

# Anand Giridharadas: Persuaders in a Hot and Polarized World

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/anand-giridharadas-persuaders-hot-and-polarized-world>

Recorded on October 28, 2022



*Note: Transcripts are generated using a combination of automated software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the actual audio before quoting it.*

**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One, I'm Greg Dalton. When's the last time you changed your mind about something important? Chances are it took time and involved people you trust.

In a democracy, meaningful change often requires adapting views and building coalitions. Some believe finding common ground and building rapport is the best way to achieve that. Others believe activism and protests are key to raising awareness and driving change. But increasingly, the acts of listening and persuading are omitted, as each side is convinced that the other is unreasonable and unmovable.

Anand Giridharadas is a journalist, political analyst, and author. His latest book, *The Persuaders: At the Front Lines of the Fight for Hearts, Minds, and Democracy*, explores how the tactics of persuasion can help strengthen democracy and foster positive societal change.

One story from his book details an event early in the Trump presidency. Muslim-American activist Linda Sarsour was giving a talk at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a group of men in pro-Trump clothing sat in the front row.

**Anand Giridharadas:** The Trump guys have found out about this progressive Muslim Palestinian American activist coming and they've shown up. And they showed up and nothing happened. They didn't disrupt, they didn't protest. They didn't do anything. And so, afterwards she describes to me going up to them, you know, once the talk had ended and saying, "What's up guys, I hear you're coming to kind of give me a hard time?" And I think one of them said to her, "I made a decision to give you a chance." And it goes on to talk about in that Chapter where she, Linda Sarsour has made decisions to give people a chance. And it's interesting you start that way but I think at the heart of what I'm interested in in this book *The Persuaders* is the possibility of doing two things at once.

Standing firmly and bravely in our convictions about what is right, not diluting them or watering them down for anyone's comfort. Not diluting them or watering them down in the name of outreach, but standing bravely and clearly in convictions such as that climate change is real it needs to be dealt with very urgently or that Trumpism is a scourge on democracy and needs to be resisted and defeated. Or that a society in which wealth is so concentrated in the top is not a humane society, not the society we actually think we are. Those are firm convictions that someone like Linda Sarsour or many of the other people I write about in the book hold. However, can we combine that kind of firm feet in the ground stance-taking with outreach, with giving people a chance, with making an effort to build a bigger we around our ideas. And I think there's a lot of people who are very good at outreach at the expense of conviction and standing for a damn thing. I think there's a lot of people who are good at provocation and getting people to talk about something or moving the Overton window without any mind to actually building a bigger we or coalition for their ideas. I was interested in these kinds of rare people, rare organizers, in particular, who have found ways of doing both. Standing for something and reaching out.

**Greg Dalton:** And that incident also shows that there are Trump supporters who can do the same thing. They came to listen to Linda Sarsour, right? And they chose not to interrupt or --

**Anand Giridharadas:** Yeah, I mean I would honestly say I think that that inclination is probably less distributed on that side in an age in which, you know, literal fascism has kind of started to overtake that side of the country as the actual political philosophy and animating impulse. And I think, look, this is not a book about how can we all get along better how can we heal. It is a book about how do we save the country from very real threats. Whether it's climate internal fracturing democratic decay disgusting wealth inequality that has you know, made the American dream, something that only exist outside of the United States and so forth. But what I'm interested in is how do we grow the support for those ideas and not write people off preemptively as being un-addressable, uninterested, stuck in their ways never going to come around. How do we actually champion ideas like universal healthcare, or ideas like everyone voting and having those votes protected or ideas close to your heart around how do we defend the planet from the threat of it being uninhabitable. How do we do those things in a way that is through joyful, magnanimous, fiery movements. Movements that don't just feel dour, right. And we should talk in climate in particular, I think there's been this problem of movements that are better at being right than they are at being sticky, right. To me and I'm an outsider at the climate world, but I will say the biggest problem with regard to climate on this topic of persuasion is the movement has been right on the facts right on the warnings right on what needs to be done. Right on the urgency right on the shaming of politicians. Right, right, right, right, right. I think somewhere down the line. No one got the memo to make sure that we are building a movement that is more fun, more life-giving more purpose giving more educative, more welcoming to be part of. So, that even if you don't care about 2° this or 2° that or you don't like the fact that China get rid of your car whatever, you just want to be part of where that's going. You want to be part of that thing. And what I want with this book is for more of the righteous causes in this country and around the world to think about are we reaching people are we connecting to people emotionally and psychologically. Are we building that bigger we or are we just simply too complacent in the fact that our facts and our policies are correct?

