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The question itself reveals our predicament: we are still asking "how should we deal" with a crisis we have understood for decades. The gap between knowledge and action is not merely a failure of political will—it reflects deeper tensions between how democracies function and how ecological systems respond to disruption.

As a historian studying energy policy and environmental governance, I've observed how modern democracies consistently prioritize short-term economic stability over long-term environmental security. This is not coincidental. Democratic institutions evolved to mediate conflicts between human interests across electoral cycles, rather than representing non-human nature or future generations who cannot vote. When the Netherlands' chance of meeting its 2030 climate targets falls below 5%, and the United States withdraws from the Paris Agreement, we witness not merely a policy failure but a structural mismatch between our governing systems and the crisis they must address.

Yet abandoning democratic principles would be equally catastrophic. History shows that authoritarian regimes, despite their capacity for swift action, often produce worse environmental outcomes, as they are shielded from public accountability. The challenge is not democracy versus climate action; it is how to democratically enable the radical transformations that sustainability requires.

This requires that we embrace three uncomfortable truths simultaneously. First, incremental policy adjustments will not suffice; we need systemic changes in energy infrastructure, consumption patterns, and economic models. Second, these transformations cannot be imposed from above without broad public participation and consent—environmental authoritarianism breeds backlash and brittleness. Third, democratic deliberation takes time we increasingly lack.

Part of my work involves developing transatlantic educational programs on environmental governance, exploring how communities from Louisiana to Zeeland respond to ecological crises and existential threats through civic participation and resilient adaptation. The path forward requires reimagining environmental democracy itself: strengthening citizens' procedural rights to environmental information, participation, and justice; creating institutions that can make binding long-term commitments beyond electoral cycles; and acknowledging that "the environment" is not separate from human society but the very foundation of it.

At the same time, we must also confront loss honestly. Some impacts are now unavoidable; adaptation and mitigation must proceed together. This requires building resilience in vulnerable communities while maintaining democratic legitimacy—no small task when climate burdens fall unequally.

Perhaps the real question is not how we should deal with global warming, but whether we can develop political forms capable of the long-term collective action that both democracy

and planetary boundaries demand. The answer remains uncertain, but continuing to ask it—critically, urgently, publicly—is itself essential democratic work.