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THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AMERICAN LIFE AND CULTURE: EMERGING TRENDS

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IN AMERICAN STUDIES

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AMERICAN LIFE AND CULTURE: EMERGING TRENDS



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THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AMERICAN LIFE AND CULTURE: EMERGING TRENDS

The USA has never had so many sources with which to inform itself and the world. But while the options of how to consume news are broadening, consumers' views are narrowing. The rise of 24-hour TV news channels, hyperpartisan advertising and social media is widening cultural, political, and social divides in the United States.

In addition to its traditional communications goal of informing and shaping domestic and worldwide understanding, and alongside the three traditional branches of government – the executive, legislature, and judiciary – the media has become a more active and significant institutional political part of an increasingly polarized America. What does the future hold?

For four days in September 2019, 49 media academics and educators, political scientists, journalists, communications specialists and Americanist generalists from 27 countries tackled the changing role of the media in American life and culture, exploring the past and emerging trends, at the 2019 symposium of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA) at Schloss Leopoldskron, the historic home of Salzburg Global Seminar.

The intensive symposium included thematic presentations and panel-led discussions by distinguished speakers and participants, as well as small in-depth discussion groups to maximize cross-sector interaction with everyone present.

PRESENTATIONS

- The Nature, Influence and Impact of American Media at Home and Abroad
- The Changing Role of the Media in American Democracy
- Questions of Lost Trust, Alternative Facts, Verification and Validity in America
- The Future Role of the Media in American Culture and Democracy

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

- Role of the Media Around the World
- Fake News and the Media
- Challenges to the Media's Future

SMALL DISCUSSION GROUPS

- The Role and Challenges of the Media in a Democracy
- Comparative Roles of Worldwide Media/ Implications of US Media Around the World
- The Political Challenge of Presenting the News

KNOWLEDGE CAFÉ TABLES

- Challenges of a Journalist in Covering International Events
- Political Role of New Media in Relation to American Literature and Culture
- Effects of Digitalization on Society
- The Importance of Global Digital Literacy

THE FIRESIDE CHAT

- The War of Words Between the President and the Media, Validity and Trust



SSASA symposia are led by an expert faculty of speakers, which this year included returning Fellow Edith Chapin from NPR

INTRODUCTION

No longer constrained to city morning papers, top-of-the-hour updates or evening newscasts, Americans now have more choice in when, how and where they access their news. In addition to the traditional newspapers, radio stations and TV channels, mobile apps, podcasts, blogs, online video channels, and social media networks also capture conventional audiences. The producers and publishers of this news are just as varied, from global conglomerates to independent bloggers and malicious bots.

Education, geography, race, political leanings, and age have all long influenced how Americans access and consume their news. Aided by algorithms, social media platforms show content tailored to their users' existing political views, homogeneous communities, and specific demographics.

Social media has also made it easier to publish and share content from news producers at all levels of professionalism and purposes, whether delivering objective reporting, serving niche audiences, advancing political viewpoints, or sowing deliberate discord. Many readers, however, lack the media literacy necessary to discern what news is “real” and what is “fake,” preferring instead to consume and share news that supports rather than opposes their view of “the truth.”

Trust in both news outlets and social media platforms is waning. Although freedom of the press is enshrined in the First Amendment, the US is sliding down the World Press Freedom Rankings – a slide that pre-dates but is accelerated by the current administration and its declaration of the media as the “enemy of the people.”

With today's global access to news online, anyone can now read, watch and listen to America's coverage of itself as well as that produced by their own countries' and others' correspondents. But shrinking revenues have reduced both the spread of national and foreign correspondents and the depth of local and international news coverage. Despite diversity initiatives and some gender advances, cultural issues remain a challenge for the media.

Many of these issues are not uniquely American, but how the USA responds to these challenges will have wide-ranging implications for media markets around the world and how they in turn positively or adversely affect their own countries.

While this report, authored by Dr Nicola Mann, Associate Professor of Communications and Visual Cultures at Richmond University, the American International University in London, seeks to dissect the challenges facing an increasingly politicized news media, it also goes further to consider what the future holds for the customer: If options of how to consume news are broadening, why are views narrowing? The rise of 24-hour TV news channels, hyperpartisan advertising, and social media is widening cultural, political, and social divides in the United States.

This report ruminates on this challenge, summarizing the rich discussions and insights shared across the four-day *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends* symposium.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

In a move akin to an out-of-season April Fool’s Day joke, on August 16, 2019, President Donald J. Trump declared his intent to buy the autonomous ice-covered Danish territory of Greenland. Unfortunately for the former real estate developer, unlike a Scottish golf resort, a Manhattan tower or a glittering Vegas hotel, Greenland declared itself “Not for Sale.” Controversial geopolitical land grabs aside, Trump has had a busy year, even for him. On September 9, 2019, Trump disclosed via his communication forum of choice, Twitter, plans to cancel secret “peace talks” with the Taliban and the President of Afghanistan, citing the recent death of an American soldier in the region.

“Apparently he was serious.” So stated a participant at the opening of the 2019 symposium of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA). These incidents prompted a debate in major newsrooms around the country: “Should we just ignore him?” Several newspapers of record, including *The New York Times* went on to cover the story since, as the symposium participant pointed out: the role of the media is to report the news. “We give him attention because this is the President of the United States.”

Trump’s recent outpourings exemplify the challenges facing the media landscape post-2016: How do news outlets negotiate the unpredictable terrain of political reporting from a man who uses Twitter to bypass the traditional function of the White House press secretary? According to the Trump Twitter Archive, the president averages 11 or 12 Tweets per day, a frequency that looks set to intensify as the 2020 presidential election approaches.

Program Chair, Ron Clifton has supported Salzburg Global Seminar’s work on American Studies for nearly 30 years



TRUMP VS. THE NEW YORK TIMES

Veering from raging anger to incestuous fawning, Trump has long harbored a schizophrenic relationship with the media. From his appearance on “The Apprentice” (NBC, 2004-2015) to interviews with shock jock Howard Stern, pre-presidency Trump reveled in the spotlight of media celebrity. Following his election victory, this desire for media fame gave way to ire, targeting the symbols of the East Coast media elite – the investigative reporters and editors of *The Times*, *The Washington Post* and other media organizations – as proponents of what he has dubbed “fake news.” While in 2016 Trump deigned *The Times* a “great, great American jewel,” by 2019 it had become the “Enemy of the People.”

Spin, falsehoods, trickery, and misinformation have always enveloped political life. Let us not forget President Richard Nixon’s 1972 paranoia-laden conversation with his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger during which he advised, “Never forget, the press is the enemy, the press is the enemy... Write that on a blackboard 100 times.” Like Nixon, Trump has managed to sow distrust in the news media, marginalizing faith in the reporting of certain outlets and, as we will analyze later in this report, facts themselves.

That Trump targets much of his current vitriol at *The Times* is no secret. Much of the president’s chagrin stems from the fact that his hometown broadsheet adopts a measured independent (“non-European”) model of reporting that excludes the partisan side taking he loves. Responding to a question regarding criticism that *The Times* is not “hard enough” on Trump, a representative from the newspaper in Salzburg remarked, “Some of our readers expect us to take sides, but we don’t do this.” As *The Washington Post* editor Marty Baron reminded an audience at the Washington Ideas Forum in 2017, the American press are not at “war” with Trump; rather, they are at “work.”

Nonetheless, as reported by NBC News White House correspondent Geoff Bennett last year, following verbal and occasional threats of physical harassment by Trump supporters, some journalists require security guards when covering rallies. The need to combat this rhetoric of hate, as well as the challenge of biased news platforms and social media necessitates a measured, accurate and speedy response by newspapers such as *The Times*: a response that takes place increasingly online.

ONLINE BATTLEGROUND

Since Trump’s election in 2016, digital subscriptions to *The Times* have increased by 27% – but its daily weekday US print circulation continues to drop, down from 1.1 million in 2005 to just 487,000 in 2018. The circulation of printed and local news media has dwindled across the US. Half of the 3,143 counties in the nation now only have one newspaper, usually a small weekly, while almost 200 counties have no newspaper at all, creating “news deserts”. This picture extends to US newspaper newsroom employment, which, according to the Pew Research Center, saw the number of positions drop by 47% between 2008 and 2018.

The shift towards paid online subscription consumption and its knock-on effects on Old Media is in part a reflection of the increase in demand for on-demand “breaking news”-type coverage. Much like the decline of “appointment television” and the rise of digital platforms such as Netflix, news consumers now choose when, where, and how they view their digital news content. Thanks to push notifications, smartphone users have access to news stories on a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week basis. As consumers increasingly turn to the internet for their news, so developing an effective “web-centric” digital strategy is essential for a newspaper. Some publications such as *The Times* and *The Post* organize “continuous news desks” with dedicated employees producing round-the-clock breaking news for the web, while others emphasize the importance of multimedia training for editorial staff.

News media outlets that adopt a web-first strategy face a competitive environment very different from the traditional print or broadcast landscape of old. Beyond the shift toward digital subscriptions and the rise of user-generated content on blogs, online forums and social networks, the specter of Google looms large. Drawing from a News Media Alliance report, in June 2019 *The Times* alleged that Google “made \$4.7 billion from the news industry in 2018.” The story broke at the same time as a bipartisan bill was proposed, The Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, which seeks to provide news publishers a safe harbor in which to collectively negotiate with Google, helping them to receive fair distribution and monetization terms.

