Democratic Quantity, Democratic Quality: *Vermont's Town Meeting Values*

Waterbury Town Meeting Study Committee

Susan Clark • January 21, 2026

Rediscovering
community,
bringing
decision making
back home
slow
democra
SUSAN CLARK and WODEN TEA
Foreword by FRANK
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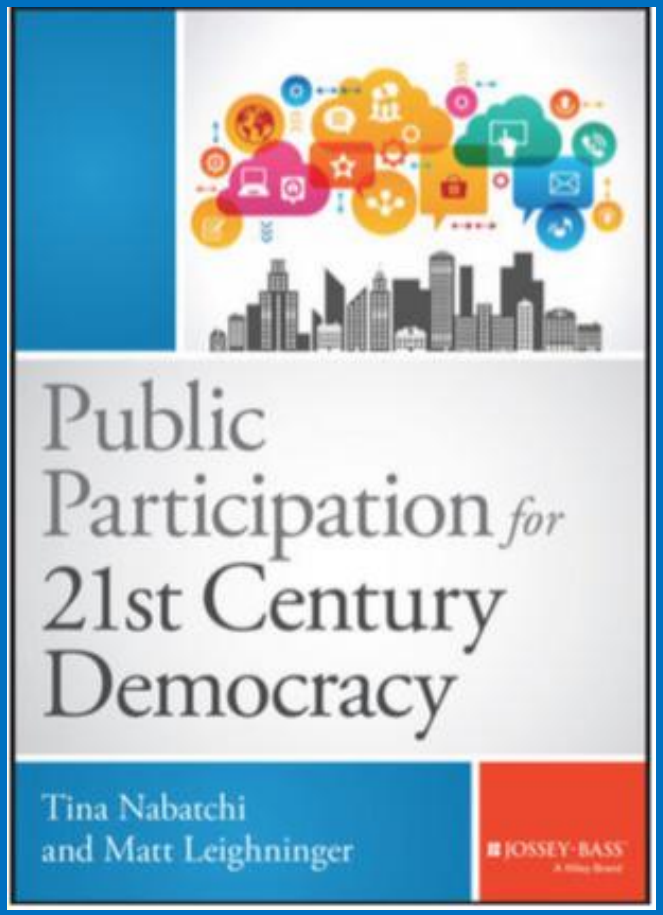
Frank Bryan
NIVERSARY UPDATE
ta, laws, & trends
CCS PRESENTS AN APPLIED CARTOONING PROJECT
VT
FREEDOM AND UNITY
TOWN MEETING
A Graphic Guide to Civics and Democracy in Vermont