**Greg Dalton:** Right. And you write about how some of those righteous movements can be exclusive and arrogant where some of the would you consider less righteous are actually more welcoming and inclusive. So, talk about that dichotomy.

**Anand Giridharadas:** It's so interesting, right? If you think about the far right in this country which is now the right. If you think about what it wants on paper, the kind of program it's committed to it is as exclusionary as kind of any major movement we've seen in our lifetime. It is devoted to stripping women of their rights. Devoted to stripping people of color of their rights. Devoted to

keeping more people out of the country. Devoted to making life harder for those on the margins of power. But if you separate the program the agenda what it wants on paper from it's kind of effective approach to voters. It's political tactic the way it is read by a lot of people in a political arena. It reads as like come as you are everyone in this is fun let's do this thing. And if you look at the left broadly speaking, by contrast, the program is the most inclusive program I would argue without exaggeration. I think the most inclusive program offered in the history of humankind, right. The leftist is talking about every expression of humanity being welcome being celebrated being legally protected, right. But then if you look at the way the left reads to a lot of people. And I'm not saying this is its fault all the time. There's also a big machinery trying to spin it this way. But I think it is also an internal problem. The left reads too many people as being a club that's hard to join. You got to know the right terms you got to say the right things you have to kind of do your education on your own time and then come in, right. Again, some of this is ginned up some of this is unfair perception. But I would say when I go out there and just talk to very lay voters. It is always surprising to me that they're somehow able to separate the program of the right from the fact that the right feels like kind of just a house party potluck where anybody can come in and come as you are. And the left which is committed to this in some ways radical agenda of human inclusion reads to people as a little bit of a close circle. And if we don't fix that we are handing the country to those who wish it very ill.

**Greg Dalton:** George Lakoff the UC Berkeley professor would say that liberals go to school and they study human rights and issues. And conservatives go to college and they study marketing and other things that are a little bit help them sell their ideas. And you write about Linda Sarsour who thinks that some on the left are "Too woke." She doesn't appear to mean at the same way that people on the right mean but what is she saying when she says some of her own people are too woke?

**Anand Giridharadas:** I think what she's talking about and again what the right is saying when they're talking about wokeness and they kind of gen it up is like they actually oppose the agenda of greater inclusion that is gonna signified by wokeness. Linda is not saying that, Linda loves that agenda. Linda wants that agenda to happen as fast as possible, as do I. Her critique of her own side her loving critique of her own side is to say that that agenda of inclusion of change of men playing different roles, white people, accounting for whiteness. People learning to live with all kinds of identities that we're not socialized to be able to understand and live with when they were young. All of that change that we want people to go through. If we don't have a little bit of generosity and grace about the fact then what we're asking is kind of a lot, like transitions are a lot change is a lot, right? Trying to get you know 150 million men to not be the way that was totally acceptable to the man 20 years ago that is a massive social project that like no one ever talks about as a massive social project. But we are absolutely trying to do that. Watch a TV show from 20 years ago and look at what all the men behave in that TV show, right. Many of those ways they're just not like not okay today and are widely agreed.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah, Seinfeld doesn't hold up these days.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Very few things do. And that's really amazing like we forget that, right. Like we have achieved enormous changes in the way we relate to each other the way people are supposed to behave, to allow other people's dignity and space and not to feel crappy about themselves all the time. We have uncovered so much of what was people's experience of the world women were going through in meetings all these years that was kind of suppressed. Now we know and there's terms for it, and there's training around it, right. But I think what Linda is saying is if we expect people now that we have defined the new standard, to be perfectly conforming to it fully down with it having no problem with any of it fluent in the terminology and then come into our movement is gonna be a small damn movement. And I think what she's saying is the goal is righteous that is the goal. And if you really want to serve that goal you need to be bringing everybody in. And you need a funnel therefore, right, this is what businesses call a funnel like you

need people at the fat end of the funnel and then as they move through your funnel, hopefully they'll start learning more of those terms. But like your movement should be the funnel, right. They should come into your movement because they like your movement they like what you're saying they like where you're going and then you educate them in your movement. But they're gonna say bad terms they're gonna misgender someone in your movement. They're gonna, you know, like mansplain a little bit like that's gonna happen, right. And how do you not allow that how do you protect the other people in the room and say I'd rather this be happening in the movement and us talking about this, than you being at home watching Fox News and getting mad in your Barcalounger about you know deadnaming.

