Tribalism, the tendency to emotionally bond with your party and dislike the other, is growing in American politics. For this volume of the Forum the papers explore the nature and sources of this tribalism.

The divides in American politics are evident in policy and place differences. Alan I Abramowitz uses data from the 2020 NES survey and finds consistent policy differences between liberals and conservatives and that these differences strongly affect evaluations of party candidates. Suzanne B. Mettler shifts the focus to rural – urban differences and finds a steadily growing partisan split between rural and urban areas, in all regions of the nation. These differences culminate in a sense that the other side poses a threat to the values and way of life of partisans. As John R. Hibbing explains it, it is insiders preserving society versus outsiders who accept diversity and are seen as a threat to existing norms in doing so. Steven W. Webster reviews how political elites find it useful to exploit these differences by using Twitter to try to create anger among their base toward the opposing party. Ian Reifowitz reviews a particularly important person, Rush Limbaugh, and his role in expressing and mobilizing white anxiety about social change.

Although the evidence of increasing partisan divides is clear, there is still much that is not clear as to the basis of partisanship. A fundamental issue is the increasing role of partisan identity: what is it and what creates it. Alexa Bankert provides an overview of how this research has developed and what are the central issues. In the last two decades the argument has emerged that tribalism is a product of increasingly negative views of the opposing party, rather than support for one’s own party. Yphtach Lelkes argues that neither the concept nor the data supporting that argument are as clear as many presume. David E. Campbell explores the role of religious differences and finds that the situation is more complicated than press reports suggest. One of the primary explanations offered for tribalism is that some people are experiencing declining economic fortunes and others are not and that is dividing people. Diana C. Mutz reviews the data on this and finds little evidence for that explanation.

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