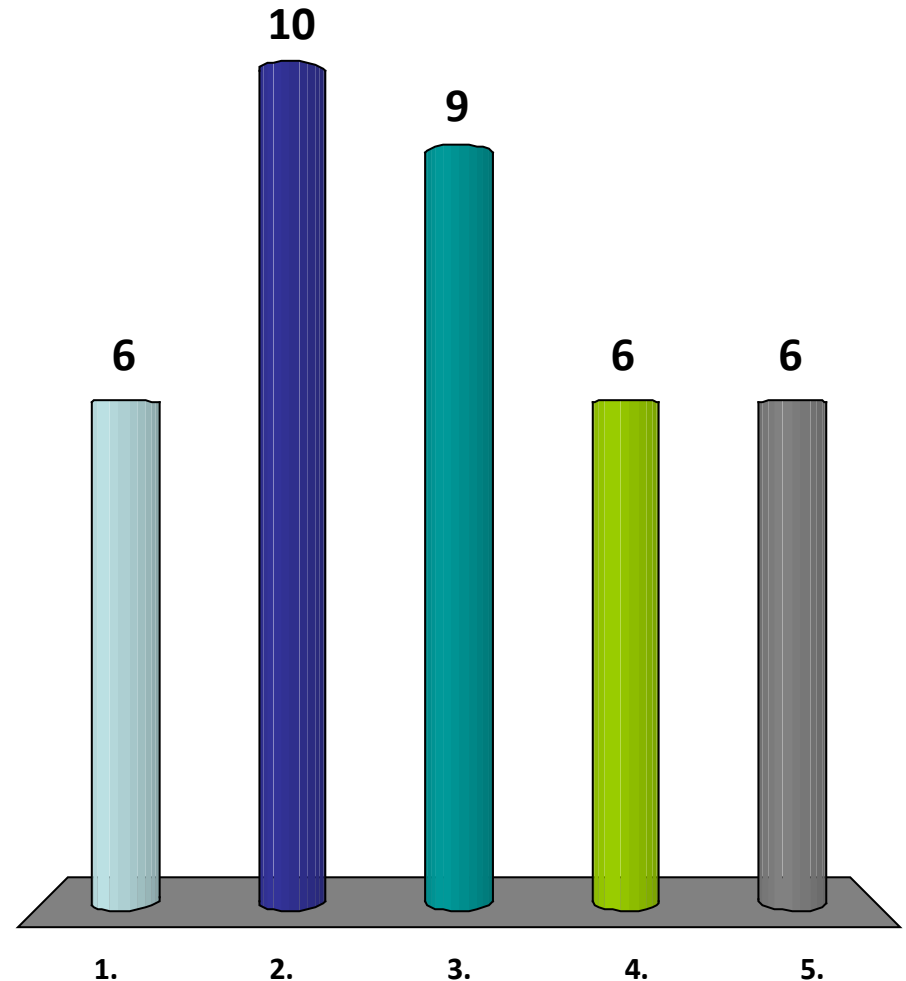
**Results from Denver Leadership Foundation Workshop, Summer 2017**

# Which is <u>least</u> important to you?
## (choose only one)

1. Justice

2. Security/safety

3. Equality

4. Freedom (for us)

5. Freedom (future generations)

**Results from Denver Leadership Foundation Workshop, Summer 2017**
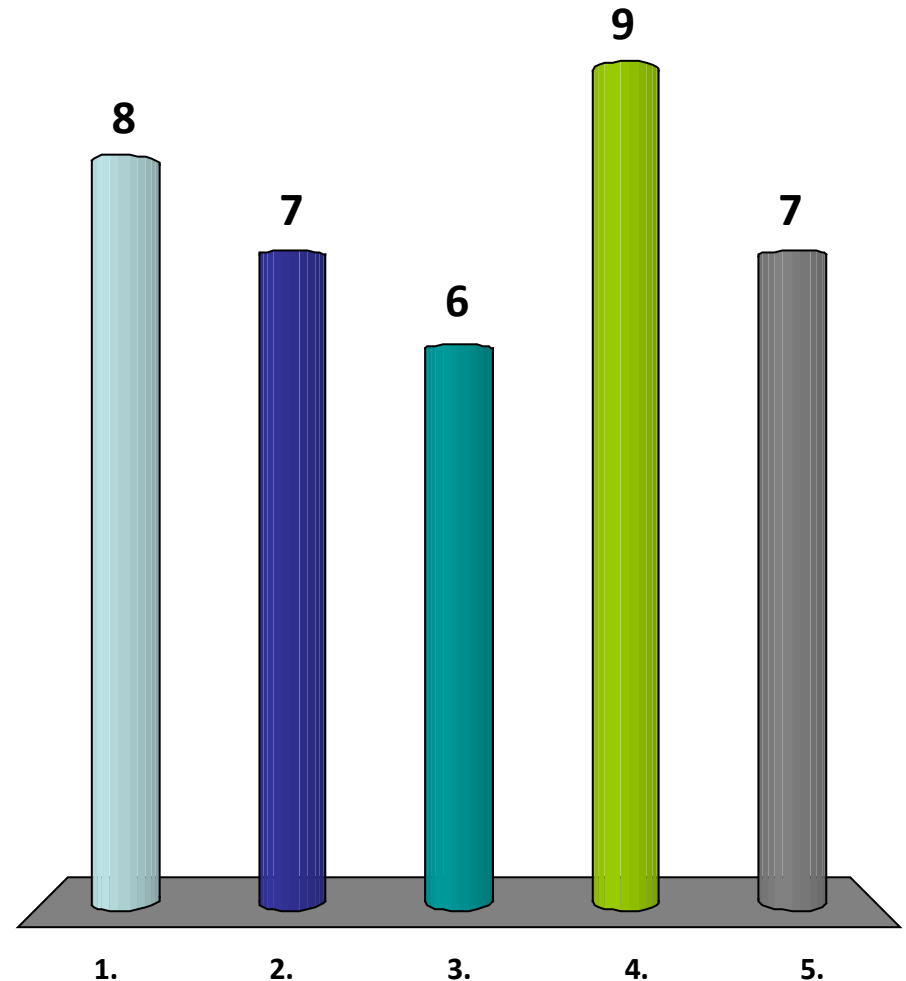


Bar chart: 1. = 8, 2. = 7, 3. = 6, 4. = 9, 5. = 7

# Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom and Equality (and between equality and equity)
- Our Freedom and Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom and Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

## Some others

- Short term and long term
- Individual rights and community good
- Unity and diversity
- Cooperation and competition
- Structure and agency (or opportunity and individual responsibility)
- Flexibility/Innovation and Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)

*Wicked problems* inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved** by science.