**Greg Dalton:** I think that happens in climate a lot where if you're not vegan and solar you are kind of looked down upon. There's this sort of, you know, purity test in climate world like that sort of judges people about their greenness. And people can sense that and it can be off --

**Anand Giridharadas:** Totally. It's such a good example because it gets to this confusion that I think a lot of the persuaders that I write about in the book were so smart about. Alicia Garza, one of the leaders of Black Lives Matter talks about this. She says, you know, I think, I'm paraphrasing here, she told me I think sometimes in our movements we feel like if there's a lot of non-radical people in our radical spaces there are something wrong with our radical spaces our radical spaces is failing. And she was kind of like what I'm here to say is if there's non-radical people in your radical space that's when your movement is succeeding, right.

**Greg Dalton:** You're growing and recruiting.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Correct. And you're now reaching people who don't share all the ideals, but they still want to be in there anyway. So, if you got mediators in your climate movement that means your movement is now reaching people who don't share all your convictions who don't share everything but they still like something about what you're saying. You probably even alienated them sometimes with some your vegan stuff, but they're still there. Why are they there? That's interesting. Why are they showing up? You have created something in them that they still want to be there in spite of the barrier. Hallelujah! Congratulations, now you got a movement.

**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. Let's get back to my conversation with journalist and political analyst Anand Giridharadas. Before the break we mentioned Alicia Garza, one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matter. I asked Anand to reflect on a quote from her in his book, in which she says, "The right deeply understands people. The left gets hung up on facts and figures in trying to change people's minds."

**Anand Giridharadas:** Alicia's quote there is so powerful and simple. Which is that I think there's probably two approaches in politics you see right now along the lines of what she's describing. What I think predominates on the left is you start with the wares that you're trying to sell. You got a couple of semi's full of wares that you're trying to sell. I'm trying to sell you climate legislation I'm trying to sell you democracy legislation. I'm trying to sell you advance manufacturing legislation. I'm trying to sell you infrastructure legislation. And you, the voter, may be standing over there being like I'm really concerned about rising prices. I feel my neighborhood is unsafe. And I feel like the broad approach of the left is like, no, no, no, no, no, over blowing inflation, it's fine, it's just the war in Ukraine. Like you're overblowing the inflation. This crime thing is not real the stats if you actually run the regression another way it's not actually more unsafe what you're feeling is not real, right. And people like, I don't know, I saw two people got shot outside of my street kind of like that. And it's like, no, no, no, no. If you actually compare it year on year adjusted for population growth, you're totally safe.

**Greg Dalton:** We've got white papers that say, da, da, da.

**Anand Giridharadas:** We got so many white papers. And like, you know, inflation like and my family can't afford anything anymore. Yeah, but like it's Putin that's like Putin did that, you know. And then by the way we got these trucks delivering some wares. Would you like to reorganize the entire economy to fight climate change like really concerned about like inflation and crime? Climate is so important like that's actually the issue that matters right now. And, you know, what about infrastructure, I'd love to build some infrastructure like. Yeah, I can't afford my house like, yeah, but we need infra, you know. And it's not that these policies are not the right policies because as you know they actually do address a lot of these issues. And they do save you money in different ways and they do create jobs that will help you afford your house, right. But I just feel like very broadly speaking, the posture of the left is like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know you feel that stuff is important. But let me explain to you why in fact, this other stuff is more important or is like is like primary like if you don't care what stuff we care about them stuff. You're worried about like it won't happen that's often the argument. Okay. Now, pivot to the right. The right starts with what's going on with you? What's happening with you, Greg, what are you anxious about? What are you afraid about? What have you noticed in your town recently that made you go, huh? that's new. What did your kids come home and say to you about what they learned in school that made you feel a little bit destabilized because you didn't learn that thing in school and that seems maybe a little weird what they learned or off-putting. What trainings have you been going to at work, Greg, that made you feel like I don't know I feel kind of awkward in those trainings or I feel attacked in those trainings. The right is starting with you.