“Conventional” Participation

e.g. public hearings
with no decision-making power



“Conventional” Participation

- **“…can be harmful to citizens”**
- Increases sense of powerlessness
- Decreases political interest
- Decreases trust in government
- Decreases public spiritedness
- Damages perceptions of gov’t legitimacy and credibility
- Increases polarization
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- **“…can harm administrators and public officials”**
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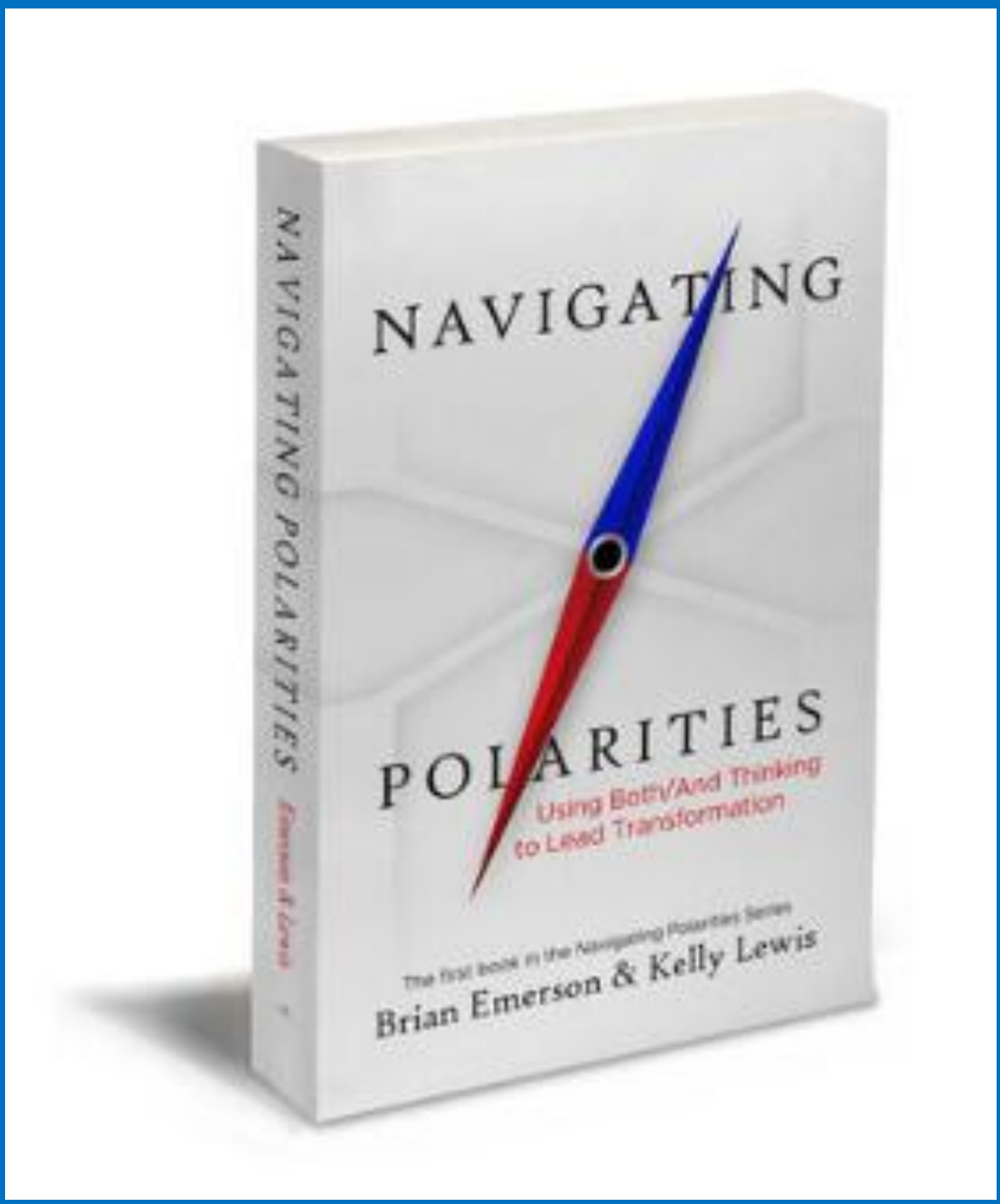
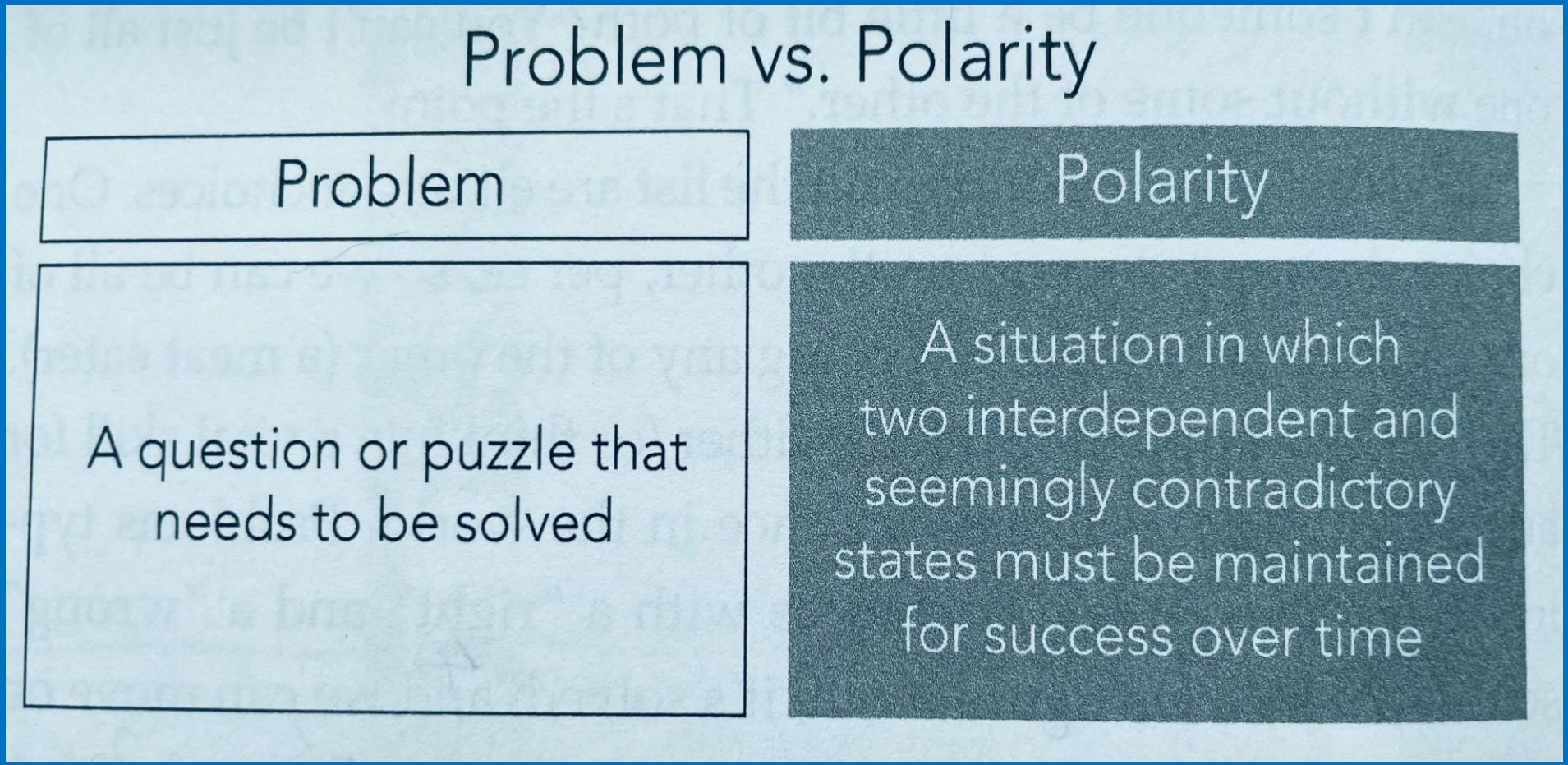
- **“…can harm policy and governance”**

