



Navigating the Partisan Divide: Best Practices for Building Strong, Resilient Citizens in the Era of Extreme Political Polarization

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Agenda

Introduction of Speakers

Purpose of the Research

Statement of the Problem

Literature Review

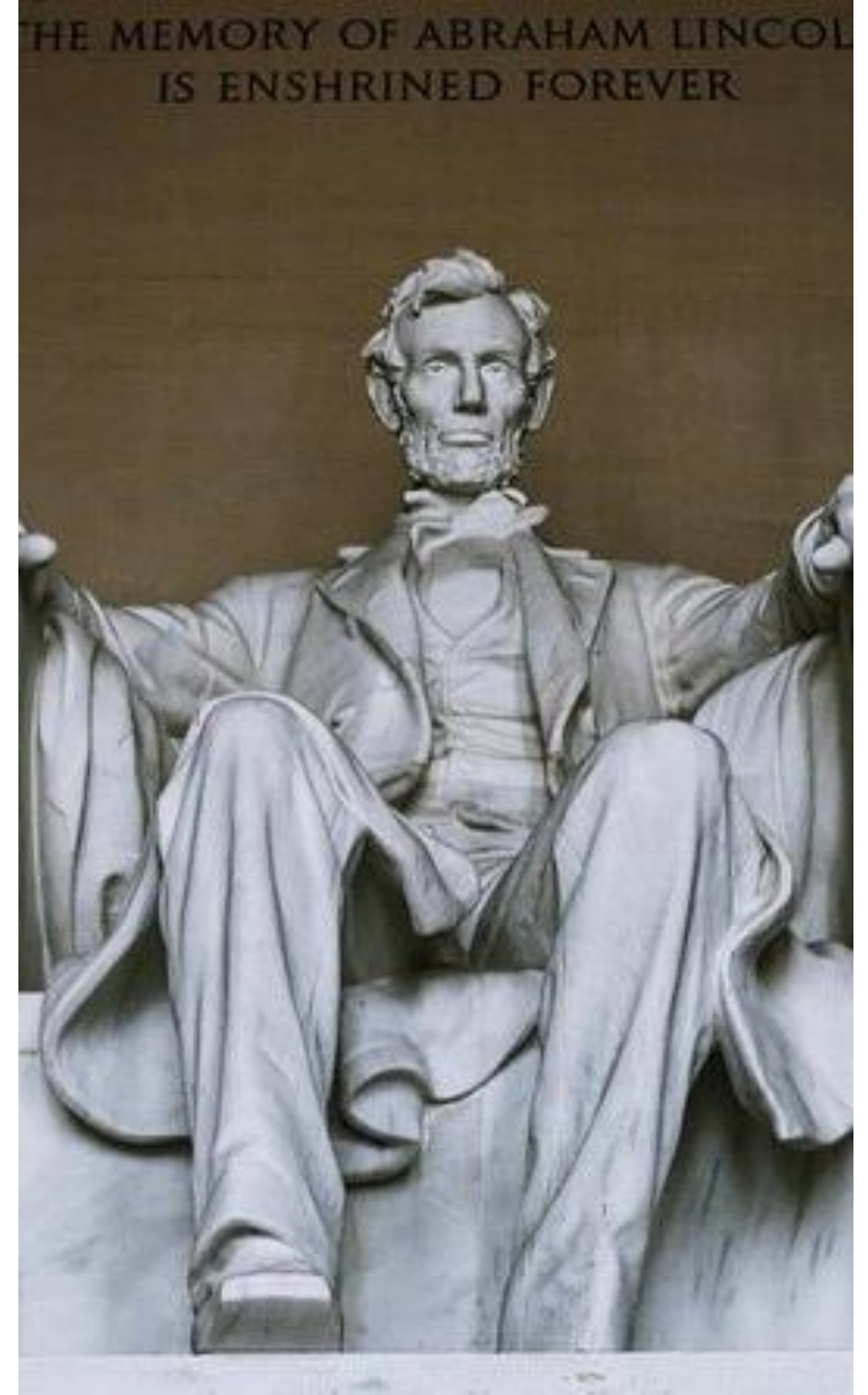
Methodology

Implications

Q&A

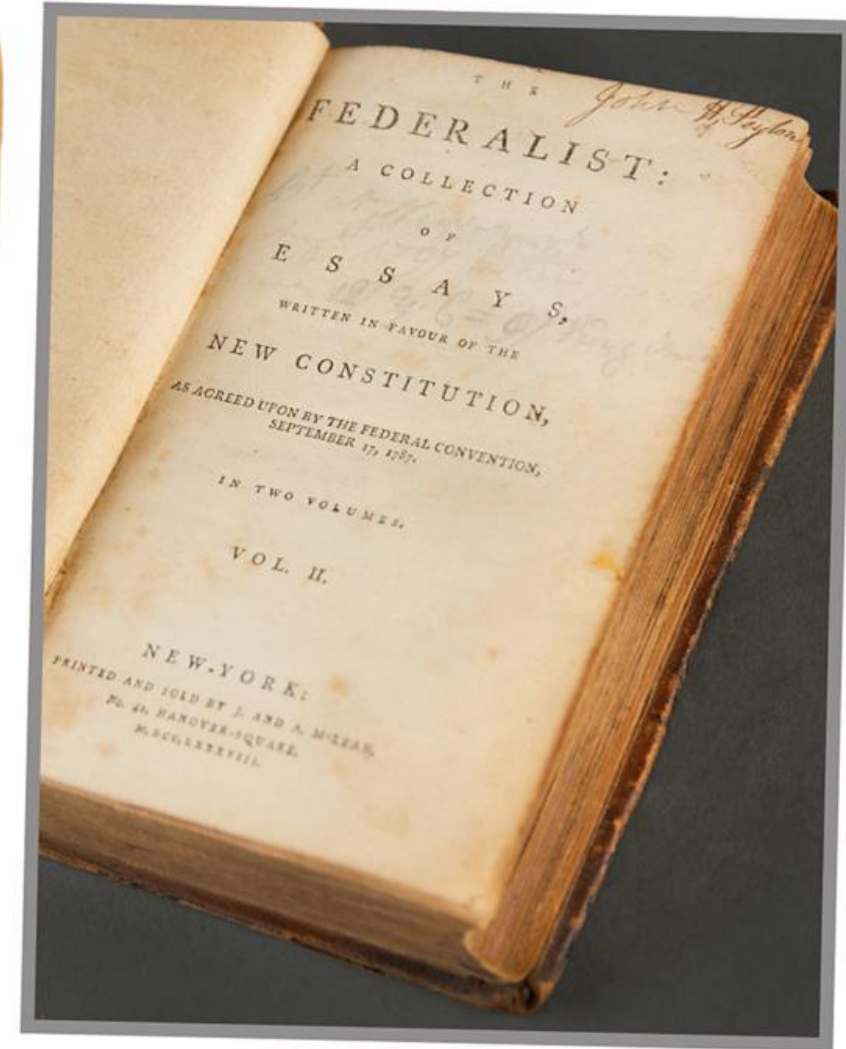
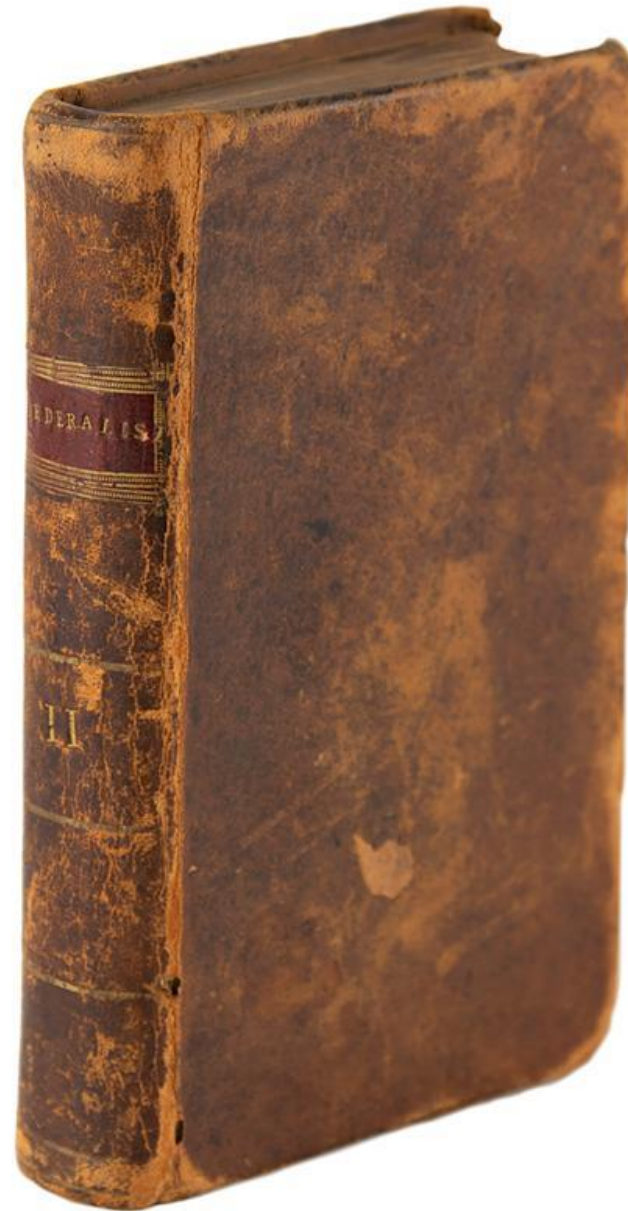
Introduction

