Political psychology: Democrats and Republicans exist on polarized extremes

[The United States], though politically fractious since its founding, is more polarized than ever, the rhetoric more inflammatory, the rage more likely to curdle into hate. It’s ugly out there.

As the 2024 primary season revs up, and with the political stakes this year extraordinarily high, voters are both polarized and hardly budging. Pundits expect another close election that’s a repeat of 2020. There’s not a lot of wobble on either left or right.

Social scientists have taken note of these hardening political divisions, pumping out academic articles and books that add data to what appears to be a steady rise in tribalism.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter. SIGN UP

The tendency to form tightly knit groups has roots in evolution, according to experts in political psychology. Humans evolved in a challenging world of limited resources in which survival required cooperation — and identifying the rivals, the competitors for those resources.

“The evolution of cooperation required out-group hatred, which is really sad,” said Nicholas Christakis, a Yale sociologist and author of “Blueprint: The Evolutionary Origins of a Good Society.”

This is just as true on today’s political stage. There are two major parties, and their contests are viewed as zero-sum outcomes. Win or lose. The presidency is the ultimate example: There are no consolation prizes for the loser.

This is an excerpt. Read the full article here