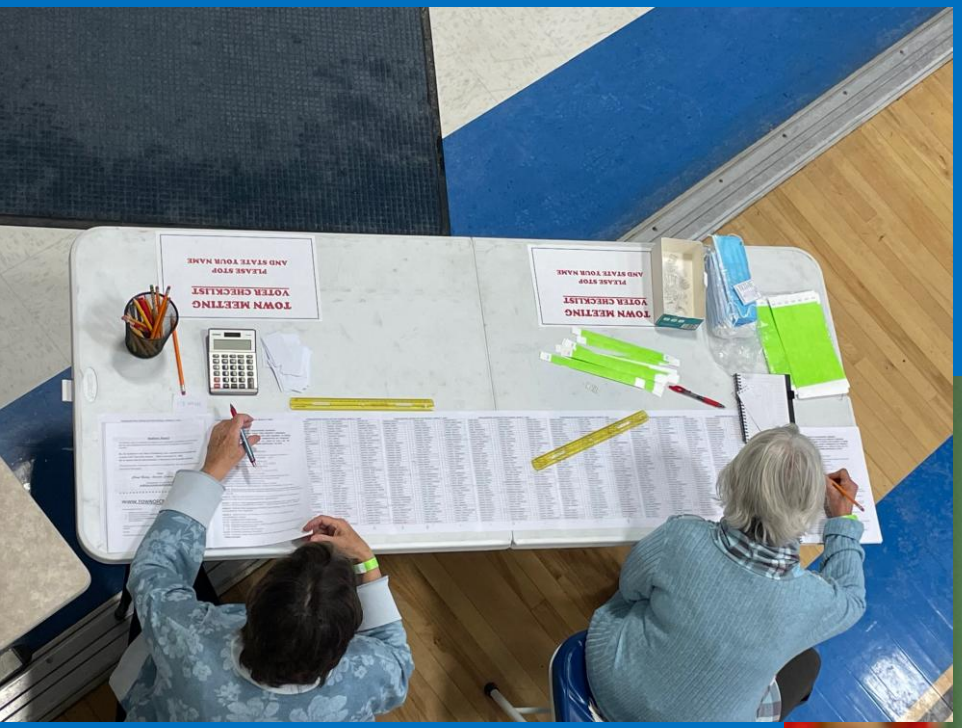
Democratic Quantity, Democratic Quality


NAVIGATING
POLARITIES
Using Both/And Thinking
to Lead Transformation
The first book in the Navigating Polarities Series
Brian Emerson & Kelly Lewis
NAVIGATING POLARITIES

Polarities are never "solved."



Democracy:
Both Broad and Deep



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Democratic Quality OVER-USE	**Democratic Quantity OVER-USE**

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-More citizen power (deliberate, amend) -See past stereotypes, build community -Increased understanding of issues -Communication between leaders & community, improves trust and solutions -Local wisdom emerges -Improve democratic skills	
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-Fewer people -No absentee voting -Risk of “groupthink,” false consensus -Takes more time and effort -Public speaking can be scary -May reinforce feelings of in-group and out-group, intimidation, exclusion	

Democratic Quality: Overuses

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Democratic Quantity: Overuse

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“Third Way Thinking…”

- How can we get the benefits of democratic quality—while also strengthening quantity?
- What would it look like if we valued civic power and building community, and also made participation easier and more inclusive?