- The United States was founded on democratic principles, but increasing polarization, divisiveness, and declining civic engagement have strained the effectiveness of its political system.
- Although party polarization has long existed within America's two-party system, the 2016 election of Donald Trump marked a significant turning point that intensified partisan divisions and reshaped political norms.
- Trump's unconventional leadership style and the rise of nationalist movements deepened ideological conflicts, normalized extreme partisanship, and heightened social and political tensions.
- Ongoing governmental gridlock, including historic shutdowns and legislative failures, underscores the urgent need to understand the psychological impacts of political polarization and develop supportive frameworks to help citizens cope.

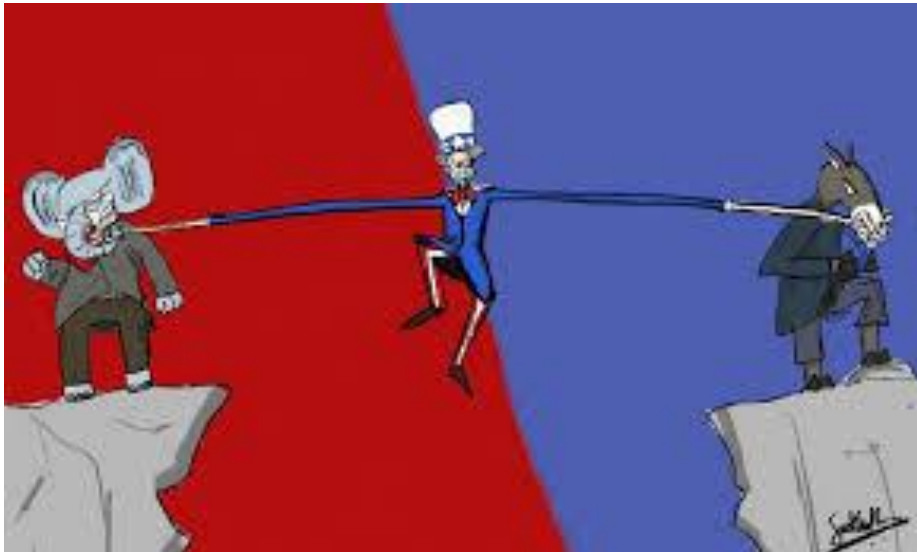


Historian Roots of Polarization

In Federalist No. 10, James Madison warned that factions – now known as political parties – would divide government and undermine effective governance, a concern that remains relevant amid today's polarized and digital misinformation.



Navigating Political Polarization



Political Knowledge = Democratic Strength

- An informed citizenry sustains a healthy democracy.
- Political knowledge empowers participation, accountability, and resistance to misinformation.
- Parties are tools to organize democracy — not to place party over people.