Calls for regulation and accountability also build on public concerns over Facebook’s news feed algorithms. Facebook removed the “Trending Topics” feature last year, for example, after considerable controversy over “curated” headlines, the viral spread of “fake news” and the alleged suppression of conservative news stories. This led to the 2019 launch of the feature, “Why am I seeing this post?” that aims to help users “better understand and more easily control what you see from friends, Pages and Groups in your News Feed.” Controls to manage the connection between users and trusted news brands becomes ever more critical in the wake of such challenges with tech behemoths like Facebook and Google.

Indeed, as Google increasingly becomes the world’s most powerful publisher, so traditional journalists face an amplified responsibility to report with accuracy and integrity. “The only pressure on us is our own standards. We need numerous sources,” stated an American participant in Salzburg. Some readers are willing to pay a premium for this kind of intensive, time-consuming journalism. As a subscription-first business, last year *The Times* brought in almost \$500 million in purely digital revenue. The newspaper offers authority, clarification, and journalistic excellence – a counter to the stream of disinformation, misinformation, and fake news stories enveloping contemporary politics.

Moderated panel discussions bring global perspectives to the year’s topic and offer opportunity for Fellows to debate the issue





TRUTH AND VERTIFICATION

Since almost anyone with the internet and a social media account can publish news to the world, how do we differentiate between truth and lies? This challenge is ever more urgent post-2016, a year that saw the Oxford English Dictionary deign “post-truth” the word of the year. Indeed, President Trump has co-opted the issue of truth-telling for his own ends, using his pre-inauguration press conference to lambast journalist Jim Acosta, accusing the CNN correspondent of “fake news.”

According to a Pew Research Center study, in 2016 “64% of adults believe fake news stories cause a great deal of confusion and 23% said they had shared fabricated political stories themselves – sometimes by mistake and sometimes intentionally.” Indeed, the proliferation of online misinformation (false or misleading content that spreads on its own) and, perhaps even more worryingly, disinformation (untruths deliberately disseminated to sway people) is one of the news media’s fast-evolving challenges.

AMERICAN DISINFORMATION

In their 2018 book *Network Propaganda*, Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts provide an in-depth analysis of media coverage during the US election time span, including the spread and consumption of disinformation. Specifically, the researchers focus on what they call an “asymmetric polarization” model derived from research on partisan media ecosystems. While the authors found that left-wing media outlets mostly allied with centrist media platforms, the main right-wing media sources operated in more acute, narrow, partisan ways. Played out across a spectrum of traditional newspaper stories as well as millions of online stories, tweets, and Facebook posts, the findings are the same: that the right-wing media ecosystem is more disposed to “disinformation, lies and half-truths.” Aided by algorithms, this bias is indeed most evident on social media platforms where content can be tailored to users’ existing political views, homogeneous communities, and specific demographics.

SSASA symposia bring together Americanists and professionals from countries across the world to Schloss Leopoldskron, home of Salzburg Global Seminar

Citing Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), one American academic in Salzburg noted the ways in which spectacles of discontent and moral outrage present (and cement) themselves online. The internet is awash with bizarre conspiracies such as the Hillary Clinton 2016 Pizzagate scandal, an entirely false narrative that claimed links between the highest levels of the Democratic Party and a pedophilia ring operating out of a Washington pizza restaurant. While spectacles were once an event played out on media stages (such as the infamous 1977 interview between journalist David Frost and Richard Nixon), they now emerge from internet subcultures, becoming what a presenter in Salzburg termed, "spreadable spectacle." Rather than refuting oddities such as the Pizzagate scandal, right-wing media opt into digitally mediated platforms of discontent, using this underbelly to reinforce and normalize their value systems. Sat alongside screaming heads on television and hateful columnists, hyper-partisan websites such as InfoWars sow deliberate seeds of discord, or what Arthur C. Brooks calls "Our Culture of Contempt" (*The New York Times*, 2019).

GLOBAL CONCERNS

Deliberate acts of disinformation are not restricted to American soil. A journalist in Salzburg told SSASA participants that, "The time when the media were gatekeepers is over." In a turn of events that sounds oddly familiar, in 2013 the Czech Republic's second richest businessman and politician Andrej Babiš, bought the country's two most influential newspapers in support of his political efforts. He was appointed minister of finance in 2014 and is now prime minister. Babiš silences the voices of independent media journalists through slander campaigns strategically designed to damage reputation and standing. Much like other populist authoritarian leaders, Babiš maintains a deep-seated distrust of independent news groups, describing their coverage of the subsidy fraud allegations that hang over the premier as "fake news." Despite Babiš' criticisms, fake news sites abound in the Czech Republic, none more so than *Parlamentní listy*, which publishes interviews with politicians, alongside sensational content that exaggerates facts.

The alternative news business and the issue of media disinformation is a global phenomenon that extends to many other countries, including Egypt and China. Egypt, for example, has undergone dramatic transformations in the media sector in support of the new

The surroundings of Schloss Leopoldskron give participants at all stages of their academic and professional careers the space to retreat from their everyday work and come together as a community of peers



authority post the 2013 coup. The Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has since been caught discussing his manipulation of the media via secretly recorded videos and audiotapes known as SisiLeaks. In 2018, Egypt's parliament passed a law giving the government powers to regulate traditional and social media. The Supreme Council for Media Regulation fines and takes legal action against platforms and journalists considered to contest the constitution with misinformation, in addition to "supervising" people with more than 5,000 followers on social media or with a personal blog or website.

The regulation of social media is also a concern in China, of course, where state censorship has long been a fact for citizens used to the erasure of comments from the internet conveying dissent, activism, or criticism of authorities and the banning of many Western media and social media sites. The "Great Firewall of China" hinders free speech surrounding events such as the recent protests in Hong Kong, framing the mass rallies as the actions of a violent minority and the result of foreign interference that threatens social stability and the ruling Communist Party.

These international examples exemplify the challenges to news media circulation in the post-truth age – a landscape where fake news and propaganda flow in equal measure – are more than just an American phenomenon.

TACKLING FAKE NEWS

How can we deal with the problem of fake news in the digital age? While social media has made it easier to publish and share content from news producers, many readers lack the media literacy necessary to discern what is "real" and what is "fake," preferring instead to consume and share stories that support rather than oppose their view of "the truth."

This was one of the concerns raised by participants during the final day of SSASA, sparking discussions related to fact-checking vigilance, social media regulation, and media literacy. Fact-checking systems, for example, have a history dating back to Politifact's 2007 launch of the Truth-O-Meter, a website that rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials and others. *The Washington Post* meanwhile operates a Pinocchio Scale, which awards fact check ratings on a scale of one (for minor factual infringements) to four (an out-and-out lie). Fact-checking responsibility also falls into the hands of individual journalists working at small news outlets not privy to sophisticated fact-checking systems or dedicated research departments.

Measures to control the spread of misinformation and disinformation online are also a key concern for social media platforms. As Millennials move toward image-based platforms such as Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube and Instagram, so too the difficulty of evaluating the verisimilitude of filtered and edited images increases. Manipulated video and audio known as "deepfakes" undermine truth telling and threaten democracy through the malicious exploitation of sophisticated face-swapping software. The subtly doctored May 2019 video of the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, seemingly drunkenly slurring her way through a news conference highlights the threat of deepfake technology. Fake detection software seeks to challenge deepfakes, utilizing technological solutions such as digital watermarking.

In the wake of reports of abuse by far-right groups spreading racist propaganda, WhatsApp is also making efforts to curb the dissemination of disinformation. WhatsApp first limited the number of times a message can be forwarded to 20 and later just five, thereby returning the app to its original purpose: private messaging. In the wake of the scandals regarding the involuntary collection of personal data and its ability to spread false information, Facebook (WhatsApp's parent company) also face calls for greater liability.

Following an 18-month investigation, in February 2019 the UK's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee denounced Facebook as "digital gangsters," prescribing a termination of self-regulation for the tech company.

Moving forward, independent regulations with tough sanctions aim to curb the anti-democratic prioritization of shareholders' profits over users' privacy rights (as evidenced by the Cambridge Analytica data-harvesting scandal of 2018). The introduction of mandatory codes of ethics and independent regulation has the potential to empower citizens by forcing social media companies to hand over user data, developments that go some way in the fight against the spread of false information online.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Comprehensive regulatory control in the face of misinformation and disinformation extend to calls for greater media literacy. The move towards civic news media education is in part aimed at combating the public's lack of trust following a general lack of credibility generated by stories of inaccuracy, bias, fake news, and alternative facts.

In 2017, the World Economic Forum found public confidence in traditional media had fallen to an all-time low as people shift their trust toward online search engines and social media platforms. Crucially, youth audiences remain the demographic most distrustful of the news media. A recent Pew Research Center survey found adults aged 18 to 29 possess comparatively low levels of trust in traditional media institutions, while a 2018 Knight Foundation report found twice as many young adults (18 to 34) as older respondents said politically focused coverage or partisan bias was a factor in their lack of trust. The ability to build youth audience confidence in the recognition of fake and real news is a huge priority if we are to prevent political disengagement, as is the urgent need to better support the development of critical literacy skills in the young.