**Greg Dalton:** Relationship.

**Anand Giridharadas:** It is starting in like it was like a tech company it's like user wager, right. Like tech companies literally employ people to sit next to people using their computer and like watch what they do what's going on with them, right? So, the right starts from a what's going on with the users. What do you think about, what are you fearing? Instead of just trying to sell you these things they're kind of trying to sell you them based on analysis of who you are. Oh, Greg, you noticed there's more Spanish-speaking cashiers at the Walgreens in your small town in Arizona, that's so interesting, Greg. Well, you know, there's this southern invasion that's happening aliens, coyotes like can we interest you in that issue, right, because of what you're afraid of. Or you're going to these trainings and you're like, why am I suddenly going to trainings because I'm white or whatever and like we're gonna explain to you CRT and Kimberly Crenshaw and this whole nefarious agenda funded by George Soros to brainwash you, right. But the right is starting with your affective experience of the world. The things roiling you the things making you feel confusing, discombobulating. And it is in some ways, respectfully centering you and those anxieties and sublimating its agenda in like as living in service of your anxieties, right. Of course, the agenda is totally bogus and is entirely designed to like help billionaires become richer and spread more hatred. But in the political tactics of it all there is a let's start with you. And I think when we do not do that on the left, we get to a place where we're almost condescending to voters about what they should be caring about instead of saying who are you what are you afraid of and how can I you know how can I serve that? And so, something like climate is such a prime example because the difficulty of climate for most people who do not experience it as a day-to-day issue right now. Maybe they should but most voters who are not it is not polling at one, two or three.

**Greg Dalton:** Right. Right.

**Anand Giridharadas:** I think there is a basic problem of saying it should be polling one, two or three. Why are you not caring about this? Don't you get on board to this? As opposed to like what do you love? You love your kids? You think about legacy? You love things being affordable? What do you

love? And having the agenda served a realistic understanding of who people are and I think there's some very smart people who I see thinking about that. I think Varshini Prakash at Sunrise has really done some honest reflection around where the movements fallen short in the past. And, you know, Ayana Johnson I think has done a lot of interesting thinking about that. But to me that feels like a very exciting direction in the conversation of climate and persuasion.

**Greg Dalton:** Chloe Maxmin is a young woman who is progressive, who won in a rural part of Maine. She wrote *Dirt Road Revival* and she went around and knocked on porches and talk to people and listen. They didn't bring up climate. They brought up other things and she was able to get them around to climate, but she listens and she says that change in rural America happens at the speed of relationship something that the right seems to understand better. In *The Persuaders*, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez discusses how she and Bernie Sanders saw and use the media differently. She says that climate change is a story that the media couldn't figure out how to sell, so to speak, and that's part of the reason why she chose to elevate it with the Green New Deal and use her spotlight to start her conversation. Tell us about her and her climate story as you tell it on *The Persuaders*.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Yeah, you know, she is at the heart of this book, I think, fully one third of this book is the kind of story of her arrival on the national and world scene first couple of years of her life and her kind of education as an organizer, an activist and politician now. And with regard to climate specifically, she made a very fascinating distinction to me between kind of her approach and Bernie Sanders as you say. And broadly speaking I would say and I covered Bernie separately and wrote a Time magazine cover about Bernie some years earlier. Bernie's approach to the media was I think this is a corrupt system that will never give me a fair deal. They're sensational they're corporate this and that. And so, Bernie just kind of had a like avoid you know as much as possible. When I was on a media tour I was probably as sympathetic kind of reporter as you'd get writing a time cover of him, you know, and still it was like impossible to get the interview time that I'd been promised. And it's just like he would not ever come say hi to the reporter. It was just like this total, and it's like dude, you literally have a bus behind you of the entire national media. Like you can't come in and fake it for five minutes like even if it hurts every bone in your body, right. It would just benefit the ideas to like just come do the five minutes of the thing.

**Greg Dalton:** He's socially awkward, yeah, you talked to his wife a fair amount of times.

**Anand Giridharadas:** They should have sent her in she's fantastic. Great communicator and great advocate for him. I really like her. He just couldn't do it, right. At some level he thinks that is a system that I can never, you know, he's got almost running against it, right. And he would often say, no one in the mainstream media is talking about inequality. Not true. A whole bunch of people were talking inequality in the mainstream media. But he just in his mind it was just like that's the dark side. Now, from a democratic socialist point of view from a kind of ideological point of view I think AOC has a similar, you know, general view that the media is problematic. Not gonna give some of these ideas a fair shake it's gonna marginalize you know some of these people power ideas. It's corporate owned it's sensational as short-term, she said as much to me. However, she said I identify as a woman of color who does not assume that any systems were built for my success. And so, I have to find the cracks and exploit the pockets within them. And so, that was a very interesting contrast, where Bernie's attitude was like media corrupt therefore, like I'm not doing the media I'm not engaging with the media as much as I can. And hers was like, the media is corrupt and sensational and short-term. So, I'm gonna hijack it. So, I'm gonna make it do my thing. So, what is media like? Oh, like celebrity? Okay, like I'll embrace the kind of painful journey of becoming the celebrity that she's kind of a reluctant avatar of. But I'll do that and then I'll use the attention I can command to introduce something that could win new a deal. Or I will protest in Nancy Pelosi's office putting my celebrity to use. So, there was a kind of assumption that, yeah, these systems may be messed up. But I think as a young woman of color in her 20s she didn't necessarily feel the same luxury to stand you

