

Tricia Johnson:

It's Aspen Ideas To Go, from the Aspen Institute. I'm Tricia Johnson. The 2020 Presidential Election has a unique backdrop. Not only are voters influenced by deep partisan divides and a growing distrust of government, they're also weighing America's response to a deadly pandemic that has plunged the country into a recession. Rachel Bitecofer is a political scientist. She says this year is different for the Trump campaign.

Rachel Bitecofer:

In 2016, it was about burning the world and revolution, right? And now people just want to watch Monday Night Football in peace and not die.

Tricia Johnson:

What's in store for the November Election? Do the results hinge on swing voters? Aspen Ideas To Go brings you compelling conversation from the Aspen Institute, which drives change through dialogue, leadership and action, to help solve our greatest challenges. Today's discussion is from the McCloskey Speaker Series held by Aspen Community Programs. Rachel Bitecofer accurately predicted the 2018 Midterm Elections with a revolutionary new theory. Swing voters matter far less than most experts think. Instead, turning out new voters drives election results. So what will get people to mark their ballots? "The motivators may include strong party loyalty and exhaustion with the pandemic and systemic racism," says Tamara Keith. She covers the Whitehouse for NPR. Keith and Bitecofer sit down with Dan Glickman, who leads the Aspen Institute's Congressional Program. He served in Congress for 18 years. Here's Glickman.

Dan Glickman:

Rachel, you've been referred to as an election nerd, maybe you refer to yourself that way. I think Tamara you're probably an election nerd too. And as somebody who's run for office 10 times in my life, I'm certainly an election nerd as well. But it was the British politician, historian who said, "May we live in interesting times," and he theoretically based that on an old Chinese curse. And we are in the most extraordinary times I have ever seen in my life. I'm older than both of you but I started my politics in 1973 and I've never seen anything like this before. And I'm gonna ask you both more of what I call a 30,000 foot question and that is, we've got this horrendous pandemic, COVID, and we don't know where it's going, we don't know if it's gonna get better or not get better, it's led to these incredible economic scenarios and conditions that people are facing, mostly working in poor people, but everybody in this country and around the world.

Dan Glickman:

We have all these issues involving systemic racism that have been raised as a result of the George Floyd situation. And we seem to have this growing lack of trust in government, which has probably always been an undercurrent in America, but it's much more serious now than it's been before. So given all these things, these what I call asteroids that are hitting the political side of the world, how does this change presidential politics from what we have experienced before? And I think I'm gonna start with Tamara, because she was on first, and then I'm gonna go Rachel afterwards.

Tamara Keith:

I mean, I think that it is bigger than a lack of faith in government, I think that there is a degradation of faith in institutions more broadly in this country, and obviously that is not a new development it's

something that's been growing. And it gets to the church, it gets to the press clearly, and government as well, and when you combine a lack of faith in institutions with a really scary pandemic, when people just want facts, you end up with something really challenging. And the current President, President Trump, sort of relishes in trashing institutions in a way that Presidents don't typically do? Presidents don't typically sort of spread conspiracy theories about their own government while they're leading it. So it creates this really unusual dynamic that I'm not sure exactly what it means for the election but I will say that there is something that is showing up in polling and elsewhere which is that people are simply exhausted. People are exhausted by the pandemic, they are exhausted, especially people of color, by the systemic racism, and people are sort of exhausted by the daily drama that comes from the Whitehouse, including Trump supporters are exhausted by the daily drama that gets picked up in the, I wish he would tweet less, which is something that we've been hearing for a long time but there's a difference between a candidate for President and someone who has been President for three and a half years.

Dan Glickman:

Rachel? You want to comment on this?

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah, I'm increasingly interested in the 30,000 foot view. And as a political scientist and my training before I became an election nerd, female election forecaster making predictions and horse racing stuff, that stuff was kind of like a byproduct from the work that I do, which is deeply theoretical and really grounded in voter behavior or voter psychology and particularly in the area of political polarization. And so we think about like the decline in trust of institutions and government, the decline in trust and of the press, those are things, like they didn't just evolve naturally, they were products of political choices that were made by political actors, right? So we have the re-emergence really of partisan news, coming in the talk radio and then cable news and then the Internet, and we have campaign, like our American campaign system is very unique, I don't think most Americans realize that most countries don't have a wild-west, two year-long campaign process, where you can kind of just say whatever you want or do whatever you want too, and those things have really eroded public confidence.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So it's not like the public just kind of naturally came to this really cynical place, right? It's a product of 30 or 40 years of really heavy advertising and media focus on kind of spoiling the idea of trust in institutions and I'm increasingly looking too at the 244 years the Republic's been in function as a very short time window. We've had one near miss of the collapse in the Civil War, and as somebody who studies political polarization, we are seeing behaviorally a lot of overlap. I'm going up to DC right after this interview for an interview and the election that I'm comparing 2020 to is not 2016, it's 1860 so they should tell you a little bit about what's going on here in 2020.