The Cost of Affective Polarization

- Growing distrust between **Democratic Party** and **Republican Party** fuels emotional division.
- Reduced cooperation leads to gridlock and ineffective governance.
- Political identity has become personal identity.

Navigating Political Polarization

- **Psychological Impact**
- Increased awareness can heighten stress and frustration.
- Confirmation bias reinforces division and weakens compromise.
- Extremes grow louder as the political center weakens.
- **Moving Forward**
- Expand access to civic and media education.
- Uphold freedoms rooted in the **Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution, and First Amendment to the United States Constitution.**
- Promote respect, inclusion, and community-based dialogue.
- Prioritize democracy over party loyalty.



Psychological & Emotional Impact of Polarization

Core Emotional Intelligence Skills

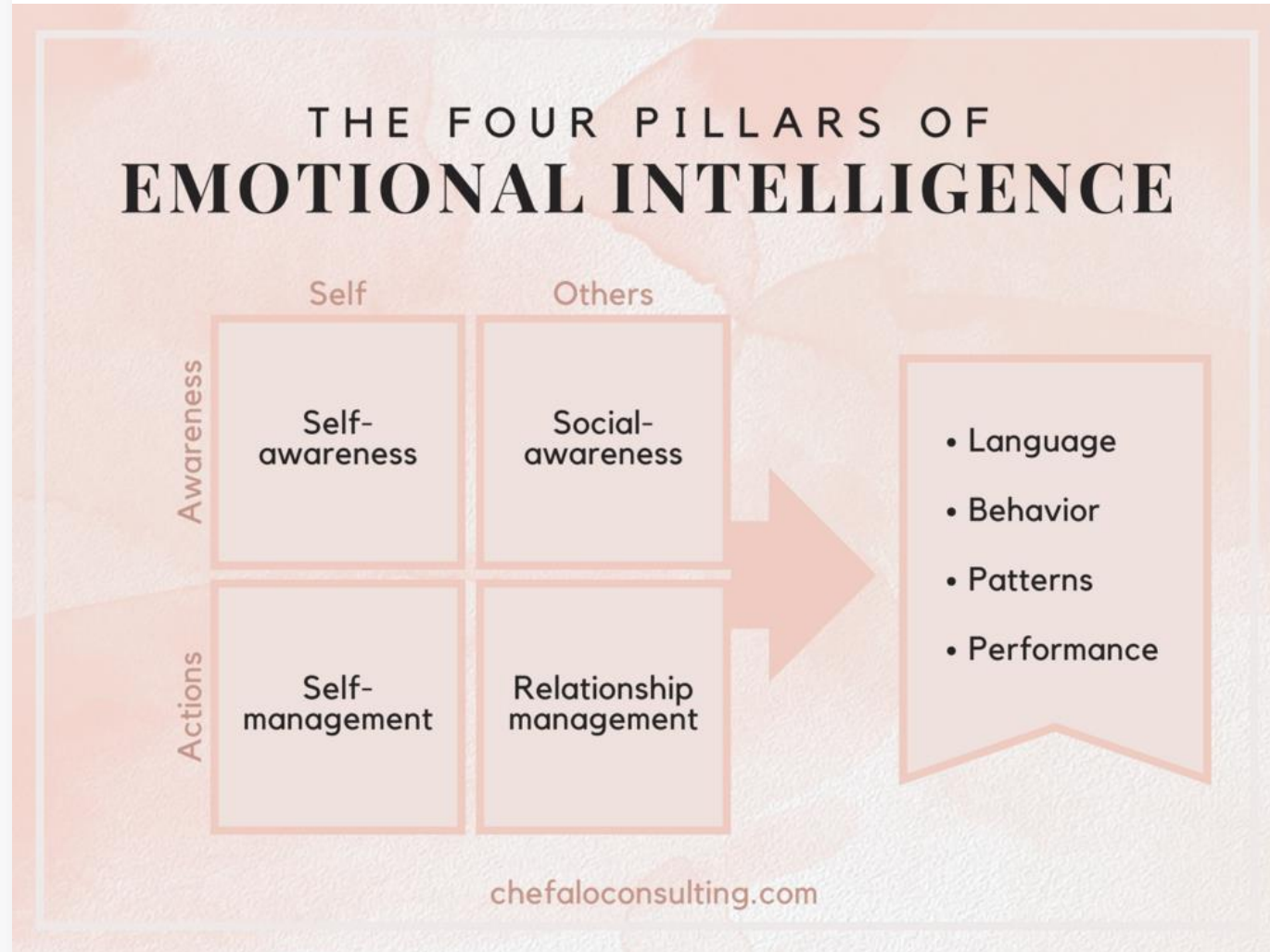
- **Personal Competence:** self-awareness & self-regulation
- **Social Competence:** empathy & relationship management
- EQ can be strengthened with intentional practice.