know below the mountain and yell at the mountain like the system is rigged. I think she, you know, started digging tunnels. And on climate it was incredibly powerful and effective. You know, I don't think there's an Inflation Reduction Act without the Green New Deal. People forget I think every major presidential candidate in the democratic side signed on to the Green New Deal, at least rhetorically, right, that's big deal. This was an out of left field new congresswoman who got all the major presidential candidates to raise their hands and say therefore that incredibly thoroughgoing climate proposal. So, I think there is an approach she had that is that still has very much about knowing that the system can be corrupt and still finding ways to exploit opportunities to persuade in a corrupt system.

**Greg Dalton:** Right. And to engage with people yeah, that she doesn't like. You write about persuasion and the golden gate of retreat. How does that relate to AOC and Mitt Romney? There was a particular episode there where you say she offered him something that her peers didn't.

**Anand Giridharadas:** You know, I first heard her talk about the golden gate of retreat probably in the spring of 2019 I believe it was when she spoke at the South by Southwest Conference in Texas. And she talked about a mentor of hers named Ernesto Nieto who, I don't even know she named him that night, but who taught her this phrase the golden gate of retreat. And the golden gate of retreat is actually a concept of Ernesto Nieto who is this like political activist and kind of Hispanic racial educator and many other things. A concept he learned from one of his mentors who I think might've been a mayor in Texas or something like that. And the concept was that when you are in a conflicts and argument with someone and you ultimately win or on the verge of winning. You have to give them a golden gate of retreat, a kind of face-saving way to back out and accept your victory. And if you don't, then they're kind of cornered, and they may not grant you the victory or they may start undermining the victory as soon as it has been declared. And so, that takes a lot of different forms I think it doesn't come naturally to a lot of us. You know, I often would feel for example, in the Trump years where like certain Republicans would come around and be like one now and against the Republican party. It was like, really? Like, and, you know, I think if you're playing a golden gate of retreat formula, you'd say welcome, great.

**Greg Dalton:** Rather than saying, oh, too late you should have done that six months ago.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Correct. I don't know that I should put you in leadership, which is a whole other discussion. Those people always jump to the front of the line of leadership and suddenly they are the, you know, but I think there's a thing about it welcoming. And the practical example you asked about is she, that there was a moment I think during the George Floyd protest in the summer of 2020 when Mitt Romney tweeted Black Lives Matter. And immediately a lot of people are dunking on him. Well, what about your vote on this or what about this or what about the fact that your party always does this? And all of the what abouts were kind of correct, frankly, like his substance of positions hadn't really changed, you know, his party is kind of on the wrong side of every issue with regard to black lives mattering so on and so forth. And I'm pretty sure AOC knows that as much as anybody but her orientation her instinct in that moment I think trained with the Nieto training was to say, do a kind of quote tweet of Romney's tweet, saying, some years ago, even XYZ people wouldn't have said this, now Mitt Romney saying it. Progress is a process, right.

**Greg Dalton:** She also says it's normal to work through discomfort along the way. Like she's welcoming people on, maybe Mitt Romney was struggling with something working through it.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Yeah, I don't think she is therefore endorsing Mitt Romney's ideas about racial justice or policing policy or any of that. But I think she's doing what I was trying to kind of understand in this book and frame for others is she's doing a thing where she's standing firmly and clearly and bravely in her convictions and in that moment reaching out. That's an example of what

the fundamental dynamic I'm interested in. Can you do those two things? Can you stand firmly on your feet in the ground and reach out? And that to me was a moment where she showed how you can do that.

**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. I'm talking with journalist and author Anand Giridharadas about his new book, *The Persuaders*. Persuasion often has a connotation of one person jawboning another over to their side. But several of the persuaders profiled in his book take time for self reflection, which informs their approach to influencing others.

