

Global Dilemma: Polarization
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We human beings have no global culture to which everyone agrees. We have been a polarized lot from the beginning of civilization (birth of cities). Our earlier ancestors, however, had little choice but to agree with the rules that enabled clans of hunter-gatherers to survive.

In the first civilizations, complex institutions required different talents. Some people were leaders, initially people of special talents. Priests and priestesses were specialists in communicating with the gods. The brave and fierce became the protectors, leaders and soldiers. Others with seagoing skills became merchants and, off season, pirates.

The heavy labor that a city-state needed was provided by slaves (and de facto slaves), wives and servants. Male heavy labor was performed by agricultural workers, irrigation trench diggers, and construction, including grandiose monuments to the rulers. Some work was so odious that only forced labor could do it (mining, rowers of seagoing vessels, and prostitution).

Class systems emerged, in which occupants tried to hand down the authority to their children. The caste system in India was (and is) the most extreme variation of this, in which status and trades are exclusively handed down to the children. The problem with such a rigid system, however, is the variability of human talents. Not every ruler's children are capable rulers, nor are other specializations amenable to inherit. Class systems seem to have worked best, with talented individuals having the opportunity to join a class into which they were not born.

Like all human social systems, class systems only survived as long as those who obeyed them were relatively satisfied. When class systems are no longer respected, societies have polarization and most often revolutions, with new players rising to rule. China's imperial system, for example, worked until the leader showed himself unable to protect the society from an enemy, a natural disaster, or excessive cruelty. The Chinese people would declare that the emperor had "lost the mandate of heaven" and both he and his family would be replaced and slaughtered.

Historic patterns show long periods of obedience to the ruling system until conditions grow so dire that the lower classes rebel. It is rare that the lowest laboring classes succeed in revolting. They have the numbers, but not the weapons. Revolutions almost always come from the middle or lower ruling class. A successful revolution does not always rely on superior muscle; it is often superior brains, and the merchant class can be very effective when united.

Today's global polarization falls into two rival political systems: the most ancient one of rule of force (dictatorships) and the newer one of rule of law (participatory governance).

Other issues that makes united governance difficult are: historic bias (women, racial differences, and religious differences). Gender and skin color are not possible to change; but religion and belief systems are. The belief in the inferiority of any of these groups is very difficult to uproot. The modern developed world with participatory governments (voting) is doing better in ending unjust bias than the dictatorships and religiously conservative societies.

The most difficult polarizing issue today is between the educated and rational in competition with the superstitious, non-rational, and believers in conspiracy. A key element here is a growing scorn for rationality and the scientific method by those who disbelieve any facts presented by formerly trusted rational institutions: medicine, school systems, and elected governments.

In the past, the majority of the world fell into the irrational category and leaders scorned and ignored them. But democracies depend on the majority sharing the common beliefs provided by our schools, our press, and our governments. The formerly ignored underbelly now have power to vote. The rational system is in danger.

However, there is hope. The irrational in our modern societies are a minority. They create chaos through violence and life choices that pose potential danger to the rest of us (such as the anti-vaccine conspiracy). Their decisions endanger their own survival, something that even their most violent members cannot prevent.

Stupidity and violence have a short shelf life but a long life in prison. Ignorance

and the Big Lie eventually lose.

682 words

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