As noted in Salzburg, the timeliest research in the area of digital literacy operates via classroom-based discourse. The Washington, D.C.-based News Literacy Project, for example, is a national education nonprofit that works with educators and journalists to equip students in middle school and high school with the tools to discern fact from fiction in the digital age. The Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change, meanwhile, takes a similar approach to the building of digital literacy and news demystification with college students and beyond. Founded in 2007, the Academy's annual three-week program at Schloss Leopoldskron connects young media innovators across disciplines to produce multimedia tools and reframe curricula and research.

The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with media in all its forms serve as a strategy of resistance in a post-truth world. The prioritization of civic intentionality and the development of critical thinking skills are at the core of these projects, making young people realize their role as active (not passive) users of news media.



PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Recent journalism has moved away from a prescriptive and narrow model of information exchange, positioning writers and readers as interchangeable forces on the front lines of truth-telling. “Convergence” media strategies developed in the early 2000s with newspapers, TV stations and radio stations collaborating to produce content. Over the last 20 years – largely due to the demands of Millennials and Generation Z demographics – this has matured into participatory modes of news production focused on journalist/reader dialogue. Indeed, as noted at SSASA, gone are the days of the “backseat baby,” a reference to children who grew up listening to singular news media outlet such as NPR in the backs of their parents’ cars.

If news outlets wish to attract young, more diversified audiences, they understand they must engage in creative ways, oftentimes involving multi-dimensional storytelling that balances complexity with engagement. The popularity of aggregators such as Reddit – a platform that pulls together news stories from a wide variety of other news organizations – appeals to youth audience’s potential dislike of professional news editors, by enabling them to rank stories by order of their importance as deemed by the community. Stripped of the curatorial framing of a glossy CNN news story, non-linear news platforms highlight the internal subjectivities of young people, not simply those of the newsroom editor.

Many traditional news organizations also provide online forums or discussion boards where people can start conversations and post comments. Online forums such as *The Washington Post*’s “Live Chats” section, for example, allow people to ask questions about how a story was reported and provide insights into how a news organization operates. Journalists now reach out to young readers via Q&As and podcasts, and by appearing on talk shows. In 2013, *The Washington Post* launched the PostTV video initiative focusing on daily interactive interview shows covering politics and policy. Realizing the limits of appointment viewing online, in 2019 the newspaper launched a news reading app for Smart TV and streaming devices, enabling readers to browse through a selection of stories on a big screen. Well-managed, social networks can also provide an opportunity to connect with audiences via first-person stories. *The Washington Post*’s 2010 “A Facebook Story: A Mother’s Joy and a Family’s Sorrow,” which published a mother’s Facebook postings about giving birth and her subsequent medical complications, provided a unique and transparent narrative insight blending social media and traditional news.

Interactive new technology products such as voice-activated assistants and smart speakers (e.g., Amazon’s Echo and Alexa, Apple’s HomePod and Siri, and Google Home) also contribute to the reframing of news consumption, placing youth audiences at the forefront of this shift. According to a Pew Research Center report from 2018, social media use is

nearly ubiquitous among today's teens: 97% of 13- to 17-year-old media consumers use at least one of seven major online platforms. Despite fears connected to social media use and isolation in young people as well as dystopian visions in TV shows such as *Black Mirror* (Netflix, 2016-present), news discussion in participatory interactive forums has the potential to encourage human connectivity. Rather than restricting us to our isolated enclaves, social media has the ability to cultivate civic mindedness in the young, exposing them to greater diversity – through either the people they interact with or the viewpoints they come across.

As discussed on the final day of SSASA, platform media can and does lead to progressive activism among young people. In 2018, for example, student journalists at *The Eagle Eye* newspaper at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, were pivotal in raising international awareness about gun control following a massacre in their classrooms. Mobilized via social media (#MarchForOurLives), the student movement against gun violence led to demonstrations in Washington, DC and other US cities. Building on the spirit of media activism of the 1960s, for some teen journalists, social media is a weapon of defiance, a resistance contrary to accusations of political apathy oft levied at their generation.

High-profile youth-led journalism, such as that born from the Parkland tragedy, has the potential to spawn interest in working in the field. As noted by one American journalist at SSASA, despite challenges facing media reporting today, newspapers have not experienced a decrease in the number of journalism graduates approaching them for internship positions. As the contributor remarked, “It’s a great time to be a journalist. Step up to the buffet!” Reporting is not just a business but also an “ism’/an ideology” according to another American journalist in Salzburg. Motivated by the general sense of political frustration shared by the Millennials attending the symposium, this desire to “re-imagine” human connection in an age of digital abundance is indeed a possibility.

Fellows of the 17th SSASA symposium gather on the terrace of Schloss Leopoldskron for the traditional lakeside group photo





CONCLUSION

As the scholars, journalists, and professional leaders gathered at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA) symposium heard repeatedly, the news media faces numerous current challenges but also opportunities.

On one level, it serves the traditional function of informing and shaping domestic and global communications. While on another, it has developed a political role in recent years, finding itself front and center of an increasingly polarized America. The issue of truth-telling in news media discourse was a running concern during the symposium exchanges – an issue complicated by the abundant sources via which Americans consume their news in 2019. Biased news platforms and some social media networks have the potential to widen cultural, political, and social divides in the United States. Yet, fueled by its emerging political role as an institution of American democracy, some news outlets provide optimism in the form of sober, well-considered and fact-verified counters to instances of misinformation and disinformation.

Participants at SSASA also looked at the role of the media in culture and democracy in the years to come, with the area civic education emerging as a primary area of concern. While the work of the News Literacy Project and The Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change advance media literacy in the young, older media users require similar education. Cyber Seniors, a program in Toronto, is a useful trailblazer in this regard, tackling the divide in media literacy needs among youth and seniors through an intergenerational program. After all, news for many is no longer simply information, but rather one of many stories requiring engagement.

As participants noted in the Q&A session at the symposium conclusion, in addition to holding media institutions to account, we must also promote a culture of media consciousness, giving both young and old the right to exercise their intellectual and civic freedoms. This is essential if we are to challenge the status quo and recover lost trust between audiences and media, and move toward more positive emerging trends.

Marty Gecek first joined the Salzburg Global Seminar (then the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies) in 1966 and although she officially retired in 2003, she has served as SSASA symposia director since 2004. She will now step back from this role after 17 SSASA symposia but will become chair of the advisory committee of the new American Studies Program, launching in 2020. Salzburg Global Seminar wishes to express our deep gratitude to her decades-long commitment to American studies.

ELISABETH BUMILLER: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A NEWS BUREAU CHIEF IN WASHINGTON

Washington bureau chief at *The New York Times*, discusses her career in journalism and day-to-day work

Veteran journalist Elisabeth Bumiller speaks at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association symposium on *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.



In her role as *The New York Times*' Washington bureau chief, Elisabeth Bumiller's day can start as early as five o'clock in the morning. The news never sleeps, and there are always overnight events for her to catch up on. By nine o'clock, Bumiller is in the office preparing for the morning news meeting. She joins her colleagues in New York via video link and outlines the bureau's plans for the day. Forty-five minutes or so later, the meeting reaches a conclusion – for now. Following many questions and intense conversations, Bumiller has a firmer idea of what her day ahead may look like – well, at least as much as is possible in the life of a journalist at a major national news outlet.

As stories come in, reporters begin to file them. Some articles are put online before noon to catch the morning traffic. Bumiller may attend another small editors' meeting about previously discussed topics, or she may go out for a working lunch with a colleague. By half-past two, she's in touch with New York again. "I start getting calls from New York, or I call them saying here's what we think is

good for the front page... I'll say, 'This story is looking good,' 'This one's not ready yet, but you should think about it,' 'This one is not going to work,' 'We're holding this.'"

Bumiller will then start asking reporters for the tops of their stories. "I can't pitch the story if I don't know what you're going to say. That's a constant stress," she said. By half-past four, there's a bit more clarity. By then, barring any breaking news, staff know what will be on tomorrow's front page, what stories matter for the web and which stories will need to be cared for overnight.

"Between five and eight stories are coming in, and I don't edit as much as I used to... but I often will just grab a story because we're shorthanded or if there's a story I want to edit..." explains Bumiller. "I usually leave sometime around 7.30 or 8 [pm]. That's my day."

LIFE-LONG DREAM

Bumiller always wanted to write. Her uncle, Frank Cormier, a White House reporter for the Associated Press, appeared to have a "very exciting life." That is what inspired Bumiller to pursue journalism, starting with her high school newspaper, *The Walnut Hills Chatterbox*. She then attended the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University – where she got her "real education" working for the *Daily Northwestern*. Her education continued thereafter at *The Miami Herald* and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

Upon leaving Columbia, she received a message to call Sally Quinn, a writer for

The Washington Post's style section. Would Bumiller be interested in covering society events in Washington? "I ended up flying down to Washington right before I graduated, and I got the job," Bumiller remembers. "My classmates all said... they wouldn't have taken that frivolous job but, at the time, the *Washington Post* was the most exciting paper on the face of the earth."