**Anand Giridharadas:** I think the opposite of jawboning is listening. And one of the things that I heard from multiple subjects that I write about in the book was the importance of listening strategic, strategic listening. And, you know, given that I interviewed such disparate people call the programmer activists, organizers, elected politicians racial educator so many others in this book. I paid a lot of attention to what they all kind of tended to believe in common or too in common because it seems to me there were bigger meta-lessons there despite their worlds being different there were some of these crosscutting things. And I think that kind of strategic listening and showing up in that spirit was one of them. And so, whether it's deep canvassing which is this kind of experiment of going door-to-door and talking to people lovingly through their own cognitive dissonances around politics or Alicia talking about coming up as an organizer in Oakland and talking like women in the black communities through their own conflicting feelings about the police and so on and so forth. There was the real theme of I think there's a lot of pressure in the culture now to just call people out as quickly as possible. You almost feel complicit if you don't you feel like you're endorsing what they're saying if you don't quickly condemn. And what in a lot of these persuaders that I write about did was thicken their skin a little bit to be able to listen to other people's bile. And again, you don't have to do this this is work that you should do if you want to do this work, right. You want to organize in these committees you want to canvas. It's no one's job to go listen to anybody's bile and I want to make that very clear. But if you are despairing for the country and you live in a place where you feel like there is some room there. There's a lot of power in that kind of strategic listening of saying why do you feel that way about immigrants. I noticed you have a lot of rage around them. Where is that come from? Do you know any immigrants? Do you have any experience in immigrants, you know. Have you ever experienced feeling like you didn't belong what was that like for you? This kind of stuff, right. And among a lot of the organizers and certainly in deep canvassing there has been a kind of ever more refined practice of having these kinds of difficult conversations in a moment of rising authoritarianism rising fascism. And people having pretty remarkable results in surfacing things that are going on in people beneath the simple outward policy stance. Steve Deline, one of the leading LGBT organizers in the country leads something called the New Conversation Initiative. Did this kind of canvassing after Prop 8 in California in 2008 outlawed gay marriage which had been legal for a few months that year and then outlawed again. Devastating loss. Los Angeles County lost large parts of San Francisco just like a devastating loss like our neighbors all hate us and they didn't know. They didn't know it was gonna lose Los Angeles County, right. We have work to do that was the verdict. We have work to do. Our neighbors in LA the friends at the grocery store do not think we are human. What do we do? And out of this grew this deep canvassing thing. And Steve Deline says, you know, the biggest thing he has learned through years now of canvassing and moving minds on gay-rights moving minds on trans rights moving minds on immigration. The biggest thing he's learned or one of the biggest things he's learned is as he puts it, most people are 60/40 on most things. And what that means is if I ask you, Greg, your position on taxation or your position on this, you're gonna give me for the purposes of going on with the conversation, you're gonna give me one answer. You're gonna give me like your verdict. You're gonna give me where you land on something, right. But the fact that you give me one thing one thought, one answer, one place that you land it doesn't mean that there's not an element of another contrary thought in you. It just means like there is a contest within all of us over everything we



think. And at some point, one side of you on that issue beat the other side of you on that issue. And the thing you decide to present to the world as Greg stance is the victor side.

**Greg Dalton:** You talked about deep racists who loved Barack Obama and voted for him. And, you know, hard-core Republicans who hate socialism and maybe embrace Bernie Sanders. So, there's a little more fluidity. So, you mentioned immigration. Immigration is rising as an issue as we approach the midterm elections. I recently spoke with Nathaniel Stinnett of the Environmental Voter Project, and he said, at least in his world of electoral mobilization it's all about turnoff, not persuasion. He says forget about persuasion we're too polarize people are locked in their views, at least in the short term. What do you say to that, particularly looking at the midterms?

**Anand Giridharadas:** I think it's just not true. It's just empirically not true. I mean a bunch of people who liked Donald Trump the first time did not vote for him the second time. And that is why he's not president. I don't want to overstate the obvious, but to say persuasion doesn't work is to insult the people on the ground who did extraordinary work to move people on that issue. And frankly the reporters who told the truth about Trump for four years in a way that separated several million people from him who liked him well enough the first time and didn't like this, you know, four-year [s—]show that they were getting accounts of. Like people move and my life looks different because of that, right. And so --

**Greg Dalton:** They move in four years but how about four weeks. Are there still people who are persuadable out of these midterms?

