

The Brett Kavanaugh confirmation process has generated very strong opinions about the credibility of the major players. Most of my right-leaning friends and the conservative pundits believe that Judge Kavanaugh is telling the truth. My left-leaning friends and the liberal pundits believe that he is lying and that Christine Blasey Ford's account is correct.

People probably need to take a deep breath and slow down. I do not see enough evidence to be very confident in my opinion about what is likely to have occurred. I have to admit that if evidence came forward that strongly suggests that Brett Kavanaugh had a pattern of physically abusing girls when he was young, I would not be surprised. Correspondingly, I would not be surprised if evidence emerged that suggested that Dr. Ford was assaulted by someone else and she originally blamed Kavanaugh because she was so traumatized by the event, she was desperate to pin the blame on someone – anyone – to help her deal with this awful ordeal.

Other people see the same amount of evidence that I do and they have become impassioned advocates of their beliefs, shouting down any dissent. I would argue that many of these people are taking a position based on faith. I would also argue that faith is more usefully applied in religious discussions and it has little place in meaningful discussions of science, economics, or politics. I think that the people on the right are so excited about the policy results that come with putting a likeminded justice on the Supreme Court that they believe Kavanaugh and disbelieve Ford. The people on the left are predisposed to believe Ford, mostly because they have such a strong distaste for Kavanaugh's conservative beliefs.

I have heard a psychologist tell a story that illustrates the dynamic that explains why people have such strongly held beliefs — despite the lack of evidence to support their beliefs. The psychologist made the statement that Hitler loves cats, or children, or some other group that we all like. This statement seems like nonsense. Most people believe that Hitler is evil so they think that everything that he does is evil. They think that Hitler cannot like cats, instead they are more likely to believe that he killed cats, perhaps even tortured them.

The same dynamic is at play when people form their opinions about who is truthful in the confirmation process. Liberals think that Kavanaugh's policies are evil, so they are inclined to disbelieve everything he says. Just like most of us have trouble believing that Hitler could like cats, liberals have trouble believing a conservative could be honorable. Likewise, conservatives think ill of liberals, so they do not believe anything coming out of a liberal's mouth and they have trouble believing a liberal could be honorable.

Given how little we actually know, it was encouraging to see Senator Jeff Flake ask for an FBI investigation. There is always a chance that the investigation will turn up more information, which would help us all generate more informed opinions. With more evidence, we could become less likely to believe unsupported claims that disparage the person who has an ideology that differs from our own.

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