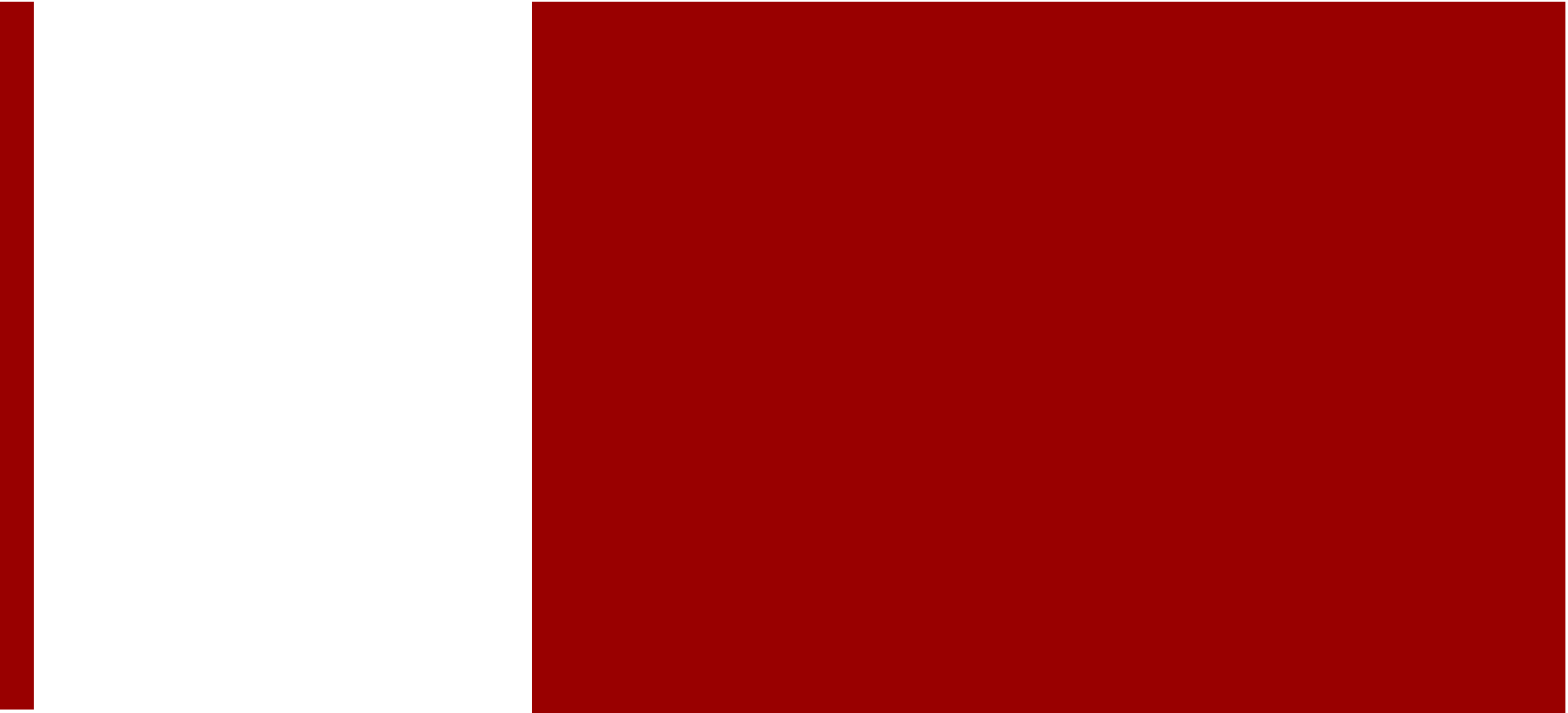




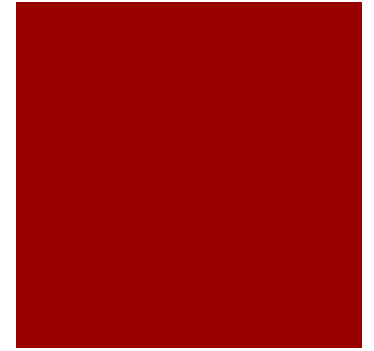
Everyday Argument in A Polarized World

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Opening Remarks

- 4 Week Course: There will be reminders and callbacks, but not repetition.
 - Today: Polarization and Argument being Hard
 - Next Week: Getting to Good Faith Argument
 - January 23rd: How should we treat Emotion?
 - January 30: Structures of Power and Argument

Quick Notes



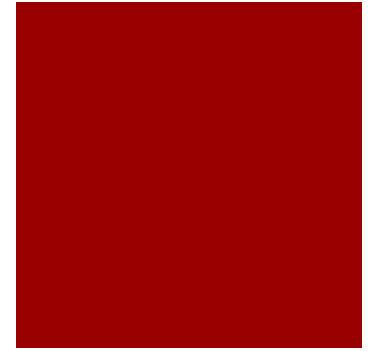
- There will be no readings or external assignments (nor will there be handouts), but you are more than welcome to take notes.
- I'll work to take questions as they come up but may ask you to wait for a few minutes as we complete a thought.
- In addition, I'll try to leave roughly 15 minutes for questions at the end of each session.
- If you are curious about something said or referenced, please feel free to email me at calvin.coker@louisville.edu

Question:

- What was the last argument you had, and did you win?



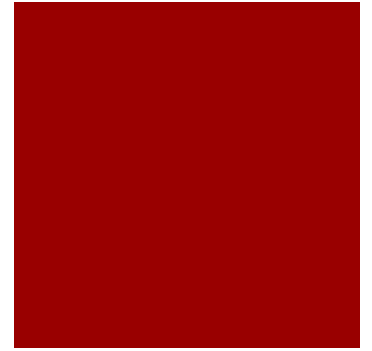
The Goal: Getting to Productive Argument

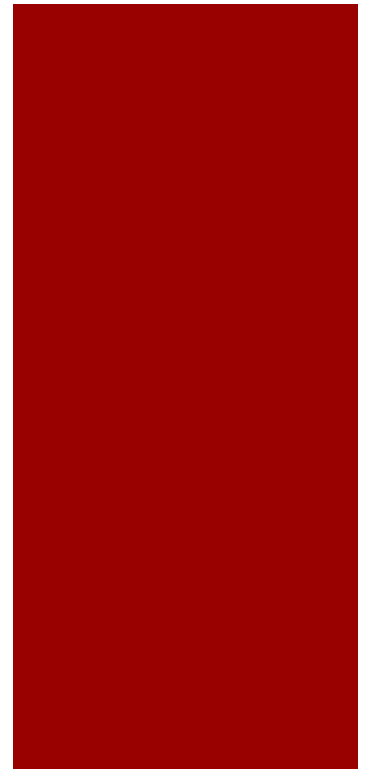


- Productive argument features:
 - Consent of those who are participating
 - Buy in to the eventual resolution of the object of disagreement (even if that isn't "compromise")
 - Willingness to change one's mind
 - Minimizing argument tactics which "end" the argument but don't solve the problem.

Animating Question:

- How does our current sociopolitical moment make argument way harder?





Affective Polarization

How did we get here?

Why does it matter for argument?

What is this?

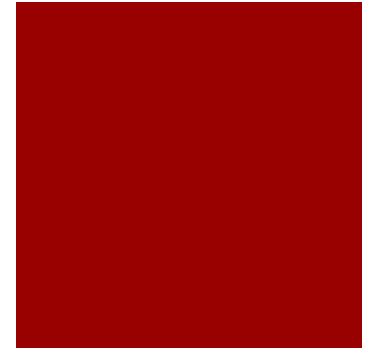
- Affective Polarization is “the gap between individuals’ positive feelings toward their own political party and negative feelings toward the opposing party” (Druckman & Levy, 2021).
- For example, December 2023 Pew Survey:
 - Self identified Liberal Democrats approved of Joe Biden more than moderate Democrats (66% vs. 57%)
 - While 77% of self identified Republicans strongly disapprove of Biden (84% vs. 64%, Conservative versus moderate Rep.)

How did we get here?

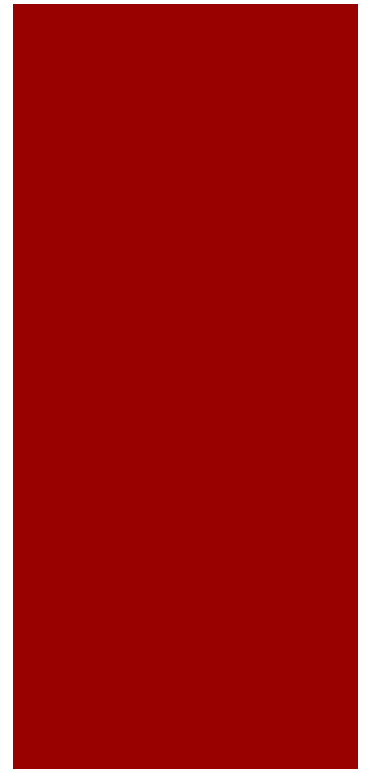
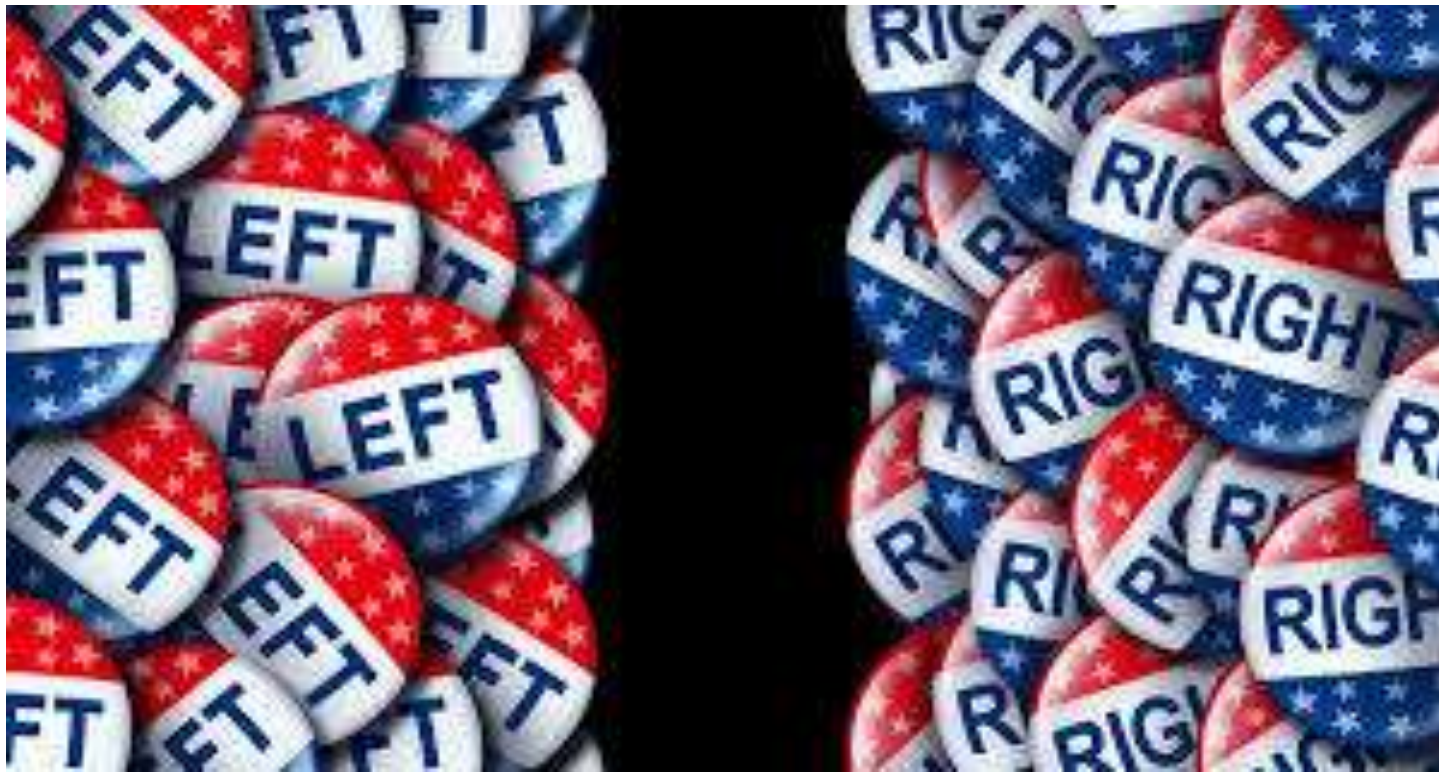
- Outrage journalism and political punditry.
- Politics is increasingly indexed to morality.
- Some candidates are *genuinely polarizing*.



How would this shape argument?



- Affective polarization gives us an imagined “other” which persists into the argument encounter.
- Affective polarization ensures the temperature of political discussions begins a bit higher than it rightfully should.
- Affective polarization colors our interpretation of the *motives* of opposing political actors or citizens
- Affective polarization alters the contours of acceptable and “trusted” evidence.



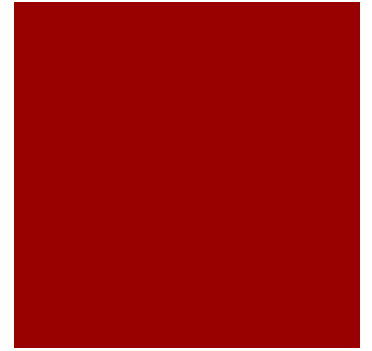
Ideological Polarization

How did we get here?

Why does it matter for argument?

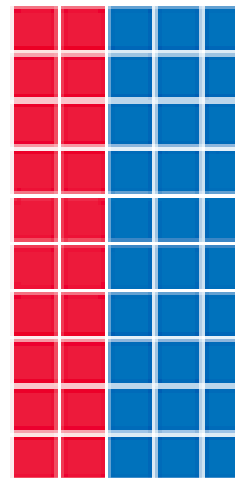
What is this?

- Ideological polarization is the difference in policy stances and priorities of both parties, and citizens.
- “A majority of Democrats as well as four in ten Republicans support banning high-capacity ammunition magazines and creating a federal database to track gun sales; nearly as many Republicans support banning assault-style weapons. But only 18 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaners feel gun violence is a major problem (versus 73 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaners).” (Klienfeld, 2023)

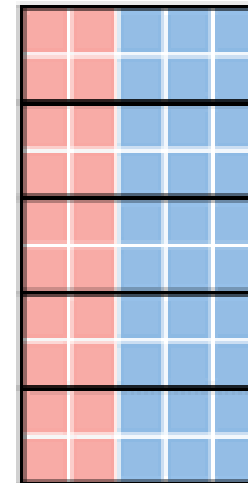


How did we get here?

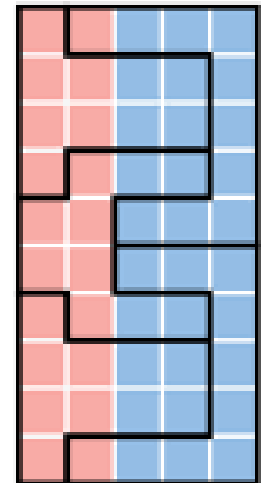
- Sorting hypothesis (people have gravitated towards the parties that better represent their interests)
- Structural hypothesis (gerrymandering, two party system, and incumbency bias)
- Clarity of policy differences between parties (no more 2000 elections)



50 PRECINCTS
60% BLUE
40% RED

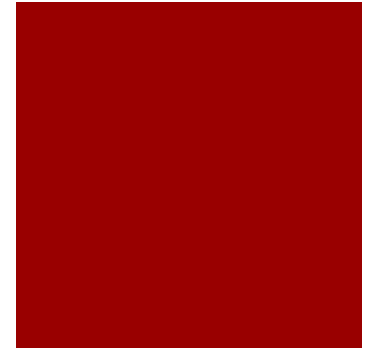


5 DISTRICTS
5 BLUE
0 RED
BLUE WINS



5 DISTRICTS
3 RED
2 BLUE
RED WINS

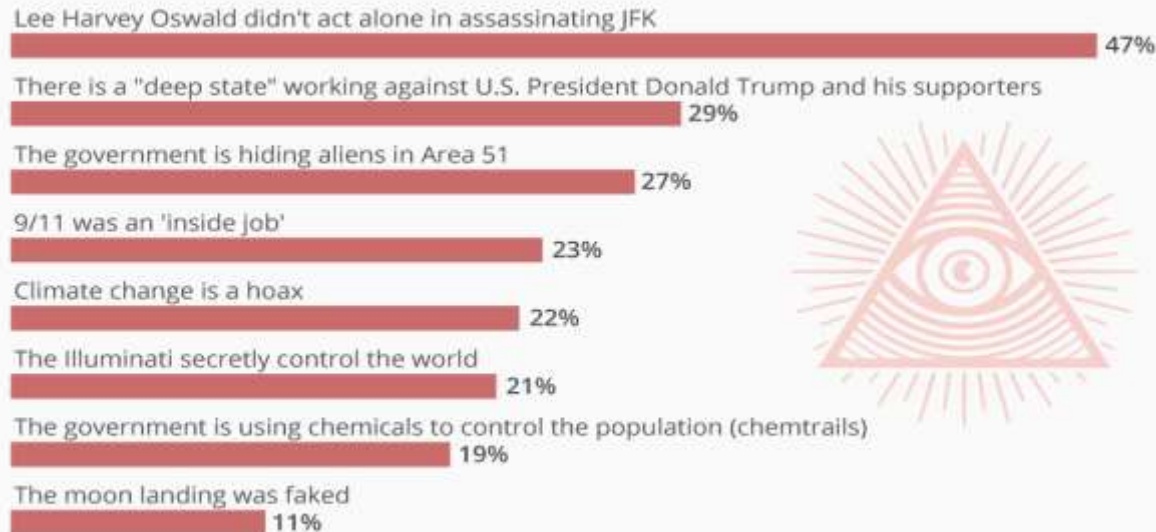
How would this shape argument?