Dan Glickman:

So do either one of you think we're at a point, a trajectory for a near-miss and could that asteroid hit the earth, the one that I was talking about, in the year 2020 in this election. I mean, is it that potentially bad?

Rachel Bitecofer:

If you'll humor me and just let me respond quick, first and quickly, I do keep talking about where we are as an abnormality and I think we did jump into a habit of talking about each presidential election is. This is the most important election ever and the fate of the world hangs on the election so that it's kind of the boy who cried wolf. But in this case, in this context, if we think of just about where we are with this pandemic. It is true that we do have this very calamitous pandemic situation in the US and it's having these massive economic repercussions and people are going to be looking at very tough decisions to send their children to school in the fall. But when we look at that in the global context, it didn't have to be this way.

Rachel Bitecofer:

The other democracies, especially established democracies of the world, they didn't just bend their curve, they crushed it, and now they're recovering from a pandemic that is well managed, ours is raging out of control. So that is just one symptom of a... this is not the America that you and I and everyone know and love, right? We are the country that stamped out fascism and put a man on the moon and we can't even handle this pandemic in the way that our global friends and allies are handling it. So I think it really does indicate we're in a position, and a time period, where we are at a juncture, and this election period is really a time of American strength.

Dan Glickman:

And Tamara, how would you comment on that?

Tamara Keith:

Well, I think certainly our divisions are being laid bare by the pandemic. And the fact that something like wearing a mask has become a political symbol is a very big flashing red light about just how divided we are as a country, that science is partisan is pretty mind-boggling and is a reflection of this time and what I don't know is, is this an echo of the Great Recession? Is some of this division a result of this huge shock that our society experienced that there is populism, the support for populism, an outgrowth of that shock that we experienced a decade ago and what in the world is gonna happen 10 years after this shock, because this one is even more significant. And smarter people are probably thinking about this but there are people who are still experiencing trauma from 2008 and 2009.

Tamara Keith:

And now even more people are going through it now and the combination of the death toll, families suffering with loved ones in ICUs that they can't see or touch or be near, the job losses, the stress that families are under is really hard to underestimate. And that has to affect the way people think about this election, how they think about voting, it's probably going to affect the way people think for a generation to come at least.

Dan Glickman:

So both of you are well experienced in drilling down into the public and the constituencies and how the parties work. Just as a note, when I ran for Congress in Kansas, and Kansas is not known as a big bastion of democratic politics, but I was a Democrat from a Republican District and we had other Democrats in there and I recall that when President Reagan ran and he carried the state by 65% of the vote, and I carried my district by 65% of the vote. And that was not necessarily unusual, and that had to do with... I don't know if had to do with, as Rachel you talked about the elasticity of the base or whatever, but there wasn't much of a base to be honest with you. I got a lot of Reagan voters that liked me and voted for

me. And most members of Congress were able to kind of manage that. So talk a little bit about this now the base.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Very happy to talk about that. In fact, the electorate that served with you when you served in Congress had distinct elements that are no longer applicable when we look at American political behavior. The time period that you served in Congress was a time period, it's always in flux, so I don't want to say like it was in flux and now it's not in flux, it's just that the time period that it was in flux then was a really, really fluid period where the southern realignment was in massive movement. And so you had ideological liberals who were Republicans at that time period. So if I knew you were a Republican in 1980, it probably meant that you supported low taxes and weren't in support of abortion, but it didn't definitely mean that. You could have been a Rockefeller Republican and you could have supported abortion access.

