



# COMMON GROUND

## In Search of Argument

**A**MERICAN POLITICS are in an appalling state. We disagree, fiercely, about almost everything. We disagree about terror and security, social justice, religion in politics, who is fit to be a judge, and what democracy is. These are not civil disagreements: each side has no respect for the other. We are no longer partners in self-government; our politics are rather a form of war.

The 2004 presidential election was sickeningly divisive. Republicans said that a victory for the Democratic candidate would threaten the survival, even the salvation, of the nation. Vice President Cheney said that a victory for John Kerry would be a triumph for Osama bin Laden and America's other mortal enemies. Some Roman Catholic bishops declared that voting for Kerry would be a sin that any Catholic would have to confess the next day. Liberals declared the stakes just as high, but the dangers all in the other direction. They said that the Bush presidency had been the worst and most incompetent in our history, that its reckless wartime soak-the-poor tax cuts and horrendous budget deficits would damage the economy for decades, that the invasion of Iraq