Bumiller joined the newspaper a few years after the Watergate scandal. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who did much of the original reporting on the scandal for *The Post*, were still in the newsroom. In her role, Bumiller covered events such as political fundraisers on Capitol Hill and parties at the State Department, but she was also able to write feature stories and profiles. She said, "I made it into a better a job."

The role gave her a greater education on Washington politics. "The style section was really well-read... It was a great job. It was high pressure, actually... The idea was I wasn't going to cover what people were wearing, I was covering what they were saying about politics and the news of the day."

After stints in New Delhi, India and Tokyo, Japan (accompanying her husband, *Times* journalist Steven R. Weisman), where she continued to write for *The Post* as well as two books about the lives of women in each country, Bumiller joined *The Times* in 1995 as a metro reporter. She was later promoted to City Hall bureau chief before returning to the US capital as a White House correspondent on September 10, 2001. The next day's infamous events dramatically changed the trajectory of her reporting from a domestic focus to an increasingly international one.

In her current role as Washington bureau chief, her primary responsibility concerns overseeing daily operations and leading all news coverage from Washington, domestic and international. Her breadth of experience in the media industry made her an appropriate choice of speaker for the latest symposium

of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association – *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.

"This seminar is fascinating because I am very interested in the perspective of people from around the world on media and journalism," said Bumiller. "I was fascinated by the question from the gentleman... who asked why we [the media] couldn't just join with the government. Oh dear, that's not going to work in the United States!..."

"I was also interested in the question from someone who kept asking me, 'Why don't you feel pressure from the administration? Don't you feel pressure from the White House and Trump?'...I kept on saying, 'No'... I realized she didn't necessarily believe me, but it's just not a factor in the United States – at least not for my publication."

Mistakes can happen in reporting, but Bumiller maintains *The Times* is a "very competitive place" with "really smart people" who believe in independent journalism and getting at the truth. "It's also just been the privilege of a lifetime," says Bumiller. "I've travelled a lot for *The Times*. I'm now working with people on their stories and on their careers... It's a constant invigorating education, and I really do mean it's a privilege."

"Someone [at the SSASA program] kept asking me, 'Why don't you feel pressure from the administration? Don't you feel pressure from the White House and Trump?'...I kept on saying, 'No'... I realized she didn't necessarily believe me, but it's just not a factor in the United States – at least not for my publication."

Elisabeth Bumiller,
Washington Bureau Chief,
The New York Times



AZZA COHEN: USING FILM AND PHOTOS TO UNDERSTAND COMPLEX ISSUES

Documentary filmmaker discusses the power of visual storytelling and her latest film, “The Last Statesman”

Visual storyteller Azza Cohen at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association symposium on *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.



“Journalism has really been rapidly evolving, and it’s exciting. I feel like this is an exciting time to be a visual storyteller,” exclaims Azza Cohen, speaking at the latest symposium of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association, *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.

Cohen, a documentary filmmaker and historian, is dedicated to storytelling in the public’s service. At the time of interview in Salzburg, she was working on her first feature film, “The Last Statesman.” The film centers on the life of political negotiator George Mitchell, who helped negotiate peace in Northern Ireland with the Belfast Agreement a.k.a. the “Good Friday Agreement” in 1998, and his relationship with conflict negotiators in different countries. It is a film rooted in Cohen’s academic and visual interests, and one she hopes will “highlight positive examples of negotiation and examples of

statesmanship which I think is really missing from our political conversation, definitely in America.”

“I’ve always felt that – and I think especially after the 2016 [US] election – that young people don’t feel inspired by politicians and that young people don’t really see negotiation happening on a scale of the national conversation or international conversations.

“I think particularly as a Jewish person, you learn about the conflict in the Middle East, and you learn about what’s happening in Israel and Palestine, and all you see is people talking past each other. You don’t really see attempts at genuine negotiation... You have to come to the table and then decide on what gets left behind or what is a priority,” said Cohen.

Cohen has worked in documentary filmmaking since graduating from the National University of Ireland in 2017, where she obtained a master’s degree in culture and colonialism, and history. Before this, she earned a bachelor’s degree in history at Princeton University in New Jersey, USA, where one of her undergraduate thesis projects involved producing a multimedia study of racial segregation in St. Louis, Mo., USA. “I think there are ways to blend... moving images, photography, and the written word, which can give you a fuller picture of a community or an issue,” she said.

Cohen describes herself as a “big history nerd,” but it was only after attending Princeton that she encountered “how much of history informs we who are.” She said, “History is really amazing, and so many

people don't have access to understanding their own history... I think that movies and photography... can be a really great way to help people understand and be excited by history."

Moving images can be really empowering, according to Cohen, but they can also be exploitative. She said, "It's important that we have these discussions, especially related to this seminar... [about] the ways that media can be very harmful. I think we've thought about it in a lot of political sense and a lot of ways that... headlines are harmful, and memes are harmful. But I also think that moving images can be harmful, and in conversations about violence or representations of minors or children, I think there's just a lot to think about."

Cohen said the symposium in Salzburg continued to inspire her to consider how visual storytelling can look different – moving away from the traditional feature-length films shown at movie theaters and film festivals.

Reflecting on her experience at Salzburg Global Seminar, she says, "What is so deeply meaningful to me is the way that this place was founded. That it was founded after World

War II with an eye towards restoring the idea that you have to restore Europe through intellectual, cultural, political exchange and not just rebuilding the roads and fixing the buildings that were bombed.

"I think that's so incredibly profound."

She adds: "What we're missing in politics, in academia [and] in so many things is this basic idea of civility and decency, and that exchanging ideas with people you don't know and with people from different countries is the very foundation of how we live in a world that makes sense and treats people well... To be a part of that tradition that was started in 1947 is such an honor, honestly..."

"I think this subject matter is particularly resonant [and] particularly timely... I just think it's really important to constantly be thinking about the media and the effect of technology because we don't have any other choice... I feel very much inspired and terrified about the state of things. But the only way that you can make yourself feel better is to do something. So, you might as well be equipped and know from experts and be able to look at things sort of dispassionately and then act passionately."

"There are ways to blend... moving images, photography, and the written word, which can give you a fuller picture of a community or an issue."

Azza Cohen
Documentary maker and historian



JING XU: THE ART OF DIALOGUE AND INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

Vice director of the Communication and Culture Research Center at Peking University reflects on learning about China and other countries around the world

Chinese academic Jing Xu at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association symposium on *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.



“When I was a student, I met a very good professor... In her classroom, she told us that if you want to do some research, the first thing you’ll need to do is [learn] where China was, where China is, [and] where China will be.” said Jing Xu, speaking at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA). “I need to know more about China.”

Why would someone wanting to learn about China come to an American Studies symposium? Xu is the vice director of the Communication and Culture Research Center and a professor at the School of Journalism at Peking University, in China, and the latest SSASA symposium was titled *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.

For Xu, learning about other countries and other cultures is just as important as learning more about China. She has spent more than

34 years at Peking University, first arriving as an undergraduate student. She earned a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. at the School of International Studies before transferring to the School of Journalism & Communication. Much of her research has focused on Chinese media, politics, public opinion, media governance, and health communication.

In Salzburg, Xu was able to provide a unique perspective as the sole participant from China. But she could also reflect on her experiences in Japan, the UK, Sweden, Hong Kong, Belgium, and Italy. Xu is a firm believer in international exchange, having founded the Europe-China Dialogue in Media and Communications Summer School in 2013.

The program is now in its seventh year, having held its latest meeting in Beijing, China in July 2019. It aims to provide a platform linking scholars from Europe and China to foster the generation of new ideas for a better global communication exchange. Xu says they want to broaden students’ perspectives.

At the program, both professors and students present their own research. “After the presentation, professors – one Chinese professor [and] another European professor – will give [the students] comments to tell them how to modify, how to craft their thesis. That’s very helpful. We call it dialogue,” explains Xu.

“In some conferences, the students have a rare chance to get more feedback from professors – maybe several sentences. But in our... program each one will do [a] 15-minute presentation and get feedback from different professors. So, [it] almost lasts one hour.”



Xu says last year's program received more than 60 proposals, more than double the number of places available. It was "the biggest success" for the program to date, according to Xu. Changes were made to the program as it sought to provide more theoretical and methodological guidance for Ph.D. students, with a greater focus on scientific training. Xu is clearly proud of how the program has progressed. "I feel happy. [This is] the first time that people hear my story about the summer school."

Xu has attended a number of different international events in her career, including

those where thousands of people come together. Events like this, however, make it difficult to have real dialogue, according to Xu. Thankfully, it is a different story in Salzburg.

"People are encouraged to speak, have different in-depth dialogue and conversation," she explains. "So, that's very, very interesting and [a] benefit for me... I also have a chance to put forward my ideas... To some extent, I'm timid. I don't want to speak too much, but here, I feel more and more optimistic [and] confident with my English... I think when I say something, people are really interested in that."

PAVEL KOSHKIN: THE NEED FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND CO-OPERATION

Russian research fellow shares his perspective on US-Russia relations and how to curb fake news

Russian journalist and Americanist Pavel Koshkin at the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association symposium on *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*.