They call for ongoing high quality **communication**, **creativity**, and broad **collaborative action** to manage well.
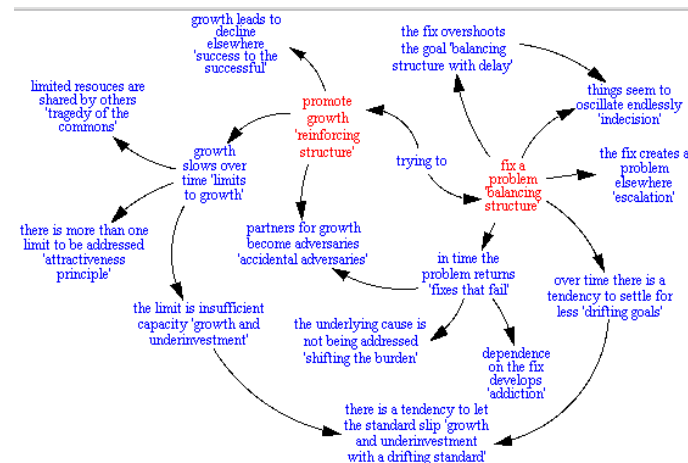
# Overview: Three Key Arguments

## #1 – The Basic Reality

Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens

## **#2 – The Bad News**

**Human nature and many of our primary institutions are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems**

## #3 – The Hopeful News

Once we realize #1 and #2, we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.
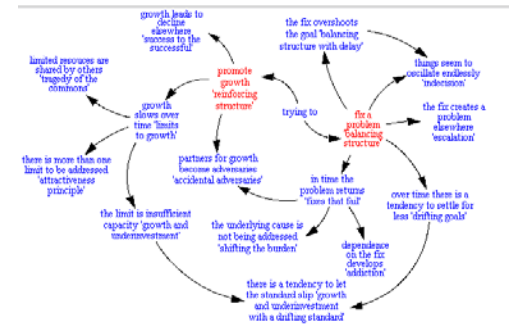
# What Are We Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

    We crave certainty and consistency

    We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

    We are "groupish" (prefer to gather with like-minded)

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?
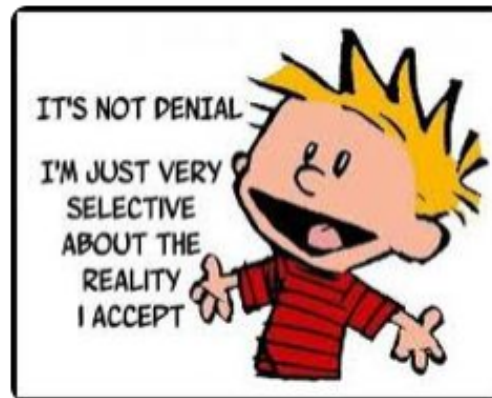
The Problematic

      We crave certainty and consistency

      We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

      We are "groupish" (prefer to gather with like-minded)

      We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

## Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to

*selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles*

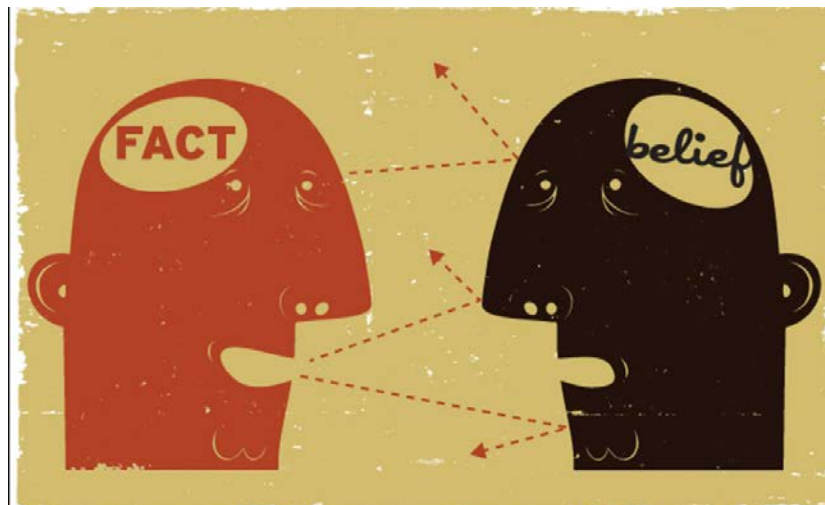# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

| Stages of motivated reasoning | |
|---|---|
| What and who we expose ourselves to | *selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles* |
| How we interpret new evidence | *confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance* |

# How we interpret new evidence

*"**when we want to believe something**, we ask ourselves, '**Can I believe it?'** Then…we search for supporting evidence, and if we find even a single piece of pseudo-evidence, we can stop thinking.… In contrast, **when we don't want to believe something**, we ask ourselves, '**Must I believe it?'** Then we search for contrary evidence, and if we find a single reason to doubt the claim, we can dismiss it"*

