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The Other Divide

There is little doubt that increasing polarization over the last decade has transformed the American political landscape. In *The Other Divide*, Yanna Krupnikov and John Barry Ryan challenge the nature and extent of that polarization. They find that more than party, Americans are divided by involvement in politics. On one side is a group of Americans who are deeply involved in politics and very expressive about their political views; on the other side is a group much less involved in day-to-day political outcomes. While scholars and journalists have assumed that those who are most vocal about their political views are representative of America at large, they are in fact a relatively small group whose voices are amplified by the media. By considering the political differences between the deeply involved and the rest of the American public, Krupnikov and Ryan present a broader picture of the American electorate than the one that often appears in the news.

Yanna Krupnikov is Professor of Political Science at Stony Brook University. She is the co-author (with Samara Klar) of *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction*, which has won three APSA section awards. Her research has appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN and the Hidden Brain podcast.

John Barry Ryan is Associate Professor of Political Science at Stony Brook University. He is the co-author (with T.K. Ahn and Robert Heckfeldt) of *Experts, Activists, and Democratic Politics: Are Electorates Self-Educating?* His research has appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN and the Hidden Brain podcast.

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Polarization and Disengagement in American Politics

YANNA KRUPNIKOV

Stony Brook University

JOHN BARRY RYAN

Stony Brook University



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Preface and Acknowledgments

During one of our early conversations about this project, Yanna said this book should be like *Freaks and Geeks* – the turn of the century, high school dramedy created by Paul Feig and Judd Apatow that Yanna has never seen. She has gleaned, however, that the program showed high school from a different perspective than other high school shows that center on the cool kids, the athletes, and the cheerleaders. While those shows were supposed to be about people for whom the teenage years might be a high point of their lives, *Freaks and Geeks* was about students who are generally uncomfortable with high school and how they relate to those other “cooler” kids. In theory, more people should recognize a part of themselves in *Freaks and Geeks* than in *Beverly Hills*, 90210.

Similarly, this book is not about politicians or their loudest supporters and detractors on social media. At the same time, we do not pretend those people do not exist and that those people are not important. Rather, our hope is that people at all levels of political engagement could read some of the quotes in it and say, “I understand where this person is coming from” even if at other points they read survey results that they cannot believe. Our goal was to present a broader picture of the American electorate than the one that often appears in the news.

If we succeeded in this goal in any way, we did so with the assistance of many people, some of whom may not even have known we were writing this book. As we debated over the book’s contents, we would each invoke our mentors Bob Huckfeldt, Skip Lupia, and Nick Valentino knowing that mentions of these scholars would be especially persuasive. We are also tremendously grateful to Michael Boerner, the Stony Brook political science department business administrator; without the help of the best administrator in academia, this whole project would not have been possible.

We are tremendously thankful to those who took the time to read various drafts of the chapters in this book: Elizabeth Connors, Jessica Feezell, Eitan Hersh, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Matt Pietryka, and Stuart

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Finally, we want to thank the journalists we were fortunate to interview, who are quoted in Chapter 8. Although they remain anonymous, we sincerely thank them for their time and for broadening our perspective.

Of course, we must also thank Cambridge University Press for this opportunity. Robert Dreesen first expressed interest in this idea. We are especially grateful to Sara Dосkow, the editor for this project, who made this book possible – we are fortunate to get the opportunity to work with her. We would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of our prospectus and early writing whose constructive, supportive feedback influenced how we completed the project.

As we (thought we) were finishing this project, the world was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many things, the final product was shaped by the pandemic, and the completion of it was delayed as a result. Without the efforts of the wonderful staff at Stony Brook Child Care, we may still be working on this book. It is not possible to say enough about all they did to remain open in order to take care of the children of the employees and students of Stony Brook University and Stony Brook University Hospital.

We turn now to the delicate task of thanking pets. We are thankful to (and miss) Penny, the cat we had at the beginning of the project, and to Toast and Jackie Daytona, the cats who used to live at a PetSmart and live here now. And many of the friends we have already thanked know that Sebastian is one of the great dogs of our time.

Finally, we obviously owe a great debt to our families. Our parents – Svetlana, Vulf, Jeannette, and John – served as an example of hard work and sacrifice. We are also grateful to our grandparents. Our daughter serves as an inspiration and remains the most important collaborative work of our lives.

We are lucky people who have benefited so much from the sacrifices of others.