Rachel Bitecofer:

The way it does now of course is that it really does give me a very tight guide to your issue positions and in the past too, of course, we had conservative Democrats. Now there are still more holdover conservative Democrats and the Democratic Party ideologically is more heterogeneous than the Republican Party is, but in that time period yes, it was very easy to pull over a crossover voter who was you know a Republican identifier or a Democratic identifier in party but who identified with you ideologically and it's just different now because it's a term from political science literature called, party sorting, if you google that you'll come up with a couple of great political science books and studies that talk about that ideological sorting process that had really profound impact.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So it's not that party hasn't always been important in American politics, but it's so important now that I don't need to know anything about you except for your party and I can guess nine out of 10 times who you're going to vote for, not just for President, but all the way down the as long as you've got that little D or little R are next to it. And in the last 10 years, I mean really the last five or six years, it's become so powerful that D and R, you'll still go with it even if the candidate has major personal flaws, like Roy Moore down in Alabama did.

Dan Glickman:

Tamara.

Tamara Keith:

Yeah, there's just not ballots flitting in the way there used to be. And so that means that you're more likely to get waves or to get... there are not a lot of Republicans who can be rewarded for moderation right now. In 2018 there were a few candidates who tried to separate themselves from President Trump, on the theory that like their voters understood them, they knew that they were moderate, that they stood up to the President when he needed standing up to, things like that. And they simply... Democrats were not going to reward somebody with an R next to their name just because they took some moderate positions or stood up to the President. And in fact a lot of Republican voters were like, "Oh that person's a squish, he or she isn't loyal enough to President Trump." And so what you have seen, and this is sort of a part of that sorting and that partisan identity where the party matters more than anything. There are polls somewhere that where you ask people, "Would you allow your child to date

someone from another party?" And people would say like, "No way, that's worse than a lot of other things."

Dan Glickman:

So does this make it easier to prognosticate elections or does it make it more difficult? I mean that the business...

Tamara Keith:

That's a Rachel question.

Rachel Bitecofer:

It's made me nerd famous. I mean yeah, so I argue it does because, really, I mean I wouldn't call it the meat of my theory, there's many things that are the meat of my theory, this is more like a limb of it. But yeah it does, I mean, so basically in 2018, just being a Republican, and keeping in mind, a district or state shapes the ideology of the member because you're going to have, in the swing district, you're gonna have moderate members who run and get supported by the parties in the primaries and win, those primaries become like moderate. So it's not like... people think of it kind of the opposite way like the moderate person makes is made by... they're making it moderate but really it's the conditions of the election, right? You can't be an ideologue and represent a swing area very effectively because you have to get independents at least to vote for you.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So when we think about all the Republicans that got wiped out in 2018, it was going to be all the ones that were in competitive places and, as Tamara just pointed out, it didn't matter even if they had kind of more moderate voting records, their affiliation by party label with Trump was an electoral death sentence for them. And I understood that having watched what happened to Democrats with Obama, in the democratic affiliation in the 2010 and to a lesser extent 2014, more in the Senate in that wave, that's a big difference. I mean it has always been that there's a midterm effect and the President's party loses seats in the subsequent midterm, but the size of the midterm effect that we've been seeing and just these sharp, sharp swings have really been pronounced. I mean it looks like the electorate's basically Jekyll and Hyde, right? Like, "Oh I want Democrats in charge, no now I want Republicans in charge," right?

Rachel Bitecofer:

But it really is a product of this polarization, this nationalized election so, a Tamara is pointing out, it's very difficult for a member to say, "Hey I'm really focused on the issues that are specific to Kansas second," because they get pulled into the national conversation so all of these Senate and Republican incumbents that are gonna lose in fall, are going to be trying very hard to talk about what they do specifically for Colorado, for Maine, for Arizona, for North Carolina, but the conversation is going to be about Donald Trump and their relationship with Donald Trump, and that is ultimately what's going to do them in.

Dan Glickman:

And Tamara, going again back to this issue of prognosticating elections, where you have to go on and say, "Well I think this is the way things are gonna go and this is the way things are going to go," but given this kind of polarization that we're in, is it possible to prognosticate elections? And I know polling does

its best to do this in a scientific basis but are there enough who can move based upon their economic circumstances to change their positions?

Tamara Keith:

Well, and it's not just about swing voters, and Rachel is better at speaking to this than I am, but it's also about who turns out and who is motivated to vote. And polls are a snapshot of a moment in time and if the election were held today President Trump would have a major problem. Something could change. This is 2020, I'm not going to predict that things are just going to be stable and normal for the next three months, four months, four months. Who the heck knows? I mean like an asteroid could actually hit, and it wouldn't be the weirdest thing that happens.

Rachel Bitecofer:

That's true.

