

Discussion Guide

When Ignorance Governs | Stephen M. Fry

Before the discussion

1. What did you expect the book to argue? Which section most challenged that expectation?
2. How would you explain the book's central claim in two sentences to someone who has not read it?

False reality and loyalty

3. How does the book distinguish an ordinary policy disagreement from a political claim that resists correction?
4. What roles do loyalty tests, media reinforcement, and institutional incentives play in turning campaign claims into governing choices?
5. Where does the idea of revenge appear in the book? What changes when it becomes a governing principle?

Institutions under pressure

6. Select one: immigration, foreign policy, the Justice Department, the courts, Congress, or the civil service. What specific mechanism does the book describe, and what evidence supports it?
7. Which institutional safeguard seems most durable? Which seems most vulnerable, and why?
8. How should a reader distinguish criticism of an institution from an attempt to delegitimize all oversight?

Democracy and action

1. What does the book mean by refusing normalization? What actions could that imply for a citizen or public official?
2. How might the next Congress reinforce or restrain the trends described in the book?
3. Which conclusion do you find persuasive? Which question remains open after reading?

Facilitator note

Invite participants to name a chapter or source when making a factual claim. Allow room to disagree about interpretations without treating every factual assertion as equally supported.