Where Civics Education Falls Short

- Teaches structure of U.S. government and voting process.
- Often omits:
 - Media bias evaluation
 - Civil, evidence-based debate practice
 - Influence of money & lobbying
 - Skills for collective political action

Why EQ Matters in Democracy

- Political knowledge is accessible — but emotional skills guide how we use it.
- EQ helps manage political stress, disagreement, and polarization.
- Without emotional intelligence, citizens may feel overwhelmed, reactive, or powerless.



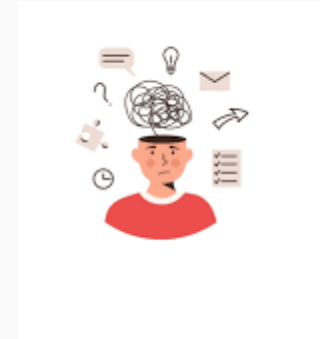
Psychological & Emotional Impact of Polarization



Fatigue & Hopelessness



Anxiety with Political Discussions



Emotional Triggers



Increased Irritability



News Fixation & Rumination



Doom Scrolling

Emotional Triggers in Political Discourse

Headlines & Emotional Reactivity

- Media often prioritizes **shock value** over substance.
- Facts are neutral — *interpretations are not*.
- Emotional reactions often stem from identity, fear, or anger.

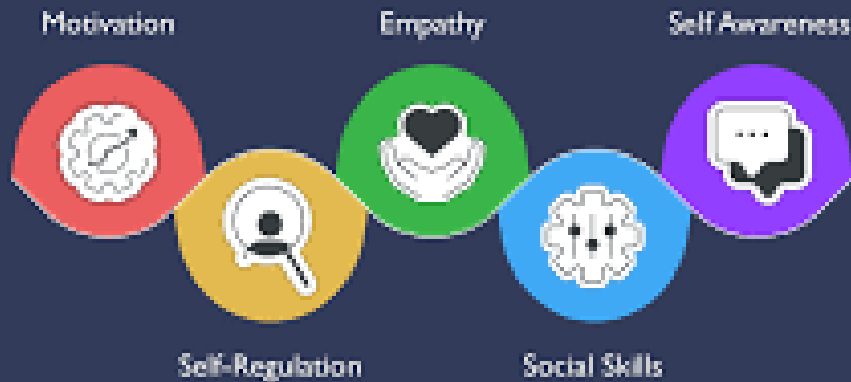
Emotional Intelligence in Politics

- EQ supports (but does not replace) factual knowledge.
- Encourages **self-awareness**: *Why does this trigger me?*
- Strengthens self-regulation → reduces burnout & cynicism.

Empathy as a De-Escalation Tool

- Counters “us vs. them” thinking.
- Reduces defensiveness and hostility.
- Makes dialogue and compromise more possible.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)



Navigating Civic Engagement

Power of Grassroots Movements

- Community-driven activism creates policy change.
- The **Civil Rights Movement** → landmark civil rights legislation.
- The **Women's Suffrage Movement** → expanded voting rights nationwide.
- Collective action drives democratic progress.

Political Awareness = Civic Strength

- Stay informed through **multiple verified sources**.
- Practice media literacy & critical thinking.
- Awareness encourages voting, advocacy, and engagement.

Key Idea

What if we built grassroots movements grounded in **emotional intelligence and resilience** to reduce polarization?



