



POLARISATION

“The degree of polarization that currently exists in Washington is such where I think it's fair to say if I presented a cure for cancer, getting legislation passed to move that forward would be a nail-biter.”

Barack Obama, 44th president of the United States

1. Polarisation Discussion

1. What is polarisation? What are some of the causes of polarisation?
2. What are some polarising issues, either from your country or the rest of the world?
3. How has the media contributed to polarisation?
4. Is social media to blame for polarisation? If so, how?
5. What have people been arguing about recently on social media?
6. Do you respect people's opinions on social media even if you disagree with them? Have you ever fallen out with a friend because you had different opinions?
7. Can political polarisation affect the economy in any way?
8. Have people lost the ability to argue and debate rationally and logically?

2. Polarisation Vocabulary

- **blinkered** (adjective) – *having an attitude or belief that is narrow and does not consider any opposing views; narrow-minded.*
- **partisan** (adjective, noun) – *biased in favour of a particular political party or ideological cause; a strong supporter of a party, leader, or cause.*
- **negative campaigning / mudslinging** (noun) – *the deliberate spreading of negative information about political opponents to damage their public image.*
- **echo chamber / social media bubble** (noun) – *an environment where a person is surrounded only by opinions and beliefs that coincide with their own; an echo chamber on social media.*
- **alternative fact** (noun) – *a interpretation of a fact to suit a person's political beliefs, usually in a way that misinterprets that fact.*
- **troll farm** (noun) – *an organisation that employs people to make offensive or incorrect statements online in order to provoke a reaction from people or to manipulate public opinion.*

Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun):

1. When people only get their news from sources they agree with, or when all their friends share their beliefs, they create an **echo chamber/social media bubble** which convinces them that their views are correct.
2. American news networks are so **partisan** that it makes no difference whether the president did something good or bad; CNN will always criticise, and Fox will always praise.
3. A **troll farm** posing as an African American support group for Donald Trump posted disinformation designed to affect the way African Americans voted in the election.
4. The leader of the opposition became a victim of **negative campaigning/mudslinging** when a campaign was organised to accuse him of supporting a terrorist group in the run-up to the general election.
5. My parents are so **blinkered**; they believe what they believe and refuse to listen to any opposing points of view.
6. Despite overwhelming evidence that humans are responsible for global warming, many senators quote **alternative facts** to suggest humans are not responsible.

Polarisation vocabulary comprehension questions

1. What might cause someone to become blinkered?
2. Are you partisan in any way?
3. Can you think of any examples of negative campaigning? Why do people resort to this?
4. Do you know anyone who lives in an echo chamber? Why are social media bubbles so dangerous?
5. Can you think of any examples of alternative facts? Why do people believe these?
6. What role have troll farms played in contributing to polarisation?

3. Video: How Our Politics Make Us Irrational

You are going to watch a video by TED Ed called "Do politics make us irrational?"

Watch the video here: <https://yourenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-polarisation/>

While you watch the video, answer the following questions:

Multiple choice

1. How many people took part in the mathematics experiment?
a) less than 1,000 b) 1,100 **c) more than 1,000**
2. What did participants have to do in the two questions in the test?
a) correlate data b) give their opinion on guns c) test skin cream
3. What predicted whether or not top mathematicians got the correct answer for the second question?
a) maths skills **b) political beliefs** c) data interpretation
4. What is partisanship?
a) a prejudice against a group **b) a bias towards a group** c) a stereotype against a group

Sentence completion

1. It is natural for humans to identify with **social groups**.
2. Humans are deeply driven to protect their **group identities**.
3. A problem occurs when a group's beliefs are at odds with **reality**.
4. Rather than perceive the world accurately, cognitive dissonance motivates people to prioritise maintaining a positive **relationship** with their group.

Short answer

1. What does allegiance to a political party allow people to create? **A political identity**
2. When facts are revised due to partisan beliefs, it can lead to policies not grounded in what? **Truth or reason**
3. Echo chambers deliver news and ideas from people with what? **Similar views**
4. What should you affirm if you are trying to persuade someone? **Their values**

4. Polarisation Conversation Questions

1. Who are some polarising leaders? Why do some leaders deliberately divide the population?
2. Which people, groups or organisations benefit from polarisation?
3. What effect does polarisation have on society and democracy?
4. How can polarisation undermine legal processes or election processes?
5. What role does social class, ethnicity, ideology, or religion play in polarisation? Can you think of any examples?
6. Does polarisation lead to an increase in extremism? Can you think of any examples?
7. Do you think polarisation could lead to civil war? Why or why not?
8. How can society heal the divides caused by polarisation? Will this ever be possible?

5. Polarisation Writing Task

Write about polarisation in your country. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- What the polarising issues in your country are.
- How the media or social media has contributed to this polarisation.
- How these divisions can be healed.

Alternative exam practice question:

Social media is the single biggest factor that explains the polarisation experienced in societies around the world today. To what extent do you agree or disagree?