To err is human, but journalists who make errors in today's climate receive little sympathy. For some critics, an honest mistake can be a sign of a hidden agenda, or proof of "fake news" and a corrupt media. The reality is slightly different. Our decision-making is affected when we work under pressure, and it is no different for reporters, according to Russian journalist Pavel Koshkin. "You have an assignment from an editor... You have to write it [and] come up with a story for one hour. It should be analytical, in-depth. You have to interview a couple of people, two or three. It's crazy, I think."

Koshkin, a research fellow at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Russia, has experience in this field. While working as a journalist, Koshkin covered topics related to US-Russia relations for several Russian media outlets, including RBC Daily, Russia Direct, Cyber World, and more. He currently contributes to Forbes.ru.

"Mistakes are not fake news, and to prevent these mistakes, I think all American newspapers and Russian ones should establish [a] good department of fact-checkers – a separate department. It's a separate profession because a staff writer can write well, can interview well, can just collect information well, but there should be a fact-checker. It's [a] top priority." Koshkin spoke while attending the 17th symposium of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association (SSASA), *The Changing Role of the Media in American Culture and Life: Emerging Trends*. As one would expect, "fake news" was a popular topic of discussion.

During the symposium, Koshkin took part in a panel discussion on the issue of fake news and the media. In Koshkin's opinion, fake news is a "very important" problem that requires our attention. Fake news, he says, is "a deliberate attempt to spread falsehood(s), false information for the sake of manipulation, and this information is distributed by groups of interest by certain stakeholders. I don't know who they are, but they pursue either political goals or corporate goals.

What fake news is not, however, is propaganda. "Fake news is not propaganda. It's a *part* of propaganda. Propaganda is a broader term; it might use fake news to achieve its goals."

FRIENDLIER RELATIONS

Koshkin developed his interest in the US as a junior in the journalism department at Moscow State University. He says, "I was crazy about American culture, movies, music, literature," he remembers. "[I] attended a lot

of lectures at the American Center in Moscow. They're called 'American Corners' in Moscow. There is one in St. Petersburg, in Kazan, and I just attended every time they had lectures just to talk with native speakers."

In 2010, as a result of the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, Koshkin received a scholarship to attend the Tennessee Technology University for one year. His experience deepened his interest in the nation. "I was exposed to American life, ordinary life, culture. I had an opportunity to travel a lot around the United States," he reminisces.

As the years have gone by, Koshkin has further immersed himself in US-Russia relations. One of his primary goals now is to see how both countries can work together. Koshkin says, "I think with Russia, the US should be friends. I know it's idealistic. I know it's gullible today, but I don't care whether it's gullible or not. I believe it. This is me and nobody else... I really believe that the US and Russia should work together, or should minimize this distrust... We need people... who bring together two countries when their relations are in bad shape."

INFORMATION ABUNDANCE

Improving those relations would partly depend on improving understanding – and thus reducing fake news.

"We need to be mindful about the limits of [the] human brain: we have so much information that we are not able to process and, most importantly, understand. We live in abundance, but we are fed up with it. We have numerous sources of information on the Web, but we find ourselves lost in this ocean of data. Sometimes we even don't know how to use it [in] a practical way.

"Paradoxically, the more [information] we get, the less we know. It is a paradox, which sometimes makes us more vulnerable to manipulation and fake news."

"What is to be done?" he asks. "We need to focus on critical thinking and sound skepticism – do not confuse [this] with nihilism – we need to be more painstaking and meticulous in nuances.

"The Devil is in the details."

"Fake news is not propaganda. It's a part of propaganda. Propaganda is a broader term; it might use fake news to achieve its goals."

Pavel Koshkin
Journalist, Forbes.ru;
Research Fellow, Institute for US and
Canadian Studies, Russian Academy
of Sciences, Russia





The Ron Clifton Lecture on American Studies is given annually, this year by political scientist Reinhard Heinisch

THE RON CLIFTON LECTURE ON AMERICAN STUDIES

The 2019 symposium of the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association, *The Changing Role of the Media in American Life and Culture: Emerging Trends*, saw the delivery of the second Ron Clifton Lecture on American Studies.

Ron Clifton has been an ardent and loyal supporter of American Studies programs at Salzburg Global Seminar for nearly 30 years. He is the retired associate vice president of Stetson University and retired counselor in the Senior Foreign Service of the United States. During 25 years in the diplomatic service, he served in Calcutta, New Delhi, Tunis, Dublin, Brussels, London, and Washington DC. From 1997 until 2005, Ron was an associate vice president at Stetson University and the founding director of the Stetson University Campus and Center in Celebration, FL. In 2018, Ron received Stetson University's Distinguished Service Award at Stetson's Homecoming Awards Celebration, in recognition of his academic and professional contributions. Over the past 25 years, Ron has served on the Faculty, or as Chair, of more than 20 American Studies programs. In 2017, Ron and Gwili Clifton created the "Clifton Scholarship in American Studies," which supports an annual scholarship in American Studies. Ron is a member of the SSASA Advisory Board.

Reinhard Heinisch is a professor of Austrian politics in comparative perspective at the University of Salzburg, Austria, and chair of the Department of Political Science. He is a European studies affiliate of the University of Pittsburgh, having served as a faculty member from 1994 to 2010. His main research interests encompass comparative populism, Euroscepticism, and democracy, all of which can be found in his numerous publications including *Understanding Populist*

Organization: The West European Radical Right (Palgrave 2016) with O. Mazzoleni, and *Political Populism* (Nomos 2017) with O. Mazzoleni/C. Holz-Bacha. Some of these publications have appeared in leading journals such as *Party Politics*, *West European Politics*, *Democratization*, *Representation*, *Comparative European Politics*, as well as *Politics and Religion* among many others. His new book forthcoming in 2019 co-authored with E. Massetti and O. Mazzoleni is titled *The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethno-Territorial Politics in Europe* (Routledge Series on Extremism and Democracy). In 2017 Reinhard was awarded the national Science Prize by the Austrian Parliament for his work on democracy and later became a project leader in an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project on populism and civic engagement. He has also served as director of the Working Group on Democracy by the Austrian Science Association and as a consultant for government institutions, including the US State Department. Similar to his prior work, Reinhard serves as a partner for the Brookings Foundation for their project on Islam in Europe. Since 2014, Reinhard has been lecturing regularly at Renmin University in Beijing, in addition to frequently collaborating with media outlets including the BBC, NPR, and *The Washington Post* to discuss questions on populism and democracy. He is a Fellow of Salzburg Global Seminar.

QUESTIONS OF LOST TRUST, ALTERNATIVE FACTS, VERIFICATION AND VALIDITY IN AMERICA

I'm not even going to pretend that I'm a media specialist or a communications expert. I'm a comparative political scientist who works on populism, parties, the radical right, and democracy. I worked on Latin America and the United States in the last eight years; much more, my focus has been on Europe. In political science, we are able to tell a story about what has been happening in Western democracies and that story speaks to the developments in the United States, as it does to Europe. We very often focus on our own countries or on the United States and, of course, try to identify the things we like or dislike by pointing to particular junctures in one's own history. The only problem is, since this is happening throughout the Western world, there's obviously something bigger going on that tends to have specific wrinkles in different countries. It's not something that is isolated and can only happen in a particular country. Therefore, we have to look comparatively at a broader picture. My goal is to explain or give you a sense of how political science talks about these developments in Western political society and then, secondarily, how the media factors into this and how the media unwittingly or intentionally aggravated the situation.

DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM: WHAT ARE THE INDICATORS?

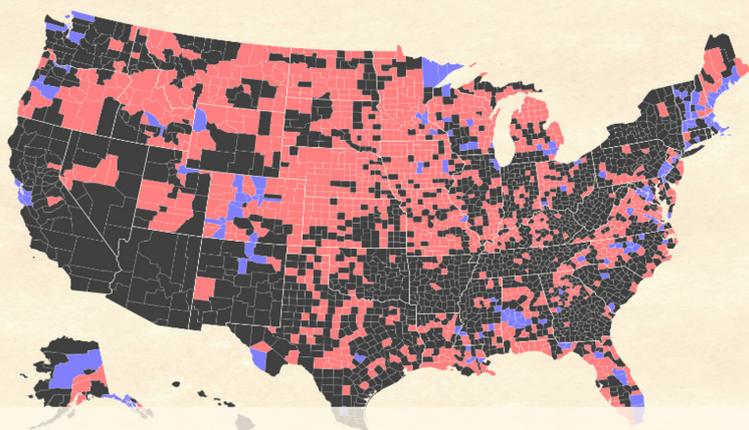
An indicator that we see throughout Western countries is a significant decline in political trust in institutions. Decline in institutions is an older phenomenon, but there's been a more precipitous decline in institutions that were once considered sacrosanct. Take the Supreme Court in the United States as an example. The judiciary was always above reproach and had tremendous respect. We've gotten accustomed to that trust in the legislators and parties started declining quite a while back, but the courts normally manage to maintain their level of approval. However, in the last 10 years, we've seen a noticeable decline in the approval of the courts, and that's including very controversial court decisions dating back to the 60s and 70s, during which trust in the courts remained very high in the United States.