Navigating Identity Politics

Rise of Partisan Polarization

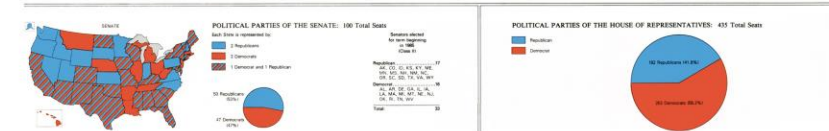
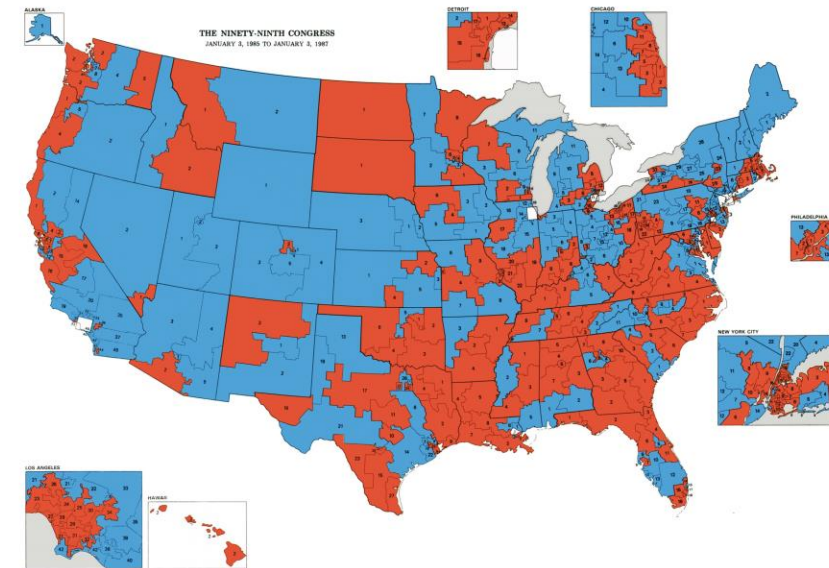
- People increasingly favor their party and distrust the other.
- Loyalty to party can override democratic principles.
- Emotional division reshapes political behavior.

The Role of Political Knowledge

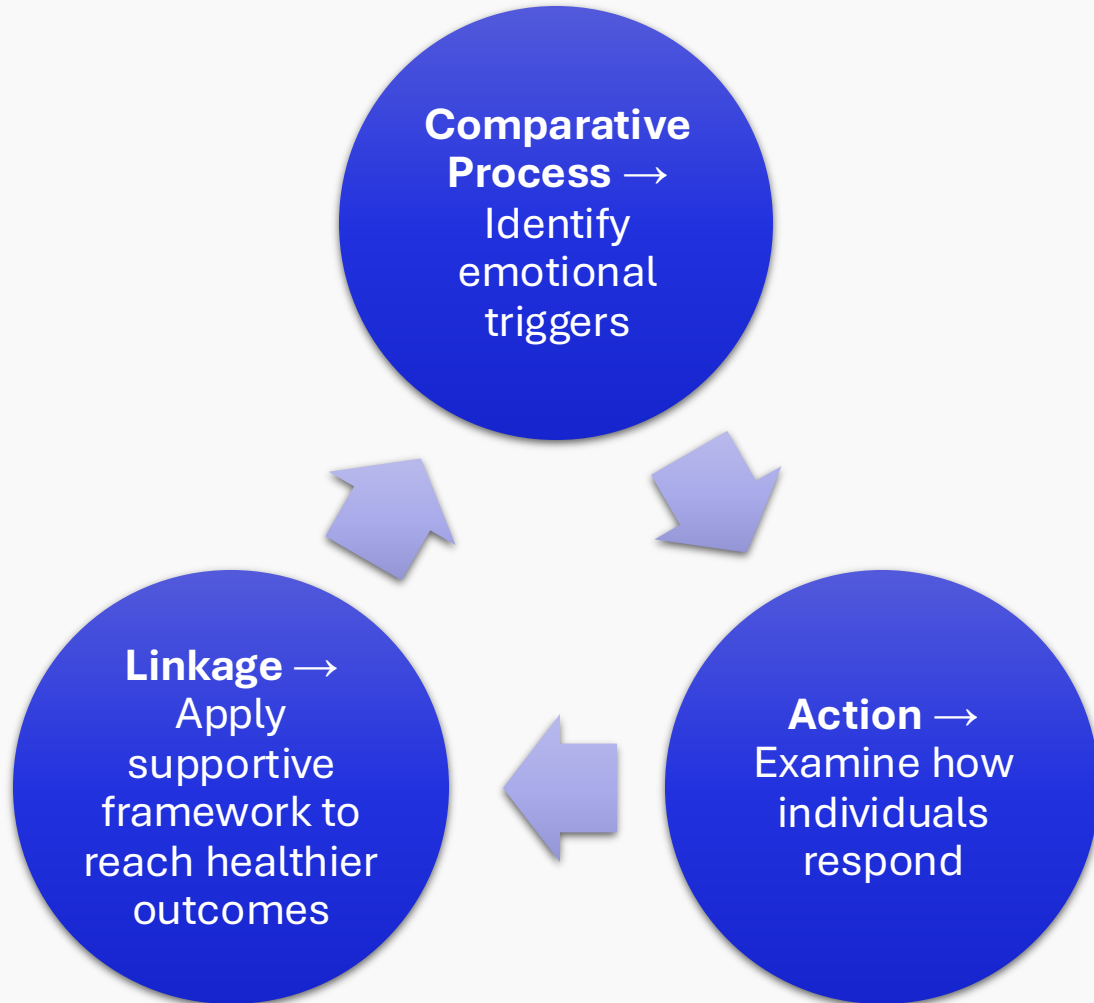
- Higher knowledge → independent policy evaluation.
- Lower knowledge → reliance on party identity cues.