**Anand Giridharadas:** Sure. Absolutely. Because first of all, like there is so much wisdom now about effective messaging for example. And I think if you wanna look at democratic messaging right now leading these midterms it's a disaster. It's a disaster. We are polling evenly like we're offering the American people like fascism or continued democracy. And it's a dead heat. Like if you are in a Democratic Party messaging apparatus or emailing apparatus or cutting ads or whatever. What are you doing? What are you doing if you are polling evenly with fascism? There's no electoral college in the polling. There are no rigged state election officials in the polling. Polling is polling. I trust the polling. We are objectively asking people whether they would like to continue being a liberal democracy or go in the direction of more political violence overturned elections. And people in a neutral polling forum are like kind of like, ah, it's a tossup, right. And so, that to me is because of a total lack of competence at message at community building on the Democratic party and the left side more broadly just actually building belonging building movements that as Alicia Garza said create a sense of home make people feel like part of something larger. A total incompetence at actually building policy framing policy as we talked about earlier in the language of what people want what their anxieties are speaking to them instead of lecturing them that their actual concerns like inflation crime don't matter. So, I am optimistic in this weird sense that we're not leaving it all on the field. Like if we were leaving it all on the field and polling evenly with fascism we'd be screwed. But if you did kind of a lackluster job and not even firing on some of the cylinders that are pretty crucial to defeating an organize fascist movement that's good news, weirdly. Because it means you can start firing on those cylinders now.

**Greg Dalton:** And a lot of your work is about democracy and whether it's a led change and your previous work Winners Take All is very critical of a lead. You believe it's immoral to be a billionaire. I'm curious what you think of Yvon Chouinard donating his ownership his family ownership of Patagonia valued at \$3 billion into a trust requiring that \$100 million in annual income be devoted to addressing climate change. That created quite a stir when it happened. What do you think of it?

**Anand Giridharadas:** Yeah, it's interesting. I've read different reporting on some of the tax implications of it, and whether like whether there should be a little more complexity around, you

know, whether there is any tax benefit that he's deriving from it. But I think overall what is interesting about it and positive about it is that it normalizes the idea not of taking money and then using it philanthropically to increase your power further. It normalizes this notion not of running your own programs, which is what so many of these philanthropists do. But in fact, putting the money towards policy advocacy, right. So, this is usually missing from the philanthropic world instead of they just like to do their own thing and this is pushing for policy that would change the game for everybody that would change the rules for everybody. Broadly speaking, you know, I prefer that kind of approach. Look, I think nobody should ever be able to amass that kind of fortune with the kind of, you know, we should have a tax code that makes that kind of hoarding impossible. That said, if you're gonna have someone who has made that kind of money and has to give it away. I think giving it away in a way where it would tend to chip away at the kind of privilege of a person like that chip away at the privilege of his social class. Erode a kind of unsustainable plutocracy instead of shoring it up is better than the alternative.

**Greg Dalton:** About 57% of Americans believe that climate change is happening and that it's caused by humans. Some say that's large enough percentage of the population to help mitigate the effects of the climate crisis. Other believes we need to bring more people in. So, what do you think about that sort of the broad landscape of how many Americans care about climate. You said it doesn't poll on the top one, two or three, where are we in climate as a relatable personal political concern?

**Anand Giridharadas:** I mean the world might end and we're only at 57% support for doing something about that. We're in real trouble. And part of what I'm advocating for in *The Persuaders* is actually being harder on ourselves rather than easier on ourselves. I think we should look at that 57% and not blame the 43% alone, although I think they bear blame. Certainly blame the Murdochs and others who are helping to spread false consciousness among that 43%. But I think we got to blame ourselves. That's a lot of people we haven't won over. And I kind of want to see those of us in the pro-democracy sides sort of pro-fighting climate side to actually be harder on ourselves and say we're falling short here, we're falling short here. And so, you know, instead of saying it's annoying that that's not a top three issue I think the way we often feel it's annoying the people and not getting it. How do we build consciousness around that issue? And so, just some thoughts. I think there's a way in which we talked about already the kind of dourness problem, right. I think there's a way in which fighting climate is often been framed this and it feels like homework or feels like eating your broccoli or spinach. It just feels it feels heavy it doesn't you know it's --

**Greg Dalton:** It's complicated. It's depressing.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Correct. And I think it's worth saying, very clearly that there is no intrinsic reason why that needs to be the dominant effect of fighting climate change. I think it's actually preposterous that that's the dominant thing. Is there a dour element to it? Is there a you can't have this anymore element? Sure. But as someone else I think Bill McKibben was in the other day on Twitter like fighting climate also means blimps. We're gonna have blimps going all around. Helium blimps carrying you around. And he wrote a piece about like where is the delight where is the space for delight in the climate. Why aren't we telling people all the cool sh\*\* that they're gonna have when we finally save the earth, right? Why aren't we talking about the fact that we're finally gonna make black communities whole in a bunch of structural and infrastructural ways after 400 years of plunder. Climate is the only thing big enough to rewire enough things to deal with not with that legacy. Why aren't we talking about how awesome transit is going to be all around the country. Why aren't we like hiring architects to invent incredible futuristic sustainable homes and build them at scale for the masses and making it easier to build homes instead of having to beg and borrow and steal from your local zoning authority to build something clean and green in your home. Like there's no reason, intrinsic reason that climate is like you can't eat beef anymore and you're like, you know, and you're not gonna be able to like you can't, you can't, you can't. It's very weird that we have allow