With declines for all three branches of government now, you might say, "This is probably a sign of the times," that "We just don't trust things as much anymore," and that "This is part of modernity." [I]n the United States, 60% of Americans still say we can trust most people. In fact, Americans are more trusting in terms of their personal trust than most Europeans... When it comes to political trust and thinking about whether politicians are corrupt, the United States and Americans manifest an attitude that is very similar to attitudes found in countries that are recent democracies and transition countries. Therefore, there is a noticeable gap between personal and institutional trust in the United States.

Another part is apathy, the lack of participation. The United States has had significantly lower levels than most Western industrialized countries and even these lower levels are somewhat declining. Now, I am fully aware that during the last midterm elections, there was an uptick, but, nonetheless, the turnout rate and the participation rate in elections is much lower and declining. It's also mediated by race and, to some extent, by class. The problem with that is that if people don't show up to the polls, at the same time, you have an increase in political activism with people who have more extreme and radical attitudes. If they show up, it tends to skew the results.

Apathy has consequences. This map [1] shows you turnout by counties: the counties colored in red show you where the GOP took the majority, the blue ones where were Hillary Clinton had the majority in the 2016 elections. Gray

1. United States of Apathy



and black shows where nonvoters had the majority. So you see a vast part of the country where essentially nonvoting was the preferred choice of the people living in that county. The consequences of apathy mean that more extreme voices are much more likely to be heard in a situation like that.

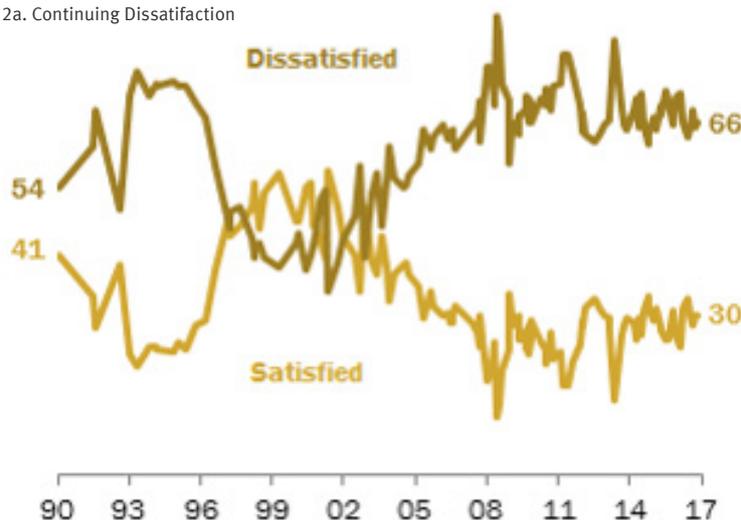
We also have profound levels of dissatisfaction. About two-thirds of Americans always proclaim to be profoundly frustrated and dissatisfied, though the dissatisfaction has actually increased. The graph [2a] shows an increase in dissatisfaction and [2b] shows a decrease in people’s confidence in the future. It went slightly up for white males with lower education, but it significantly plummeted for women. For example, in October 2015, 43% of women said they had confidence in the future, while 29% had that same sentiment just two years later.

Partisan polarization is another indicator. Not only do we now profess to love our own parties, but we also profess to hate the other party, and the level of animosity towards the other party is very much the same between Democrats and Republicans. In other words, we no longer believe that the other may be misguided, good people who just don’t know what’s good for us. Here, we have a situation where the other side, and their viewpoints, are delegitimized. They’re not considered part of the democratic game because you see them as enemies. From the Pew Center’s published statistics, you can see the kind of characters we attribute to the other: closed-minded, immoral, lazy, dishonest and unintelligent. These are rather striking notions that we attribute to the other. In the 1970s, the Pew Center used to ask what you’d do if your daughter or your son married somebody who supports the other party. That was, for the most part, OK, with 40% or more of Americans thinking that this wasn’t a problem. That number has declined, and is now in low single digits. Another survey question about lifestyle now sees bike riding as a liberal activity, while living in a more spacious home is viewed as a more conservative lifestyle. Partisan polarization translates slowly into lifestyle and personal habits. But the political polarization is really what is key here.

The political polarization has significantly increased. To summarize the indicators we have: trust is declining, the dissatisfaction remains high and stable, apathy is rampant, polarization, and growing sense of illegitimacy of the other political party and their supporters is also very much manifest.

Now, there are two prominent narratives: a liberal narrative or liberal leftist narrative and a conservative right-wing narrative. The liberal narrative is inequality and racism: people are fundamentally good, but they’re misled

2a. Continuing Dissatisfaction



2b. Growing Gaps in Optimism

	October 2015	April 2017	Change
Total	45	41	-4
Men	47	53	+6
Women	43	29	-14
18-29	38	30	-8
30-49	43	39	-4
50-64	49	49	0
65+	53	47	-6
Postgrad	55	42	-13
College grad	51	43	-8
Some college	41	34	-7
HS or less	43	45	+2

by powerful, self-serving elites who want the accumulated wealth and enlist a variety of strategies, new media lobbies to distract, divide and brainwash the people. Therefore, the economic right (Wall Street) and the cultural right (fundamentalists, racist, xenophobes, and misogynists), make common cause so that the people don’t realize their true interests and essentially make the wrong voting choice. I’m not completely unsympathetic to this, and I’m not saying that’s exactly what everybody is arguing, but this is a narrative that is out there for what is happening.

There is also a conservative counter-narrative that is an anti-liberal backlash. The argument is that they are multicultural elites, they dislike their own country, they reject its tradition, they repudiate its history, they tear down its social fabric, they want to replace the country with people and values that are foreign and alienate common people, they want to impose additional costs on common

people because they tell them how they should live their lives and the chaos crime, the job losses that we see are all the consequences of open borders and the spread of an anything-goes Hollywood culture. These are two resonant narratives that are out there that can be tested empirically in different ways.

From a political science perspective, I think we probably would have a somewhat different sense of how we would diagnose the causes and we would probably first say that there have been profound socio-economic changes in Western society. These changes led to changes in political attitudes, which, in turn, have resulted in changes in the political system across the Western world, from Austria to the United States. The reason why it shaped out differently has a lot to do with the rules of the game that are present in different political systems. While the rules are different, the causes and the big currents are very similar. The second argument would be that there have been changes in media and communications. If you take these two parts – these changes in economic and social change in society, in combination with media and communication – you can explain a vast range of the variance of what’s been happening.

There are two more things we need to add if we want to talk about the United States. There was a strange development in American political parties that is unique to the United States that has something to do with the Republican Party. Lastly, there are some quirky institutions that are part of the American political system because it’s so old and it has this long continuity that’s very unique to the United States. Taking the big picture, if we wanted to add why certain things play out a certain way in the United States, we have to consider changes in the party system, and we have to also understand some of these features that are strange from a European perspective or from a foreign perspective that are, inherently, part of the American system.

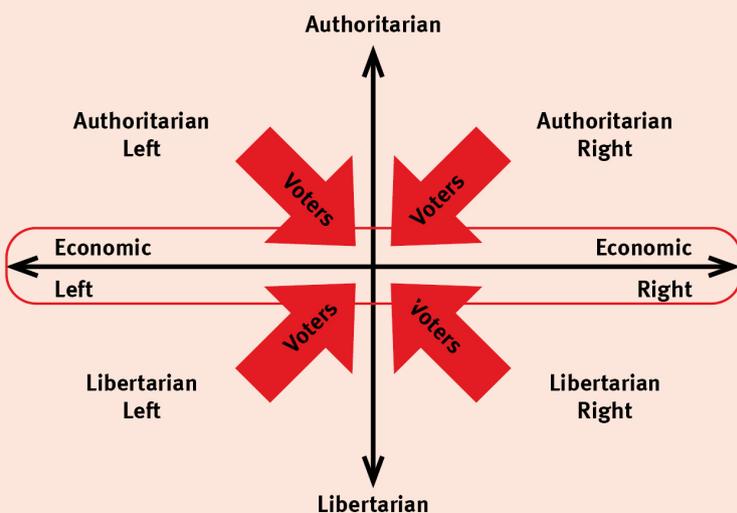
PROFOUND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN WESTERN SOCIETY

Moving on to diagnose the social and economic changes in Western societies, I ask you to picture the following [3]: Imagine the electorate in the industrial age, and we can imagine voters varying from left to right. That’s the socioeconomic axis. Some voters want more state interference in the economy, more redistribution of wealth. Other voters want less of that. That’s the left to right axis. Some voters have a greater need for structure, for order, for authority. They are more inclined to be trending towards an authoritarian end. I’m not saying everybody wants to be an authoritarian. These are axes. Some people want more structure, while others want more personal and individual freedom. So voters line up along these axes because in the industrial age most competition was along the economic axis. It was about the redistribution of wealth and whether you, as a voter, were part of that. So that drew you towards the center. The natural tendency was to move to the center because the key political parties, the key actors negotiating socioeconomic questions, were the center-left and the center-right parties. If you wanted to be part of this, you had to be there. So that contestation drew people from the margins, from the extremes to the center. In addition, we have the emergence of large center-left and center-right parties throughout the Western world. The Social Democrats, if you will, and the Conservatives. In the United States, they’re Democrats and the Republicans. This is where the axis of political contest was.

The main difference in the United States is its winner-takes-all majoritarian election system. That is, if you have a majority in a district, you get the whole district. It’s also called the “first past the post” system in Britain. A system that is majoritarian has to have a two-party system because the main parties win all the districts, which is called “Duverger’s law” in political science. The United States didn’t have a party system with many different parties and just two that were bigger, it had essentially a real two-party system consisting of the GOP and the Democrats. There were other parties, but the hard left, the hard right and the libertarians remained niche parties.

In the post-industrial era, the situation resulted in voters being very differently affected by the economic and social changes introduced. Some people, particularly those who are lesser educated, saw not only their jobs disappearing and being shipped overseas, they had a much greater sense, greater need for control, order and authority because they felt the borders were open. They felt they’re losing control

3. Movement of voters



over their lives. They lost the ability to bargain and found themselves in new economic situations. Their need for order increased. They were looking for people who provide them with a seemingly more authoritarian answer. Since there was nobody on the left, they'd veered right because the only offer of greater order and structure came from there.

Not only were voters moving away from each other in different directions due to their different fates resulting from modernization and globalization, but they also veered strongly to the right in the authoritarian dimension. Now, the competition was no longer along the economic axis, but primarily along the post-economic or the identity axis or between liberal and an illiberal order versus the libertarian dimension.

The party systems became more fragmented – in virtually every European country, the Social Democrats and conservatives are declining. In the Netherlands, they are a shadow of the former selves. In Germany, in Austria and in many other countries such as Spain, many more parties are appearing. We now have a whole broad range of parties that pop up that are all focused on the non-economic axis. It's about identities, about non-material things. That can't happen in the United States because the voting system hasn't changed. That tension is unfolding within the political parties, which are strangely shaped in different directions. The Republican Party, as a whole, moved to the right, ranging from a libertarian end that's getting smaller (Ron Paul would be an example of a representative of that part of the spectrum), a mainstream Republican Party, and an increasingly important and larger part that's moving in an area where the Republicans originally were not present. This is an authoritarian, illiberal part of the party, which is in part propelled by the Tea Party. The Republican Party has been stretched and contorted in different ways. The same happened with the Democrats. The old blue collar Democratic Party is just a shadow of its former self. They associate with mainstream Democrats, but then there is an increasingly important progressive, urban part of the party that is much further to the left. It's driving the Twittersphere, driving candidate selection, and it's very dynamic.

The changes and attitudes are reinforced in the United States because it's a very mobile society, as people self-select to live in areas where they encounter people who think like them. This is an effect that's also not present to that extent in Europe, as Europeans are much more sedentary. The polarization is actually helped along to some extent by the settlement patterns.

CHANGING POPULATION GROUPS

Let's look at some population groups: working-class, elites and middle class. In the industrial age, elites in every country, and this may seem strange for us today, used to be on the right. It would've been strange in the 1950s, 1940s that the editors of newspapers, professors, judges, and the kind-of middle class would vote for the Democrats, or the Social Democrats if you're in Europe. They would vote for a center-conservative party instead. Now, the elites have become split. Most of the cultural elites have moved to the left, and that includes the educated elite. Thomas Picketty calls them the Brahmins and the smaller "business" elite are called the merchants. We can test this by looking at voter attitudes – they're now really two distinct groups of societal elites, but the majority have moved to the center-left and they're available for a party that makes a center-left offer.

The working class used to be on the left, halfway up toward a more authoritarian end of the spectrum, and the middle class was always traditionally in the middle. The working class has moved to the right and the working class predominately votes for right-wing parties. The reason this was delayed for a long time in the United States is that elections are much more personalized there, which is mediated by candidates. You often have a tendency that voters veer in a direction, but they have to wait for a certain candidate who closes the deal. So we had these big realignments in the United States usually coinciding with presidential candidates, such as the Reagan alignment, the Newt Gingrich alignment or in the Trump alignment. In other countries, we can observe this from election to election. In Austria, 67% of the workers have voted for the far-right since the mid-1990s. However, for the far-right party, the workers' group is only 12% of their voters. In other words, if the Social Democrats tried to get the voters back, they wouldn't gain very much and they would lose a lot more people, such as urban progressives, in the process.

So having to get the working class back is not a simple answer. If you get them back, you lose voters elsewhere. They just move to the Greens or to other parties. Nevertheless, in the United States, the working class has also moved to the right, waiting for a good excuse to be electing somebody that made them a different offer.

The middle class has become split because of parts of the middle class being negatively affected by globalization and moved into low-level service industries as a poor middle class that's also veering to the authoritarian right. There's still a traditional middle class, and then there's the new middle class that's firmly to the left, which is where the Democratic Party recruits a lot of its voters and activists. The

problem is that this is not the entire United States. That's not the entire electorate. That's a sizable but not huge part of the electorate. If you select candidates and drive political debate based on that group, you might have a problem in the general elections. If we look at voters now, for example, the computer geek, the computer scientist, the soccer mom, the urban middle class, it would have been strange 50 years ago that these people would be voting for the Democrats, as these were associated with the blue-collar electorate or with the rural underclass in the South, the Dixiecrats.

It's quite clear to us, when we see these images, that they look like Democratic voters. But that tells us how much we ourselves have been shaped by this flip-flop. The oil worker, for example, is now a natural Republican voter, and the white lower-middle class, middle-aged male – called the NASCAR dads, an equivalent of the soccer moms – are normally expected to vote Republican or for Trump. However, that's fairly new in terms of electoral history. In the 1990s, I was part of a venture campaign in Michigan, and we were still going after rural white voters that were part-time factory workers. Everybody was a factory worker in Michigan, which was split between this industrial part and the rural part. We went after them and they were still recruited because they were all in the unions. Even when I lived in western Pennsylvania, people were union members and hunters. So you could still reach them, but that became less and less possible.

CHANGES IN THE MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION: HOW DID WE GET TO ALTERNATIVE FACTS?

So then let's focus on changes in the media and how the media changes factored into this story. Let's first look at old media and habits inherent in the old media that made this polarization more possible.

The United States was different from most countries in that it always had a fragmented media landscape. The problem was there were technological limits. Most Americans would watch the three networks because there was really nothing else you could do at one point. However, polemics against the elites and government have been a staple of American politics, although it radicalized noticeably in the 1980s with religious and talk radio formats taking over the Fairness Doctrine clause and creating a format that was often replicated subsequently through cheaply produced studio broadcasts, [and] opinion pieces that involved a deliberate reframing or framing of today's political events. There's a story that you hear and then somebody tells you what you should think about that, what that means. That came into its own in a big way, in a more organized way, in

the 1980s.

At the same time, what was also very typical in the United States was the importance of the media logic – political candidates knew that they had to be subservient to the media. The media mediated how people perceive the candidate and one has to conform to the media's rules and laws in order to be successful. Campaigns were personality-driven, candidate-focused, dramatized, sensationalized and script-oriented, meaning that the big story was the underdog. It was good versus evil, or there was some triumph over adversity. It was some narrative. It was always more than just presenting the person and the program. Increasing competition and performance meant that trend accelerated and became even more important.

Then we had in the United States a segmented consumer market. With the availability of new technology, cable news – satellite at first and then other media – you could narrowcast and focus on particular subgroups and supply them with delivered messages. Simultaneously, mainstream media went more strongly into infotainment and soft news. That created a niche market at the highbrow end, but also at the ideological end. There was a need for four additional news stories that were boring to most, but interesting to some. You could supply them at the intellectual end, but you could also supply them at the ideological end by filtering stories through an ideological lens. Then, of course, 24-hour news shows on the cable news networks came into their own because you needed to set the agenda. In addition, if you didn't set the agenda, your opponent would set the agenda and therefore you had to make sure you get there first. The news broadcasts had to provide content. The issue then was everything became a campaign. Campaigns used to be limited, but now every bill had to be rolled out as a campaign. If the notion of permanent campaigning in politics is a horse race and sport, this sort of coincided roughly at the time when in the background the party system and the voters were re-arranging themselves.

Something that I have a hard time thinking about, is the notion of what I would call the democratic biases because these are old media in a democracy. Since, in a democracy, we have to absorb democratic values and the assumptions we make about democracies, if we engage in news making, we have a tendency to think everybody is equally important. Our democratic instinct doesn't allow us to say that certain people are more important and should receive more coverage, but that leads to false equivalence. So if 95% of climate scientists say there's global warming and 5% say it's not the case, it's hard to not report about them, but that creates the impression that there are two sides.

There is a business model in the media in which the consumer is always right. If they want cute dog pictures and baby kissing, they're going to get more of that. Who are we to say they shouldn't be watching this or should be dissecting political programs? There's a fairness bias, the two sides to every story, and there's an objectivity bias. We live in a subjective age. I mean, if we feel vaccinations are bad because we're worried, maybe they are sort of bad. Who are we to say that you shouldn't feel that way and why shouldn't we report on this? So the idea of such subjectivity and inclusivity is that nobody shall be excluded. In a democracy, we are inherently skeptical of powerful people, so there's also a bias of "these are the experts." As long as this could be controlled by editors and journalists who knew what they were doing and could weigh these things, it could be contained. But once the horse has left the barn, it becomes very difficult to apply the same standards.