Reducing Anti-Democratic Effects

- Correct misperceptions about the “other side.”
- Combine informational campaigns with emotional health frameworks.
- Develop a healthier political identity rooted in democratic values.



Methodology: Best-Practice Approach



Research Question:

What psychological challenges arise from political polarization, and what frameworks help individuals cope?

- 1. Comparative Process** → Identify emotional triggers
- 2. Action** → Examine how individuals respond
- 3. Linkage** → Apply supportive framework to reach healthier outcomes

Why This Approach?

- Political media evokes **fear, anger, outrage**.
- Recognizing emotional triggers reduces vulnerability to sensationalism.
- Connects emotional reactions to evidence-based coping strategies.

Best-Practice Model (Bretschneider, 2004)

Methodology: Best-Practice Approach



Key Findings: Three Focus Areas

1 Misinformation → Affective Polarization

- Amplifies fear and anger
- Undermines institutional trust
- Encourages “us vs. them” thinking

2 Low Democratic Participation → Echo Chambers

- Limits exposure to diverse perspectives
- Increases reliance on narrow information sources
- Allows misinformation to spread unchecked

3 Low Emotional Intelligence → Escalation

- Greater emotional reactivity
- Reduced empathy & openness
- Increased susceptibility to identity-threatening content

Psychological Challenges & Supportive Frameworks

<u>Psychological Challenges</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Supportive Framework</u>
Focus Area 1: Misinformation	Developing critical thinking skills using tools and/or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Competence • Cognitive Reframing
Focus Area 2: Lack of Democratic Participation	Develop coping strategies, emotional regulation, and boundary-setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Competence • Emotional Regulation • Cognitive Reframing
Focus Area 3: Low Emotional Intelligence	Help develop emotional resilience using tools or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Regulation

Supportive Frameworks for Navigating Polarization

Personal Competence

- Is the ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies, focusing inward rather than on social interactions
- It comprises self awareness (recognizing emotions) and self-management (controlling impulses and adapting) allowing individuals to navigate personal decisions effectively

Emotional Regulation

- Is the ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.
- It may involve behaviors like rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or anxiety, hiding visible signs of sadness or fear, or focusing on reasons to feel happy or calm

Cognitive Reframing

- The psychological technique of identifying, challenging and restructuring irrational or negative thoughts into more balanced, constructive perspectives
- It is a core emotional regulation skill that alters the “frame” of a situation to reduce distress, manage emotions and foster resilience.

Q & A

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