

Roots of Polarization: Perception, Fear, and Media

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The roots of polarization run much deeper than disagreement about issues and beliefs. They are more basic and fundamental than events and actions that create skepticism and mistrust. The roots of polarization lie within us – they are a result of how we see and respond to information we receive about our world and each other. Most of that information comes through various forms of media that are designed to grab and keep our attention.

Polarization is ultimately a perceptual issue—each side sees the world through frames that don't overlap. Fear creates the distance between those frames. Political campaigns use media to generate fear and form perceptions in order to create a dependable voting base.

Perception, fear, and media are the core roots of polarization.

Understanding how they work can help create a path away from hate and distrust toward a shared vision of how we can restore the term "United" to the States of America.

Perception is the stuff that political campaigns work with – it's carefully molded to get our attention and keep our support. Political consultants have learned that the best way to do that is through fear. The increase in polarization in our world matches the increased sophistication in the use of fear by political advisors and media producers over the past three decades.

Fear grabs our attention and creates a surge of energy that demands action. It also narrows our vision, drives us to seek certainty and control, and creates an "us versus them" win/lose mindset. Fear drives us to act quickly without thinking about where we're headed or why we're going there.

Fear draws us to seek strong leaders who will keep us safe. It leads us to accept simplistic solutions to complex problems without asking questions. Fear compels us to put issues and people into broad categories that keep us from seeing who they are or understanding what they need. Fear isolates

and separates us. It turns us against each other when we most need to work together.

Fear is the best way to win an election and the worst way to govern a nation.

What can we do?

We can start by gaining a deeper understanding of perception, fear, and media. We can learn how perception works, what fear does to us, and how media is used to pull us apart. We can learn how to broaden our perceptions, let go of fear, and see how media influences our understanding of our world and each other.

Perception, Fear, and Media: Roots of Polarization is an eight-hour online course over two weeks offered by the Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island. The course is designed to help us understand perception, fear, and media along with steps we can take to undermine polarization so we can work together to create a better world for our children and grandchildren.

The solution to polarization is simple: We need to create a shared understanding of what's happening and see and think more clearly about the issues and concerns that separate us. This course is designed to help us learn to do that.

It starts Sunday, July 21. I hope you will join us

<https://mediaeducationlab.com/events/perception-fear-and-media-roots-polarization>

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