Dan Glickman:

Let's hope it's the other side of the earth and it's small enough so it doesn't...

Tamara Keith:

Yeah just a few little ripples. I mean, I guess what I'm saying here is I have a different job than Rachel does. Rachel has gotten into the forecasting business and she's got the confidence to roll with it and I am able to sort of analyze what I see and tell you what the campaigns are doing and tell you how that compares to the past, but I don't run models, I don't make predictions, I try not to because I hate looking at video of me when I've said something that's wrong.

Rachel Bitecofer:

I will say though you know Donald Trump has made things a lot easier on election forecasters because the number one rule that I used to tell my students about elections when I teach students how to run and do elections campaign work was to never overestimate the intelligence of voters in terms of like your marketing and digital and advertising messaging and stuff like that, which is a little bit cynical but it's a hard truth that people need to learn. But I've had to recently replace that number one rule was something I think is fairly obvious and that is to never just kill your voters. You don't want to actually kill them via incompetence because it's a very, very bad electoral strategy.

Rachel Bitecofer:

And so what we're really seeing is you know about a five-point embedded advantage for Biden, that was due to Trump fatigue, Trump anger, and fear negative partisanship which is what my model talks about, that was always going to give Democrats a structural advantage, that they just they could have used in 2016 if they had been motivated but they were complacent and they didn't exercise their demographic advantage, and that turned it into basically a double-sized advantage with the persuasion of more independents away from Trump with this pandemic mismanagement, which has just been a horribly mismanaged nightmare. And this last month in particular has really illustrated how poorly managed it's been because these red states that reopened preemptively without managing the pandemic, the chickens have come home to roost and this is just going to be a very bad situation for Trump headed all through the fall.

Tamara Keith:

One thing that I've really marveled at is the inability of the Trump campaign to define Biden, to define their opponent. One of President Trump's unique abilities, up until this point, is to find an opponent's weakness and really take advantage of it, find their strength and then turn it into a weakness. And he and his campaign, I mean his campaign has spent millions of dollars on television ads and Facebook ads trying a bunch of different messages against Biden and thus far it just hasn't stuck, which is kind of surprising. Incumbents usually have a head start to try to define their opponent and the Trump campaign has had an incredible cash advantage, they built a Death Star, but they haven't really been able to, and they even at one point said they were training it on Biden, they were going to... the planet destroyer was coming in and yet it didn't... it really... Biden so far has had an element of Teflon.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah and Tamara that's an excellent point and really I think what's killing them is that you know in 2016 it was about burning down the world and revolution, right? And now people just want to watch Monday Night Football in peace and not die, right? I mean the bar is much lower and then when you think about the nicknames he's debuted against Biden, it's Sleepy Joe, people are like, "Oh, I haven't been able to sleep in a year, God, I would love to be able to sleep," all of them sound great. So people look at Joe Biden and he's boring and that's comfortable, that's comforting, he's calm and they're like, "God that would be nice," so it's really, I think really flummoxing Trump because the chaos president after four years and to close out those other four years were pretty bad in terms of the chaos but this fourth year, I mean, it really is delivering in terms of chaos and I think people are looking at Biden and just seeing this calm ship, right? And that actually would to me normally almost always be a liability except for in this one case, right?

Dan Glickman:

When you see a 138,000 people, Americans dying. That does make you worry about the leadership in our country.

Rachel Bitecofer:

You've got a guy who literally can't even fake empathy, I mean like, I mean Trump has spent almost zero like bully pulpit effort on empathy and you would think somebody had by now would have been like, "Okay look, even if you didn't feel it, you gotta get out there and do some empathy theater right?" No.

Tamara Keith:

Talking to people who are around him, he is self-aware enough to know that he wouldn't feel authentic doing it and when he doesn't feel authentic doing something he can't really perform, he can't do the show.

Dan Glickman:

That great American political theorist Groucho Marx once said, "The most important quality in politics is sincerity, and when you can fake that you got it made."

Rachel Bitecofer:

It's true.

Dan Glickman:

Because he has great difficulty, when he said he didn't like people have been captured, that was kind of the first of what you would see that he is not a faker when it comes to his views.

Tricia Johnson:

It's Aspen Ideas To Go, thanks for listening. Mitt Romney, a US Senator from Utah, says China has become America's number one geopolitical adversary and competitor. He says China has made enormous strides economically, militarily and geopolitically.

