Finding Common Ground: The Importance of Political Diversity

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"Do you realise that it's murder?!" "That makes no sense! What makes you think that you have any right to tell women what to do with their bodies?!" "What about the unborn child, then?! All human life is valuable!"

No, these aren't vicious attacks spewed from the mouths of politicians. They're words that were thrown around in an argument about abortion between my friend and another classmate at the school I used to go to. Abortion, climate change, police brutality, the gender pay gap, immigration. People tend to get emotionally charged, and more often than not, hostile when they talk about these political landmines. It is not rare these days to hear reports of gruesome clashes between the Antifa and far-right protesters staining the streets red with blood. Undoubtedly, our society is currently more polarised than ever before.

What is it that's causing this polarisation in our society? One major factor that is contributing to this problem is the widespread consumption of news on social media websites. As an example of this, when I log in to Twitter, more than half of the tweets in my feed contain some form of political opinion that reinforces and strengthens my views. Because of this, I used to have rigid political opinions, dismissing all alternatives that went against mine as 'invalid'. This kind of cognitive inflexibility causes friction when people from opposite sides of the political aisle cross each other.

How do we combat this problem that we've become all too familiar with? The best way to treat this is for you to intentionally surround yourself with people that you don't agree with. I have a friend who has opposing views from me on almost every political issue, which exposes me to viewpoints that challenges my political beliefs. This helped me immensely in overcoming the aforementioned rigid political mindset that I had fallen victim to.

Understanding why he held a particular opinion made me challenge my own beliefs and left me wondering if those beliefs were built on logical foundations. We must have systems of checks and balances in our own minds to ensure that we don't reject sound logical arguments for simply going against our existing ideas.

"But," you might say, "How could I discuss politics with someone who has wildly different views from me?" In his speech addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Ronald Reagan said, "I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world." The first step we need to take in order to solve this split is finding common ground; a common issue that both sides can agree on, a common enemy that both sides can fight against, a common comrade that both sides can fight along with. The West and the Soviet Union battled alongside one another in WWII to destroy Nazi Germany; they found a common enemy. The same has to be done when talking about politics. If you find yourself in a political conversation with someone whose basic principles differ from yours, start by discussing fundamental political values that both sides can agree on, and then start debating from there.

Clearly, the lack of political cooperation is staggering the progress of civilization as a whole. If we were to solve this problem, we must first do it at the individual level. Exposing yourself to a variety of political ideologies is the best cure for this disease. We must consciously force ourselves to keep our political ideologies in check because, as John Dewey wrote, "Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities."