# Is this polarization or just ordinary conflict?

| Dimension | Ordinary conflict dynamic | Polarized conflict dynamic |
|---|---|---|
| Characterization of problems | Problems are understood with complexity, nuance; shades of grey; multiple positions are seen to be possible | Problems are over-simplified, reduced to two sides, often opposites - right vs wrong, true vs false, good vs. evil – such that positions appear irreconcilable |
| Orientation to conflict | We can face the conflict; difficult topics & people are manageable | We avoid the conflict by avoiding certain topics and people; the stakes in a conflict are seen as very high |
| Emotional engagement in conflict | Minimal to moderate emotional engagement around differences and conflict | Intense emotional engagement around differences and conflict |
| Behavioural change in response to conflict | No change or only temporary change in our behavioural patterns and practices | We may boycott establishments; "cancel" people |
| Regard for different ideas & opinions | We regard differences in ideas/opinions with tolerance, openness, intellectual humility | We regard differences in ideas/opinions with intolerance, close-mindedness, derision, or a sense of superiority |
| Relationship to our own beliefs | We are willing to consider new or challenging information that might end up modifying our beliefs | We hold our beliefs tightly, and feel defensive when presented with new or challenging information |
| Stance toward others who think differently | Curious, inquiring, willing to contemplate others' beliefs | Dismissive, judgmental, even contemptuous, in regard to others' beliefs ("I'm right and you're an idiot!") |
| Effects of disagreement on relationships | We can agree to disagree; it does not significantly interfere with or threaten our relationships | We struggle to maintain relationships across the divide created by our disagreement(s) |
| Alliances (e.g., on a City Council) | Alliances form differently around different issues | Alliances form predictably as "sides" or teams; people may be reluctant to hold beliefs different from the team "slate" |
| Relationship of ideas to our identity | Our ideas can be separated from our identities | Our ideas have become tightly coupled to our identities |
| Doubt & discipline (in relation to the orthodox view) | Doubts may be expressed; we do not feel a need to suppress them to protect our belonging in the group | Doubts may be suppressed; we do not feel safe to express them as our belonging in the group may be jeopardized |

**Resources:**

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Mason, L. (2018). Ideologues without issues: The polarizing consequences of ideological identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 82*, p. 866–887.
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