Mitt Romney:

They're flexing their muscle in Hong Kong, they're flexing their muscles in the region with the Philippines, with the Solomon Islands. They're more and more hostile domestically, with regard to the Uyghurs and other minorities and religions...

Tricia Johnson:

The coronavirus pandemic, he says, is an opportunity to divert China from its confrontational past. He explains why in a video on our website. Watch China's Rise Demands a Renewed Brand of American Diplomacy, on aspenideas.org. You can also a link in the podcast show notes on our website, aspenidea.org. Let's back our featured conversation. Here's Dan Glickman.

Dan Glickman:

If I might move just quickly over to the Congress side of the picture, so I was raised in the article, I called it the article one institution, although I don't think the founders of our country kind of anticipated the evolution of one and two and it's gotten very confused to certainly. But any thoughts about that, not necessarily prognosticate the elections but to look at all these competitive Senate seats that are out there now and how the money is just rushing in on the Democratic side into a lot of these seats that we're not heretofore competitive. I wonder if you might comment on this as it relates to November and the role of Trump in that effect?

Rachel Bitecofer:

Of course I just have to precipice and say, under the Bitecofer model, all of these Senate seats were competitive pretty early and before the pandemic made them more so. But yes now they are super competitive and here's what we know from political science research, once there is a national tide of first off, once the tide is against a party, that's tough because it sets people up where a party can recruit better challengers and that's what you see, you see just fantastic challengers with Mark Kelly in Arizona and Sarah Gideon in Maine and Teresa Greenfield in Iowa and Cal Cunningham, So they're coming in with these great challengers, and the reason is, these challengers felt people are risk-averse and then when they feel like they have good chances where they're more likely to emerge. And then the donors feel that and it starts to basically snowball and we saw that with that first funding report with all nominees basically chosen, almost all of them, and you can really sense that in that left side of the spectrum there's a sense of they smell blood in the water to take that majority and then of course you throw in the Lincoln Project. And that Lincoln project, I mean you gotta think about what's going on there and of course I should disclose I am on the board of the Lincoln Project as an advisor that does not mean I'm a principal, I'm an adviser.

Rachel Bitecofer:

But in the Lincoln Project, you have the top-tier talent of Republican campaign strategist, people who ran five Presidential Campaigns for Republicans for 50 years, okay? The literally creme de la creme of the Republican campaign brain trust working now against Donald Trump and working to unseat these Senate Republicans and they're working unmoored from any party or any other consideration. And I think that is a real problem for these incumbents because who knows better how to beat them than their own people, all right, they know exactly where all the weaknesses are there, and Republicans if anyone who follows me knows, that Republicans are just very good at electioneering much better at electioneering than Democrats are and I think the Lincoln project in these Senate races is a major asset for Democrats.

Dan Glickman:

Tamara.

Tamara Keith:

Yeah, I would just add that that money racing to these Democratic Senate candidates is an indication of energy. There is a lot of energy on the Democratic side. Now, a lot of it is negative energy like Anti-Trump off the charts, negative energy that has motivated people, motivated them to donate money to Senate campaigns in states that are nowhere near their state. And obviously the Supreme Court is typically something that motivates Republicans and evangelical voters but given the age of Ruth Bader Ginsburg the icon status that she has taken on, it appears to be a motivator for Democrats as well.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Can I just add...

Dan Glickman:

Sure go ahead.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Democrats feel so burned on what McConnell did with the Merrick Garland vacancy, that they're convinced, that not only do they need this presidency but in order to fill the any vacancy with a non-conservative justice they have to flip the Senate, and so it really has I think, kind of come back to bite Mitch on the butt because he is you facing a fervor to take that Senate majority back that I don't know that he would quite have that much energy and also, as Tamara's pointing out, for decades it's been only on one side focused on the courts and now we're going to see Democrats I think, changing that. You're going to start to see advertising that's court focused, at least on the digital sphere amongst micro-targeting into progressive or you know people who are coded in the voter file as Democrats, and I think you're gonna start to see over this next decade Democratic voters starting to indicate importance of the courts.

Dan Glickman:

So one last question before we get to the audience and that has to do with the media, and of course Tamara, you're I guess part of the media, you're not the media but you're an important part of the media. NPR is a very well-respected part of the media.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yes, one of the best parts, yeah. And I love the media.