- *Jonathan Haidt and Tom Gilovich*

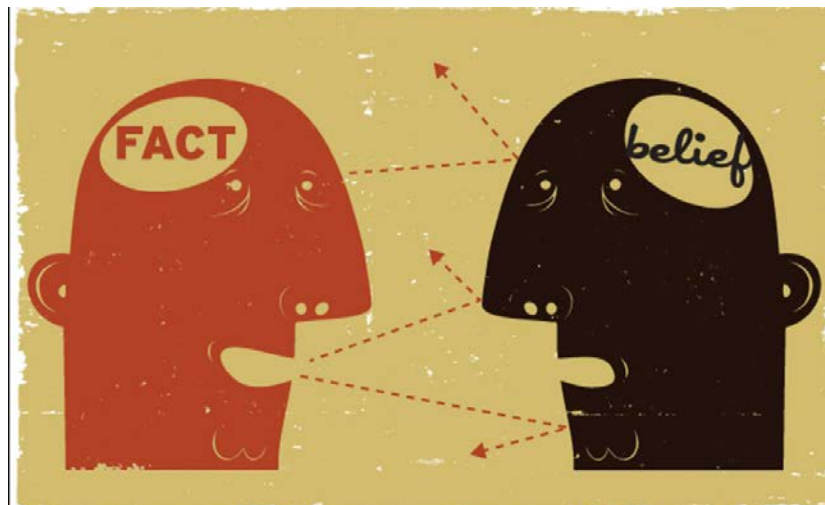# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

| Stages of motivated reasoning | |
|---|---|
| What and who we expose ourselves to | *selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles* |
| How we interpret new evidence | *confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance* |

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

| Stages of motivated reasoning | |
|---|---|
| What and who we expose ourselves to | *selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles* |
| How we interpret new evidence | *confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance* |
| How we make attributions and tell stories | *egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias* |

Bush: 'Too often we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions'

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

| Stages of motivated reasoning | |
|---|---|
| What and who we expose ourselves to | *selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles* |
| How we interpret new evidence | *confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance* |
| How we make attributions and tell stories | *egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias* |
| How we make decisions | *heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof* |

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

| Stages of motivated reasoning | |
|---|---|
| What and who we expose ourselves to | *selective exposure / echo chambers/ filter or media bubbles* |
| How we interpret new evidence | *confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance* |
| How we make attributions and tell stories | *egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias* |
| How we make decisions | *heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof* |
| What we remember | *availability bias* |

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science
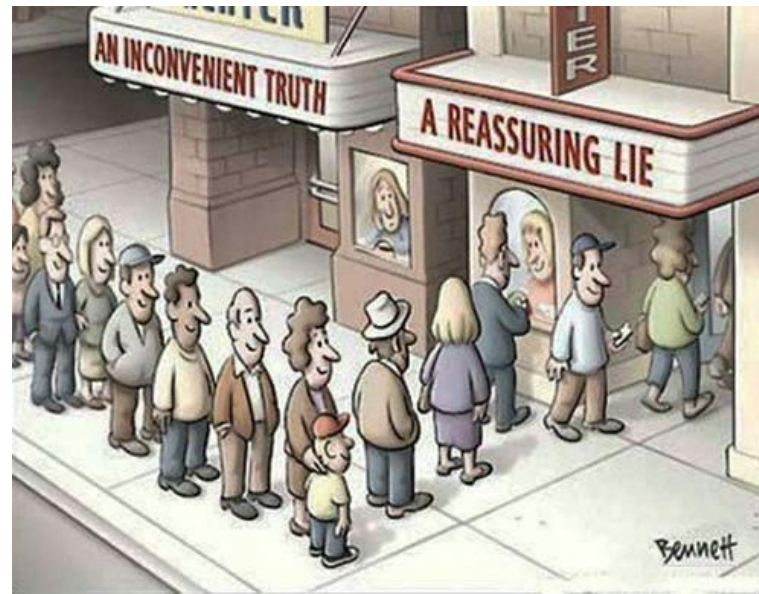
The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

