



Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide

By Cass R. Sunstein

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Why do people become extremists? What makes people become so dismissive of opposing views? Why is political and cultural polarization so pervasive in America?

In *Going to Extremes*, renowned legal scholar and best-selling author Cass R. Sunstein offers startling insights into why and when people gravitate toward extremism. Sunstein marshals a wealth of evidence that shows that when like-minded people gather in groups, they tend to become more extreme in their views than they were before. Thus when liberals group get together to debate climate change, they end up more alarmed about climate change, while conservatives brought together to discuss same-sex unions become more set against same-sex unions. In courtrooms, radio stations, and chatrooms, enclaves of like-minded people are breeding ground for extreme movements. Indeed, Sunstein shows that a good way to create an extremist group, or a cult of any kind, is to separate members from the rest of society, either physically or psychologically. Sunstein's findings help to explain such diverse phenomena as political outrage on the Internet, unanticipated "blockbusters" in the film and music industry, the success of the disability rights movement, ethnic conflict in Iraq and former Yugoslavia, and Islamic terrorism.

Providing a wealth of real-world examples--sometimes entertaining, sometimes alarming--Sunstein offers a fresh explanation of why partisanship has become so bitter and debate so rancorous in America and abroad.

Praise for the hardcover:

"A path-breaking exploration of the perils and possibilities created by polarization among the like-minded."

--Kathleen Hall Jamieson, co-author of *unSpun* and *Echo Chamber*

"Poses a powerful challenge to anyone concerned with the future of our democracy. He reveals the dark side to our cherished freedoms of thought, expression and participation. Initiates an urgent dialogue which any thoughtful citizen should be interested in."

--James S. Fishkin, author of *When the People Speak*

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Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide By Cass R. Sunstein Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #747083 in Books
- Published on: 2011-03-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 5.40" h x .60" w x 8.20" l, .48 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 208 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Harvard law professor Sunstein (*Radicals in Robes*) explores the nature of group decision making, largely expounding on his contention that homogenous groups of like-minded people tend to adopt more extreme positions than groups with a diversity of opinions. As in his previous, coauthored book, *Nudge*, in which he argued that small incentives can subtly push people toward making better decisions, Sunstein marshals empirical evidence in aid of his argument, which largely focuses on politics and public policy. As President Obama's nominee to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Sunstein's ideas about such matters have now attained a level of national importance, but with the exception of a few notable potshots at the decision making in George W. Bush's White House, the book is not ideological and displays a keen interest in diverse areas ranging from the mindset that leads to genocide to how conspiracy theories form and are propagated. Interestingly, and most helpfully, Sunstein returns repeatedly to the recruitment and decision-making processes of Islamic terrorists, finding in these groups the purest example of the radicalizing echo chamber effect that the book warns against. (May)

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Review

"Cass Sunstein has written *Going to Extremes* for those confounded by a country that remains stubbornly polarized. In clear, precise language, he explains that extremism is a consequence of the company we keep. He challenges not only what we think, but how we come to our beliefs, and he demonstrates that diversity of thought is the one ingredient necessary for both a healthy state and a working democracy." --Bill Bishop, author of *The Big Sort*

"A path-breaking exploration of the perils and possibilities created by polarization among the like-minded."--Kathleen Hall Jamieson, co-author of *unSpun and Echo Chamber*

"Sunstein's book poses a powerful challenge to anyone concerned with the future of our democracy. He reveals the dark side to our cherished freedoms of thought, expression and participation. New strategies and new designs are required to make political discussion the constructive force our ideals prescribe. His book initiates an urgent dialogue which any thoughtful citizen should be interested in." --James S. Fishkin, author of *When the People Speak*

"Harvard law professor Sunstein (*Radicals in Robes*) explores the nature of group decision making, largely expounding on his contention that homogenous groups of like-minded people tend to adopt more extreme positions than groups with a diversity of opinions.... As President Obama's nominee to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Sunstein's ideas...[have] attained a level of national importance."--*Publishers Weekly*

"Cass Sunstein's work and theories have never been more important."--*Seed*

"meant to unsettle us in the way his earlier work did"--*Slate*

"An excellent study of the conditions that drive events like the financial crisis...a valuable survey of research pertinent to managers in various areas of finance, and it suggests a range of practical, utilizable approaches to improving decision-making processes."--*The Investment Professional*

"A fun book to read...Sunstein is a brilliant writer, learned and clever."--*Contemporary Sociology*

About the Author

Cass R. Sunstein is the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in the Obama Administration and the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law at Harvard University. He is the author of many books, including the New York Times best-seller *Nudge* (with Richard Thaler), *Infotopia*, *Republic 2.0*, *Worst-Case Scenarios*, *Radicals in Robes*, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, and *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech*.

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