that to become the dominant framing.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah, stop, don't, bad, yeah. The framing where the electric cars are great. Anyone who's driven electric car knows that it's inherently better, faster, more enjoyable than an internal combustion car. As we wrap up here at the end, Anand. I'm interested in, you say that most people are failing as persuaders. What can people do to be better persuaders?

**Anand Giridharadas:** I think there's a whole bunch of things you can do. I think you can learn to listen better and more strategically. Again, not for kumbaya but for actually achieving results in moving people. I think you can thicken your skin a little bit and grant people little civic grace and recognize the difference between as Loretta Ross, a veteran reproductive justice and racial justice advocate says, recognize the difference between people who are like not fully fluent with the new language of social justice and people who want to kill you. Those are really different communities and being able to recognize the difference and having a little more patience. I think above all the pro-democracy forces need to embrace a kind of human psychology and human emotion lens as the way to reach people. The climate movement needs to, you know, stop trying to hawk a dour sounding agenda and actually start with where our people meet people where they are. Where are they in the emotional level where are they psychological level how can we speak to them. And finally, I would say, whether this is folks listening worrying about their climate change denying uncle or worrying about this set of more systemic scale. I think it's important to recognize that a very large number of voters of citizens of our relatives and friends are morally confused. As Beyoncé has describes herself in her new album they're contradicted, right. And, not everyone, there are absolutely militant committed fascists in this country, and you can kiss them goodbye. There is a lot of them. There's a lot of diehard progressives you probably not gonna convince them that climate change is not real. But there's a lot of people between them who they're not actually according to so much of the research that I've seen, they're not centrists they're not in the middle they are morally contradicted. They agree that the planet is beautiful, but they don't like pressure on small business to save the planet. They agree that black people have it harder in this country, but they don't like the government playing favorites on race and you know having race conscious politics. They just feel contradicted.

And that's the thing that separated the persuaders, I wrote about in this book from the people who I'm all of us, the rest of us, to I'm writing this book for. Is that I think the persuaders I wrote about get that people are contradicted and orient themselves toward building up that element in people that might compete with the other thing that is right now their outward stance. Your outward stance is against immigration. Your outward stance does do nothing on climate. But there's another part in you. It may be your Christianity and your idea of God's creation of the earth. It may be your sense of the importance of freedom that actually starts to convince you that universal healthcare would actually free you from the moods of your boss and health insurance bureaucrats, right. There is a kind of B-side in people's hearts on virtually every issue. The B-side is small in some cases it's almost near as influential as the A-side in other cases. But we all kind of have a B-side for the things we think at least many of us enough of us to drastically change the course of this country. And the biggest thing I think you could take away from these persuaders I got to spend time with over the last few years is to recognize that view of other people as complicated as complicated as you know yourself to be. And then engage, whether interpersonally in your family in politics. Engage in that work of helping them make it make sense, helping them make meaning and be there to walk with them in the direction that you wish to go.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah, we're all complex. More complex than what shows up on social media feeds where all that nuance and complexity is often distilled. Anand Giridharadas is author of *The Persuaders: At the Front Lines of the Fight for Hearts, Minds, and Democracy*. Thank you so much, Anand, for sharing your insights today.

**Anand Giridharadas:** Thank you. I enjoyed this conversation so much.

**Greg Dalton:** Climate One's empowering conversations connect all aspects of the climate emergency.

**Greg Dalton:** Climate One's empowering conversations connect all aspects of the climate emergency. To hear more, subscribe to our podcast on Apple or wherever you get your pods. Talking about climate can be hard-- but it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review if you are listening on Apple. You can do it right now on your device. You can also help by sending a link to this episode to a friend. By sharing you can help people have their own deeper climate conversations.

Brad Marshland is our senior producer; Our managing director is Jenny Park. Our producers and audio editors are Ariana Brocious and Austin Colón. Megan Bisciegia is our production manager. Our team also includes consulting producer Sara-Katherine Coxon. Our theme music was composed by George Young (and arranged by Matt Willcox). Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, the nonprofit and nonpartisan forum where our program originates. I'm Greg Dalton.