We strongly prefer to gather with the like minded

We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

We avoid values dilemmas, tensions, and tough choices

# Overview: Three Key Arguments

## #1 – The Basic Reality

Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens

## #2 – The Bad News

**Human nature and many of our primary institutions are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems**

## #3 – The Hopeful News

Once we realize #1 and #2, we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.
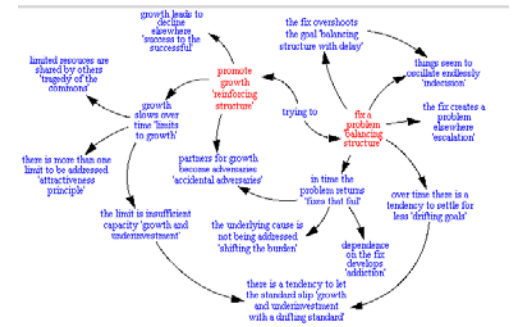
# The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization
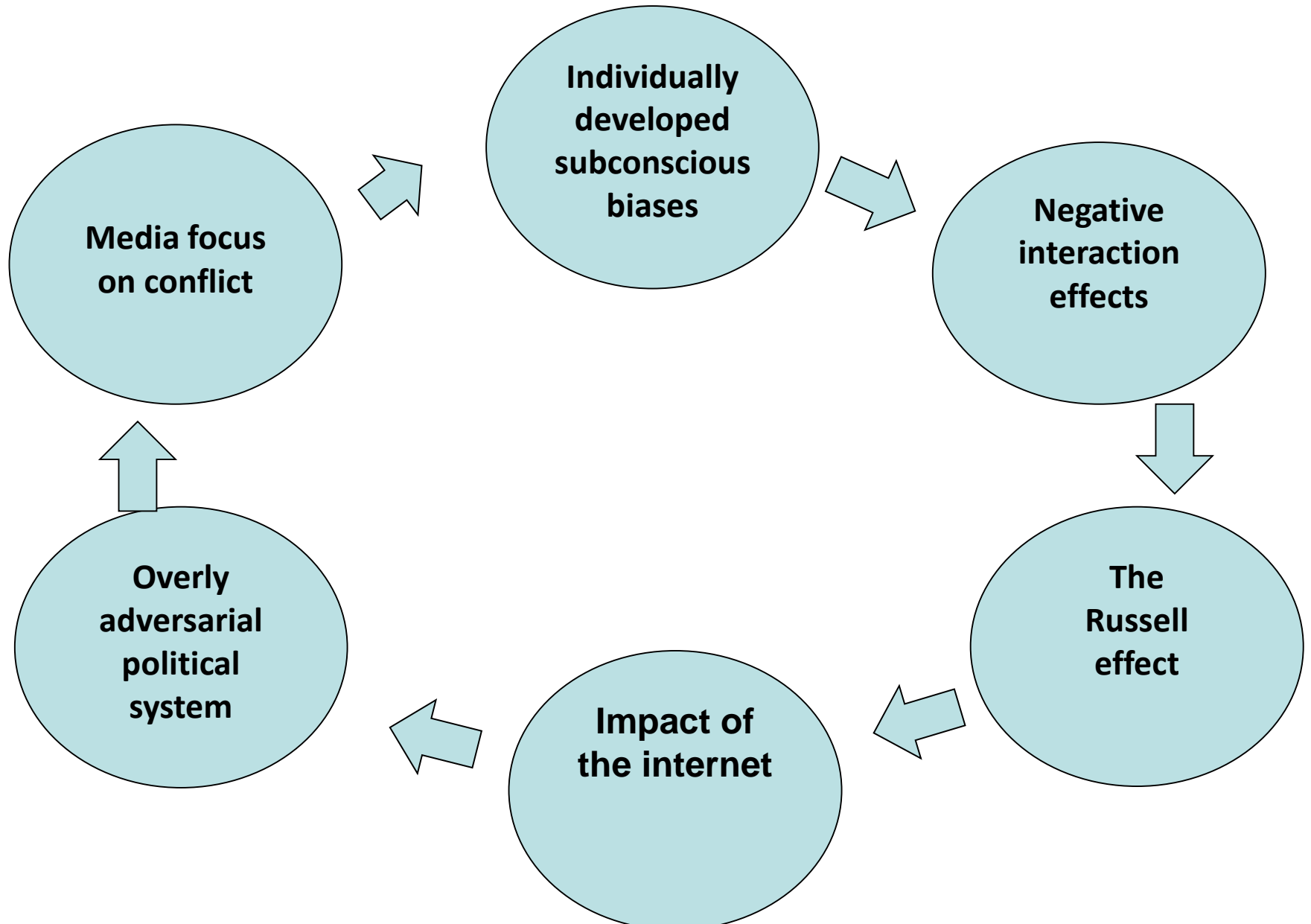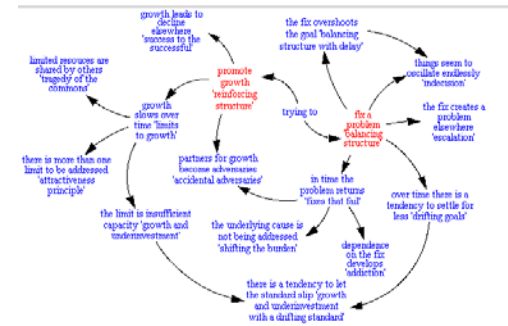
# Why Experts Can't Save Us
## *(though they can certainly help when used well)*

- Good data is undermined in a polarized environment

- Facts don't change minds or behavior

- Experts by definition are focused on a specific, narrow aspect of the problem (i.e. they struggle with wicked problems).

- Experts often focus on being "value free" (they tell us what *is* or what *could* be, not what *should* be)

- Expert perspectives can overemphasize what can be measured and underemphasize what cannot

- Expert dominated processes shut out the public

# Overview: Three Key Arguments

# #1 – The Basic Reality

Most of the key problems we face are best understood through a wicked problems lens

# #2 – The Bad News

Human nature and many of our primary institutions and processes are woefully ill-suited to address wicked problems

# **#3 – The Hopeful News**

Once we realize #1 and #2,  we can build capacity for the kinds of conversations, processes, and institutions that cultivate the wisdom so critical to addressing wicked problems. Colleges & universities have a critical role to play at the local level.

# Key Steps for
# Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset

**Short term**

↕

**Long term**

# The Wicked Problems Mindset

- Presume wicked problems, not wicked people

- Become more comfortable with uncertainty

- Focus on elevating the conversation not just winning the argument

- Put your energy toward identifying, engaging, and negotiating inherent tensions

- Work toward creating a learning community

# Key Steps for
# Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset
- **Better processes  - tap into different aspects of human nature**

**Short term**

**Long term**

# What We Are Learning from Brain Science
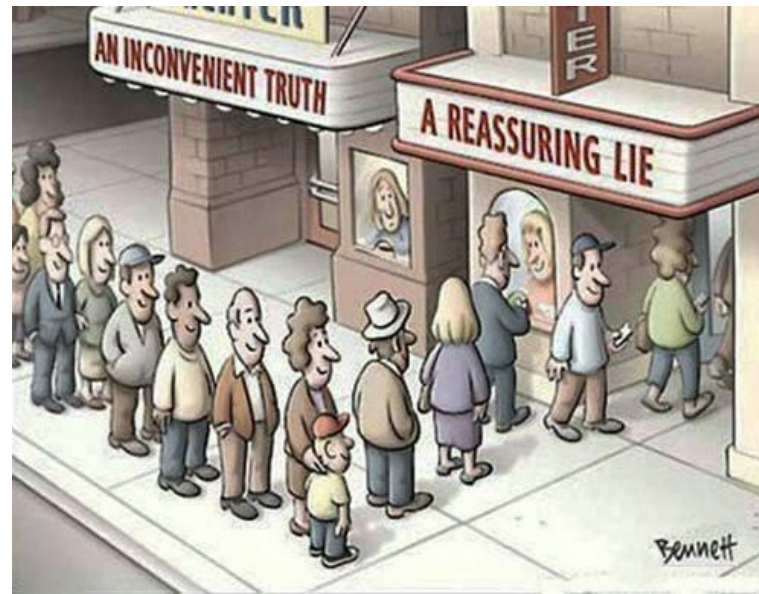
The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

We strongly prefer to gather with the like minded

We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

We avoid values dilemmas, tensions, and tough choices

# What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community

We are inherently empathetic

We are inherently pragmatic and creative

We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits

# What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases and tackle wicked problems well is **genuine conversation with people they respect**.