New media was a game-changer because it allowed policymakers to reverse the media logic. They could create their own media logic because they could directly contact people or each other and the media had to decide whether to report it or not. The most important difference is that they don't have to go through media anymore. People like Trump are extraordinary in that their tweets are followed by more people than very powerful, well-established institutions. In addition, if you have that power, you can sink somebody's stocks, you can ruin somebody's political fortunes and you can instill fear – a very powerful motivator. Virtually all far-right parties that are successful are very good at shaping the public message. They have very extensive media departments. For those who follow the Italian Northern League, the Lega, they were a model to be studied.

The news media provided different levels of mobilization. There was initial mobilization, how people are drawn into this. The gateway is reframing; you see news story as you would see a news story in traditional media, but now there's a reframing of the meanings of what you see. Then, simply relying on human nature – the confirmation bias – we like to read stuff that validates our opinion because we'd like to be validated. There is something called the Dunning-Kruger effect that refers to people who are incompetent, not knowing that they're incompetent. People who are very competent in an area know their limits and therefore are very skeptical. But there are issues when people are very certain, such as that trees produce more CO₂ than diesel cars, for example. If you don't know much about it and you read this, you tend to trust it if it's described in a more scientific way, because you're not aware of your own level

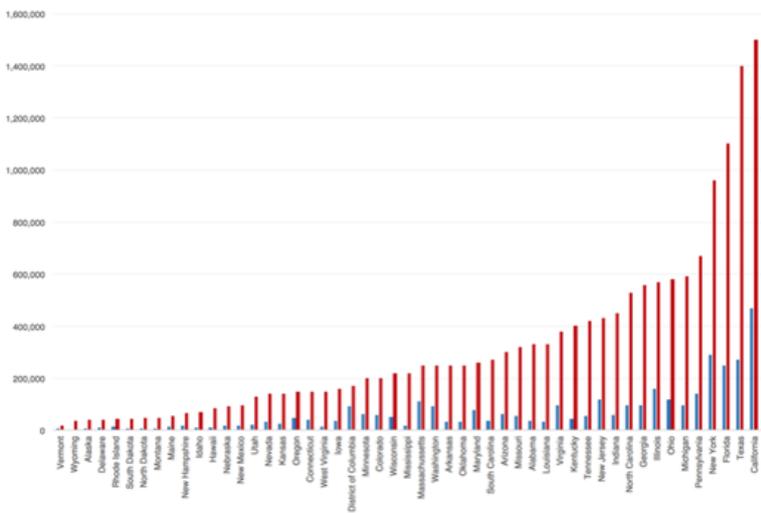


of competence. Filter bubbles, click-baiting and algorithms do the rest. This leads to initial levels of mobilization where you're fed alternative facts and alternative news.

The next step is immunization, because even if you fall for the first, you going to encounter at some point counter-narratives. So why are these counter-narratives not effective? Because of their ways of immunizing you by claiming that society is divided into two groups, yours being the good group and the other being the bad group. So whatever comes from them shouldn't be trusted. Counter-narratives are part of a story of the other side, and you then become part of a tribe engaged in a battle about what is, in a cosmic sense, right or wrong. You don't listen to the argument, but you discount it because it's part of the other tribe. And that's where emotional appeals and pseudo truths are very important.

The last stage – radicalization – is the use of extreme emotions and engaging in conspiracy theories. Not everybody gets to that third level, but there are some who constantly read unbelievable things. In Europe, there are a tremendous number of supporters of the idea that the United States blew up the Twin Towers and that 9/11 was carried out by the CIA. Of course, there's also the idea that Hillary Clinton was linked to a child pornography ring, as many of you know. These are not people that are in an institution, these are people who are out living and then they act on those beliefs. A high level of insulation, immunization, and radicalization had to have occurred for people to have that kind of attitude. It can't be compared to cults in the 1970s as those developments were limited to cults and people indoctrinated and believed it. This has become much more of a mass phenomenon. But just the simple reframing of what a refugee is or whether a leader

4. Power of Algorithms and People's Habits



is a traitor. Those kinds of things are very powerful. That is what most social media does on a daily basis.

The power of algorithms and people's habits [slide] [4] shows the red bars are people clicking on Trump Facebook pages and the small blue bars are people clicking on Hillary Clinton pages in different states. You can see that the red bars are much higher because people were just more interested in Trump. This doesn't mean everybody who clicked there was a supporter of Trump, he was just more interesting in terms of click-baiting – a more interesting story, more exciting. Then the algorithm delivers you something that's very similar and therefore you keep being fed similar messages in some ways. This isn't saying that there's any master plan behind it, it's just structures and human nature coming together in a certain way.

The next step is how media began to be part of information wars. They started innocently and from today's perspective, quaint because they all looked like the Drudge Report 20 years ago. Pages like the Drudge Report sort of seemingly presented an overview of articles, which was put together for maximum partisan effect. It was a deliberate shaping of public opinion that is fair in political campaigns. The next level was to create platforms that were not just there to present reality in a filtered way, but to be part of a war. You had people trailing candidates with cameras or creating scenarios where candidates would trip up and you put that on the website. Or the websites were used deliberately to engage in disinformation and to claim things that were patently untrue. The next step was, of course, using media data for political campaigning. Cambridge Analytica and then hacking, stealing information, dumping it on the internet or engaging in using botnets to spam and often

perpetrated by foreign powers or by nefarious interests is the next level.

But these things were possible, I would argue, because of an underlying change of the political system. What happened is we then create, and the media accomplices this, a dichotomous image of reality; a version of us versus them, good versus bad, all or nothing, a tribal bifurcated view of society, the country and the globe in which we only have stark choices. There's no center anymore and if we don't choose this, we're doomed. That sense that politics is conveying is amplified by modern media.

CHANGES IN US PARTY POLITICS

The results are not surprising. If you look at political polarization, only in the 1990s, the median Democratic position and the median Republican position were very close together. The electorate has moved much further apart by 2017 and that translated, of course, into Congress, where they used to work across the aisle. The Founding Fathers in the United States were liberals. They deliberately wanted to gum up the workings of government because they didn't trust governments. In order to get things done, you need bipartisan consensus and you need moderate bipartisan consensus to get things done because there are so many veto points built into the American system. If there's no bipartisan consensus, or the parties drift apart, you can't get anything done. There's nobody there to work with. As a result, you have a steady decline in bills, gridlock, and blockages. If the government, therefore, can't act, can't address the kinds of issues that worry Americans, the government then loses legitimacy. So that's a self-fulfilling prophecy. The government can't respond to the needs of the people. The government is unable to act. Thus, it increases the illegitimacy and that feeds polarization, leading to further inaction. That's sort of in a negative spiral that the United States is engaged in at this time.

The sense is bipartisan in that Democrats feel deeply aggrieved, but this was genuine also in the other direction. Both parties always feel very alienated in a polarized world if the other party has the president in power. The spikes and the troughs are a mirror image of each other, but, over time, the trust has declined.

Just two more things about changes in US party politics, which is something that also happened uniquely in America. The Republican Party, for various reasons we can't get into, moved much further to the right starting in the 1980s. This drift to the right, a sort of conservative onslaught, is something that happened in Britain too, but was then counterbalanced. It's really happening in the United

States and has no equivalent in Europe and, therefore, the movement to the right prompted a counter move by the Democrats, but never to that extent. Partisanship increased first on the right in the United States. The Republican Party used to be a four-ring circus, then with the Tea Party turned into a five-ring circus. But the Trump part of the party was never in the Republican Party. Trump would not have qualified to be a Republican, but for various reasons, Trump and the Trumpians have sort of taken over the party. And if this were not the United States with a majoritarian voting system, the Trump party would be a radical right-wing populist party, exactly the same that we see in most of the West European countries. There's very little difference.

The reason that we should call them Republicans is because it's just so difficult for a third party to emerge. Everything gets absorbed and internalized into the existing parties. Now, the Republican Party is clearly not what it used to be. Two things are quirky about the American political system; one that does not exist anywhere else is gerrymandering – partisan redistricting for the benefit of public party. The Supreme Court recently ruled that this is a political question, not a juridical question. Both parties have been engaging in gerrymandering for a long time and it goes back to the 18th century. The problem is that the Republicans are just much better at this. It takes a lot more Democrats to fill the same number of seats as it does Republicans. So, Democrats have to have much larger victories in order to have the same effect. Having these grossly misshapen districts also means that when you live in

some of these districts, you don't even go to the polls because it's pointless. It is already a foregone conclusion which party is going to win because the district lines are drawn to it for the benefit of a party and you are so far away from winning it in many cases that you do not even bother. And that again goes to the question of legitimacy and representation. Therefore, you just hope.

Much more generally, the American system, for historical reasons, understandably tended to privilege more conservative rural areas. One of the issues is that the Senate is non-representative and non-proportional because every state has two senators. But if you think about this, California's 40 million people have two senators, while 40 million in other states have a total of 46 senators. California would have 46 senators if this was done proportionally. Now, there are many arguments that if the roles were different, other things would happen. But nonetheless, the structural bias favors a more conservative population that tends to act more conservatively and provides one of the two players with a decided structural advantage.

So let me conclude by saying the main message is: we have a loss of center. The media played an important in declining legitimacy, declining representation, and politics driven by activist groups and selective mobilization because others feel excluded. We have a drifting apart of the country. The question is how far will it go?

Thank you very much.



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