

Braver Angels Book Discussion Guide: *Why We're Polarized*, by Ezra Klein

Optional resources for pre-discussion reflection

Concise explanation of how Klein sees group identity at work in sports and politics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1SGYabxvPM>

Klein interview with Malcolm Gladwell in February 2020:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1PA7mOhQ4Y>

Wall Street Journal book review: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-were-polarized-review-going-to-extremes-11580947003>

New York Times book review: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/books/review/why-were-polarized-ezra-klein.html>

Discussion questions

1. Klein asserts that issues of group identity have always been a feature of American politics but were less visible – and less polarizing – when one group (white, Christian, predominantly male) dominated political office, discourse, and both major political parties. Over the last 50 years, demographic and cultural shifts have allowed people with diverse identities a greater role and voice in American politics. Further, American's identities have become “stacked” and “sorted” so they align with our political affiliations, leading to dysfunctional hyper-polarization. What do you think of this argument? How do you think your group identities (religion, race, gender, culture, urban-rural location) inform your political views and your feelings toward others who don't share them?
2. Klein writes at length about media's role in the systemic problem of polarization...how it amplifies the loudest voices and reaps rewards for stoking outrage. He argues that media is responding to market demand, giving readers, listeners and viewers “what they want” versus “what they need.” Do you think that's true? Is there anything an average media consumer can do to shift those dynamics and reduce polarization?
3. In the final chapter of the book, Klein offers some potential remedies for readers' consideration. He advocates eliminating the electoral college to make national elections more democratic and expanding the number of Supreme Court justices to achieve more ideological balance and reduce partisan fights over appointments. What do you think of these recommendations? How do you think they compare to his recommendations for changes in individual behavior, like greater mindfulness of how one's identities are activated and manipulated?

The Braver Angels Pledge

- As individuals, we try to understand the other side's point of view, even if we don't agree with it.
- In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
- In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.