# Key Steps for
# Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset

- Better processes  - tap into different aspects of human nature

- **Build local capacity for deliberative engagement**

**Short term**

↑
|
|
|
|
|
↓

**Long term**

# What is Deliberative Engagement?

Deliberative democracy

Community problem-solving

Collaborative problem-solving

Participatory decision-making

Slow democracy

Strong democracy

Multi-stakeholder dispute resolution

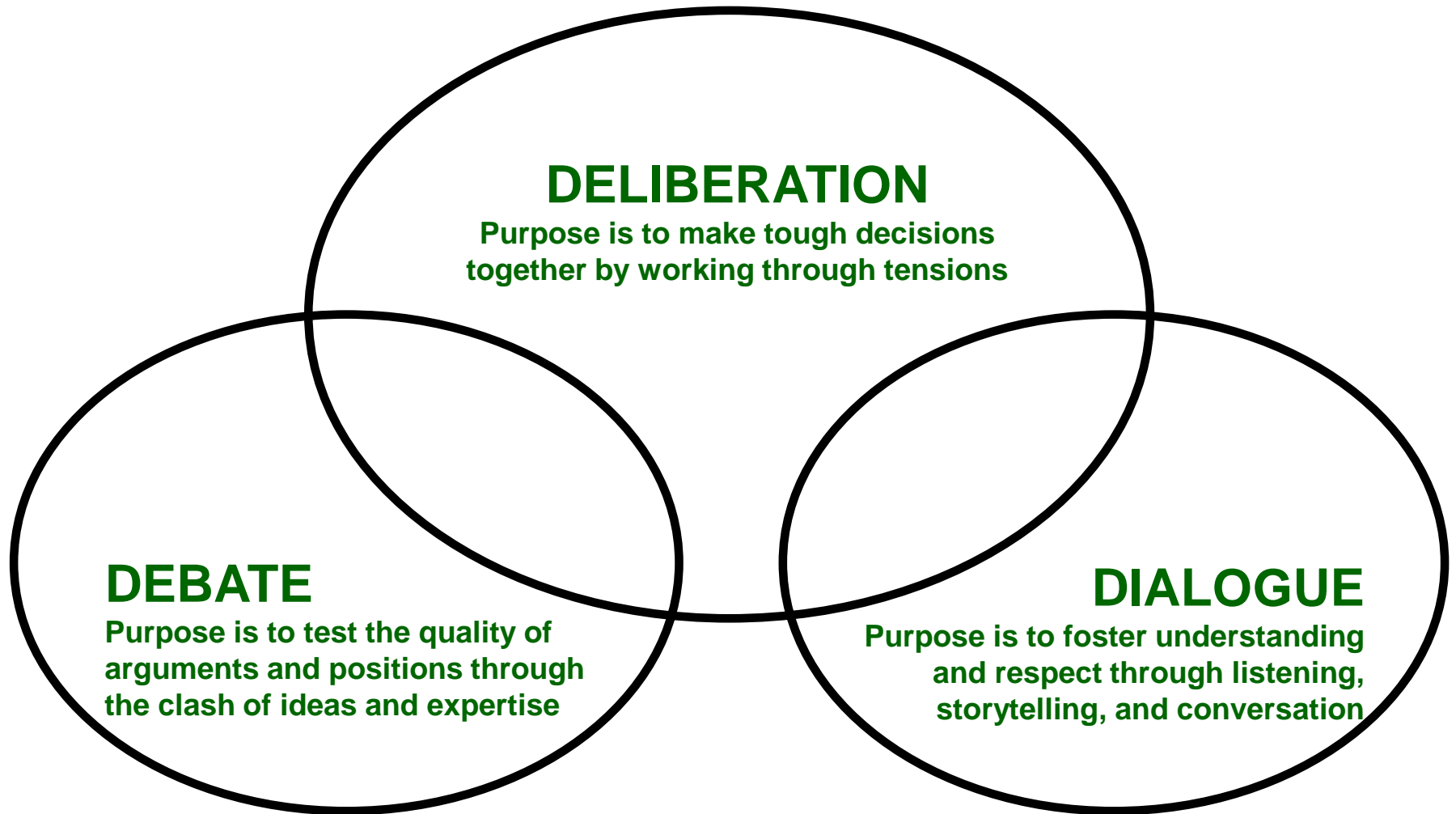Public participation

Democratic governance

Collaborative governance

Organic or community politics

Consensus building or seeking processes

Organic politics

# Forms of Interactive Communication

**DELIBERATION**
**Purpose is to make tough decisions together by working through tensions**

**DEBATE**
**Purpose is to test the quality of arguments and