- There is a disconnect between the way elites and citizens are ideologically polarized
 - Citizens are told the other side wants to do _____ which may be true of the *elites* but not the *voters*.
 - Politicians and journalists insist we *should* care about _____, and we filter our political beliefs through their insistence.
- People have *quite* different priorities and understandings of social, economic, and political problems

Belief in Conspiracy Theories in the United States

% of U.S. adults that say they 'somewhat' or 'strongly' believe the following conspiracy theories



n=1,220 U.S. adults. Conducted 15-16 January 2019.
Source: YouGov for Statista

YouGov statista

Conspiracy Theories

How did we get here?

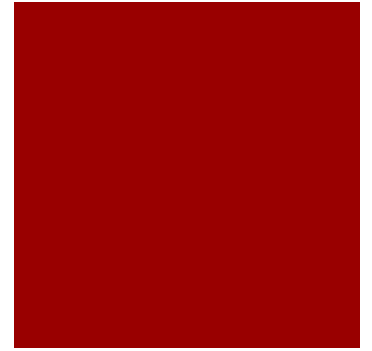
Why does it matter for argument?

How did we get here?



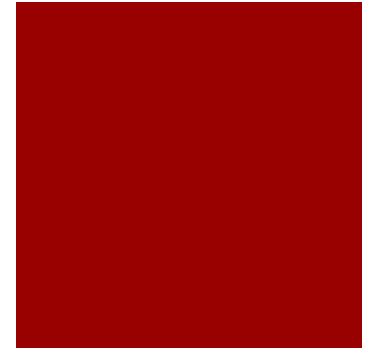
- Fringe media sources have political commentary, conspiracy bleeds into it.
- Social channels like YouTube and Facebook allow for frictionless spread (alongside communities and algorithmic support).
- Genuine frustration and disenfranchisement.

What would this shape argument?



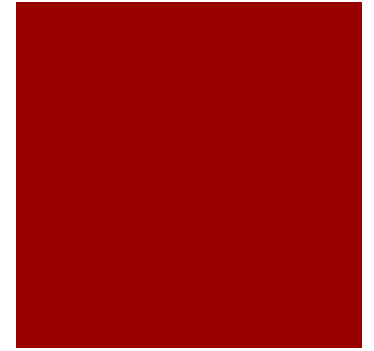
- Conspiracy alters the argumentative playing field on base level assumptions and “acceptable” evidence.
- Conspiracy theories warp our priorities and our media consumption in ways that are unintelligible to outside sources.

So what are we supposed to do?



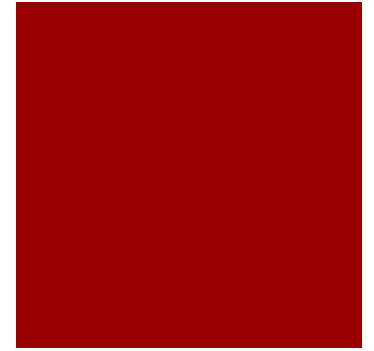
- Every class, we will isolate strategies which intersect with some of the problems highlighted for argument.
- There is no cure all, no perfect training, no uniform way to effect change. But there are habits and viewpoints that we adopt.
- Not every problem is solvable with argument, but argument will be a way to figure that out.

Base Level Strategies



- Objectivity is a goal, not a state.
- The more assumptions you make in an argument setting, the worse off you will tend to be.
- Not everyone is worth your time. You deserve to be engaged in good faith, and so too do the people you engage.
- Avoid thinking you are "entitled" to your own opinion.

Subsequent Days:



- How to cut against your worst tendencies and navigate towards good faith argumentation. (January 16th)
- How to treat emotion in argument, both your own and your conversation partners. (January 23rd)
- How to minimize the impacts of social structures which make arguments way harder. (January 30th)