positions through the clash of ideas and expertise**

**DIALOGUE**
**Purpose is to foster understanding and respect through listening, storytelling, and conversation**

# Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Overall deliberative framing
  - Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors, starting discussion "upstream" (before polarization)
- Discussion guides/backgrounder
  - Base of information, something to react to, framed for deliberation, not persuasion
- Small, diverse, representative groups
- Processes designed for interaction and learning
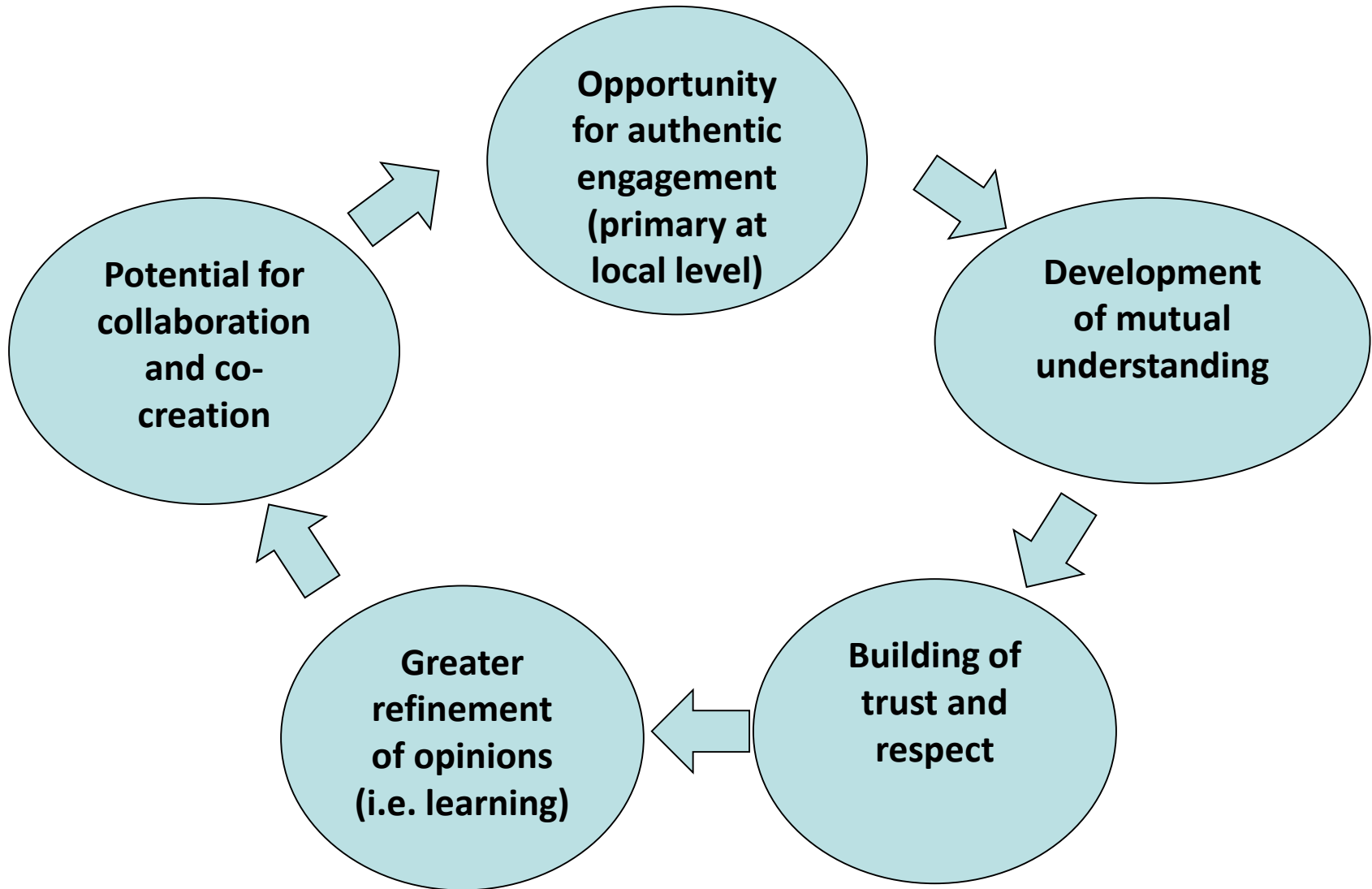- Deliberative facilitators

# The Four Key Shifts
## of Deliberative Engagement

- From wicked people → to wicked problems

- From adversaries → to collaborators

- From inciting the worst of human nature → to bringing out the best of human nature

- From facts as cherry picked ammunition or "fake news" → to facts as tools for addressing problems together
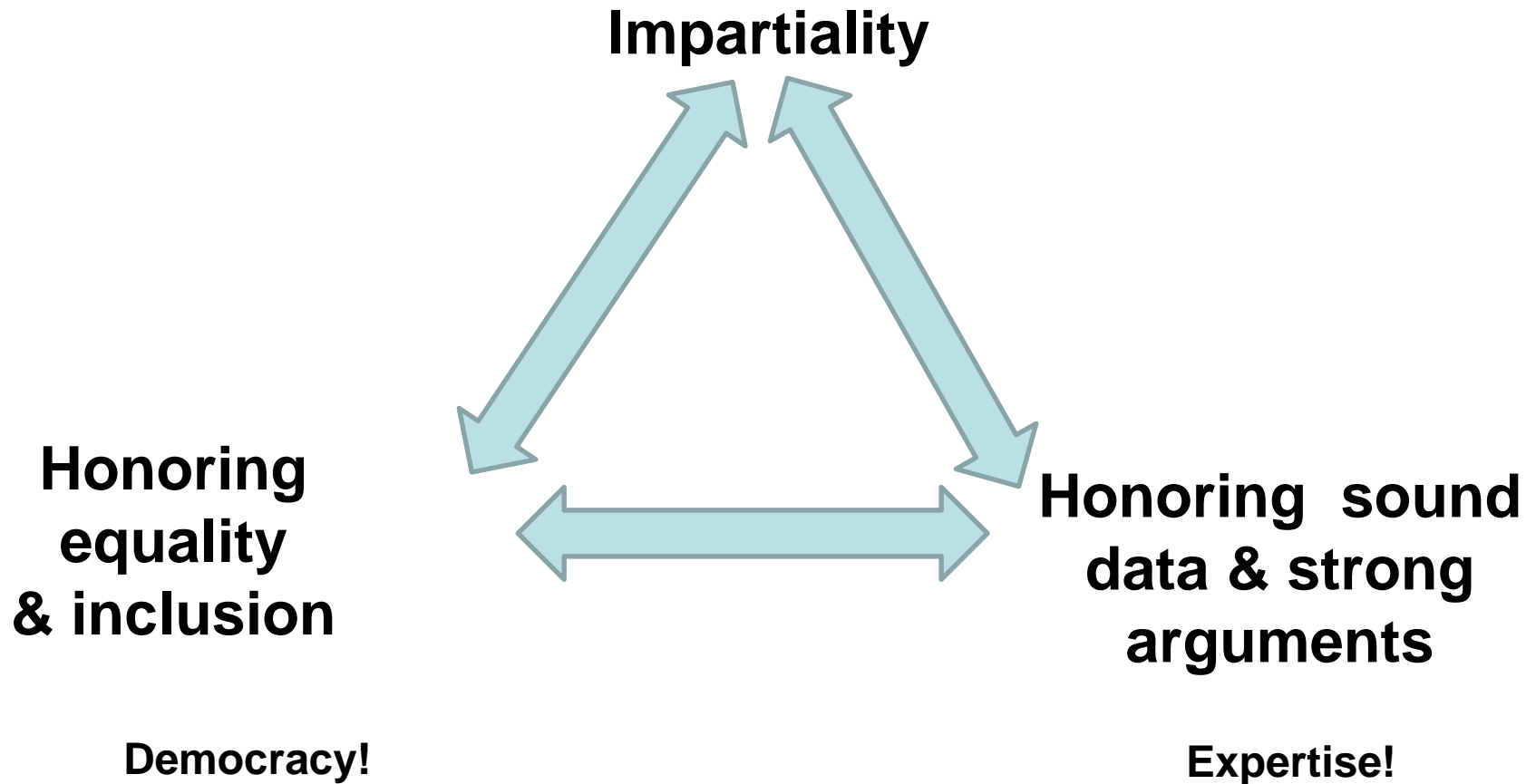
# The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization
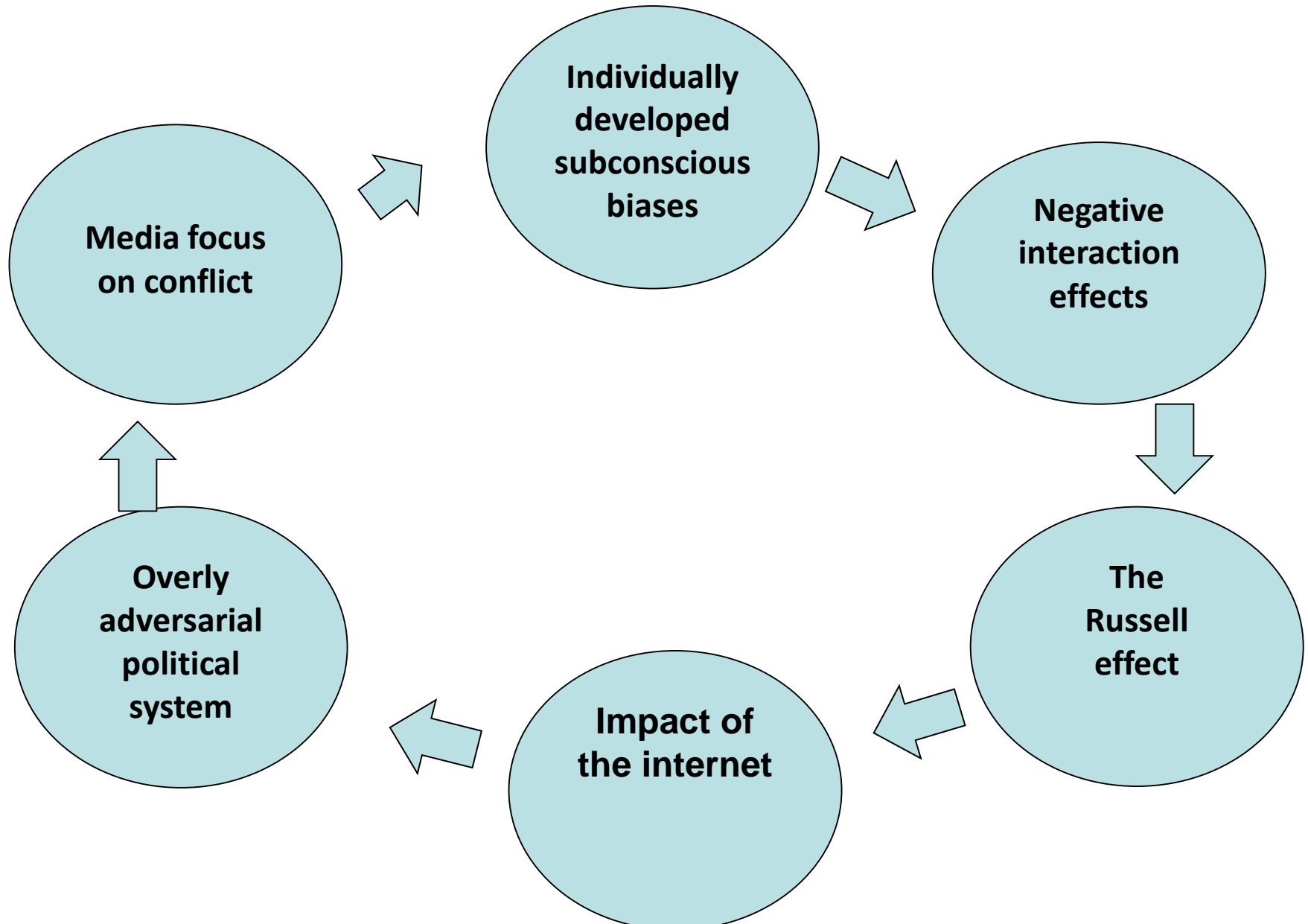
# The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement

# Passionate impartiality
## The recognition of the tensions between:

**Impartiality**

**Honoring equality & inclusion**

**Honoring sound data & strong arguments**

Democracy!

Expertise!

# Key Steps for Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset

- Better processes  - tap into different aspects of human nature

- Build local capacity for deliberative engagement

- **Reinvigorate or create new key bridging institutions**

**Short term**

**Long term**

# Institutional Troubles
## Bridging v. Polarizing Institutions

- Political parties/elections
- Advocacy groups
- Internet / Social media

**More polarizing**

- Media/Press
- Experts
- School districts
- Universities

**More bridging**

- Community organizations like Leadership Foundations, League of Women Voters, United Way, Community Foundations, Leadership programs, Boards and Commissions

# Key Steps for
# Local Communities

- Adopting a wicked problems mindset

- Better processes  - tap into different aspects of human nature

- Build local capacity for deliberative engagement
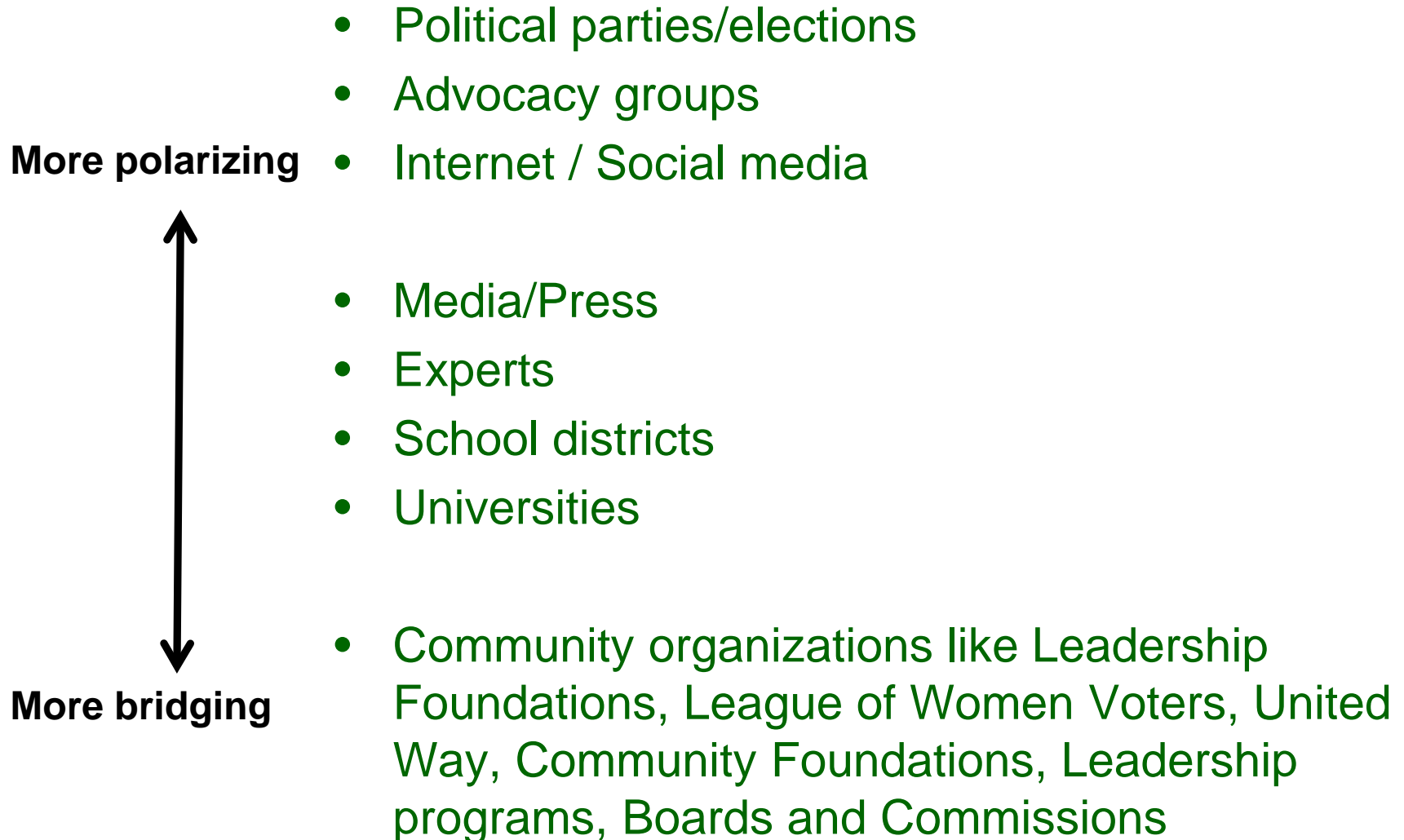
- Reinvigorate or create new key bridging institutions

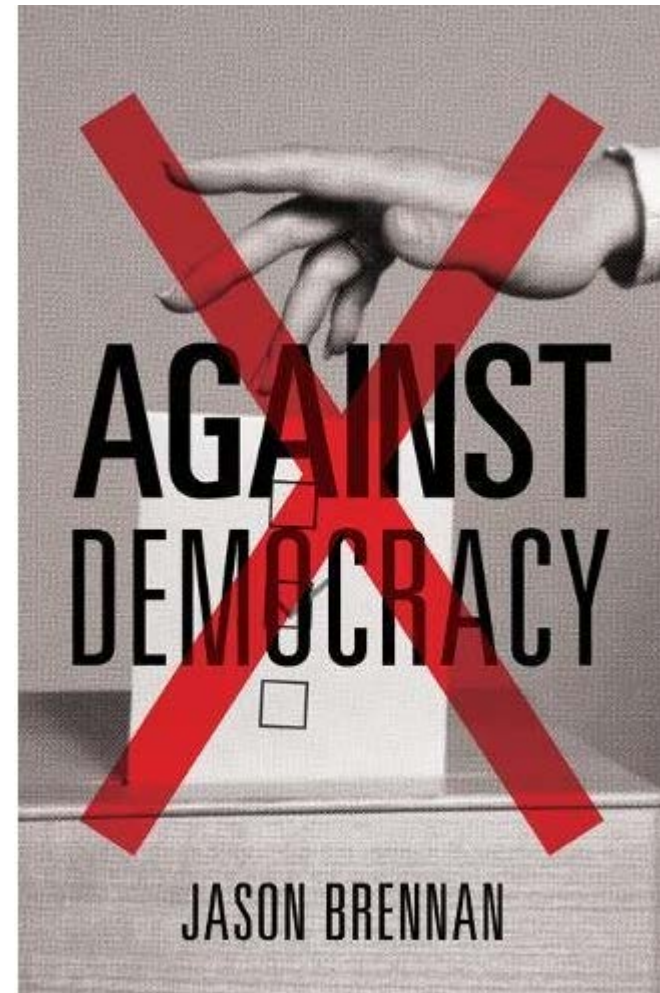- **Cultivate citizens as wise collaborators**

**Short term**

**Long term**

# Brennan's *Against Democracy*

Three types of citizens:

- Hobbits

- Hooligans

- Wise collaborators

# When Universities Focus on Local Deliberative Capacity:
# The "Win-Win-Win-Win"

- Students

- Faculty

- University

- Community

Carcasson, "The Critical Role of Local Centers and Institutes in Advancing Deliberative Democracy," 2014

# Imagining the Deliberative University

- Adopts the wicked problem mindset

- Passionately impartial and locally engaged

- Inherently works against key negative narratives undermining public support for higher education:

  - vs. Ivory towers and narrow silos

  - vs. Glorified job training/student as customer/benefits as primarily individual

  - vs. Liberal/Progressive capture

  - vs. Corporate capture