Dan Glickman:

Okay. But I noticed that one of the chains of newspapers that they had the Sacramento Bee and the Kansas City Star in the Miami Herald. McClatchy has been bought by hedge fund or in that process, and we're seeing, except for the New York Times and The Washington Post and Wall Street Journal and maybe USA Today, almost every newspaper in America is going down the toilet almost, in terms of not being able to financially keep itself up. And again, when I was in the political game, the Wichita Eagle, not one of the big newspapers had the highest penetration rate of almost any paper in the United States. So that that was a great stabilizer in our politics in terms of keeping us focused and I just wonder if you might quickly comment on the role of the media in terms of the preservation of our democratic elections as you look down the road to November.

Tamara Keith:

Yeah, I mean the sort of decline of the local paper, the corporatization of some local television, it's a real concern because there's no longer a shared set of facts. And when there isn't a local paper, and in a lot of places there isn't a local paper, that's light that isn't being shined on the dark crevices of our government and others who should be held accountable. And you talk about McClatchy, basically every news organization in America is in a big hole right now, almost every one of us, because of the pandemic affecting revenue. People aren't listening to the radio as much, advertisers don't want to be adjacent to, and I'm not talking about NPR here but more broadly, advertisers don't want to be adjacent to death and sadness. And a lot of advertisers that would traditionally be advertising aren't because they also don't have the money and they also are suffering. And so I mean we are in a very, hopefully temporary, but deep recession that is taking a toll on the news industry at a time when the industry is in a really rough spot already.

Tamara Keith:

We recently learned that Westwood One is going to be ceasing its radio news operations. When the dust settles and everybody's doing layoffs or furloughs or pay cuts, when the dust settles on this, the media landscape is going to be even less populated than it was before.

Tricia Johnson:

Cristal Logan, Vice President of Community Programs and Engagement at the Aspen Institute, reads questions from the online audience.

Cristal Logan:

Great, we have a lot of great questions coming in. The first question is, we hear there are very few swing voters left to be persuaded and that negative partisanship will drive turnout. If someone who tells a pollster that they are still undecided, what is the likelihood that they will actually cast a vote?

Rachel Bitecofer:

It's a really great question and something that if I just had a big budget and my own survey capabilities, I would dig at. There's so much potential stuff like that we're not ever seeing surveyors tackle that I wish that we were looking at. But that said, you know for many undecideds they do end up casting a ballot, when I do run a survey, closer to election day, I usually push my undecideds with a prompt to kind of force them off the bench. But generally speaking, I think right now we're looking at surveys that don't

apply a likely voter screen too, so we're really looking at registered voter survey is not likely voter surveys and then even if you do get a likely voter survey, we're not looking at a tight screen or model applied to it. So I guess my point is kind of hang tight, but there are some people I think that they enjoy the attention of being undecided and they kind of like to be rude or they have that whole debate last year or last cycle where they had only undecided voters come to the debate, so it could kind of make you feel a little special. So there are some incentives I think that stay on the bench but it would be a fascinating question and, like I said, I just wish I had money and survey capabilities, because I can do surveys, I just don't have the money.

Tamara Keith:

And the other thing that I don't know the answer to, is given what could be potential difficulty in voting in November, either difficulty getting an absentee ballot or fear of in-person voting, how good are the likely voter models even going to be given the level of uncertainty about how easy it will be for people to vote in various states.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah it is so uncertain, and we're gonna have a lot of variability because of the way these Governors have managed things, right? So we have states like Florida and Texas that are just, whoo, and then you know other states where the management has been decent. I mean the whole country has been mismanaged and that sets the context, so there's truly no state that's gonna have a clean safe and I think fall, in terms of the pandemic, but yeah there's gonna be a lot of variability.

Tamara Keith:

And this is the part where I make my pitch about how be prepared for election week rather than election night because it's going to take a while for these vote-by-mail ballots to come in.

Rachel Bitecofer:

And we need to normalize that and the fact that vote-by-mail announced t-ballot is perfectly legal and safe, that's why all of the entire Whitehouse, including the President himself, the ROC chairwoman, all vote-by-mail because they know it is a wonderful way to vote so it's certainly something that people should feel confident in and we will get those votes counted and American elections are nice and secure.

Cristal Logan:

Following on from that, is there a Bitecofer model that incorporates foreign interference, particularly manipulation of the actual vote.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So there's not a way to model. It's something that I certainly watch. We do know. Really we only know because that that one woman that leaked that information and a serving time in jail for it I think, that some of the voting systems were or the state files were actually looked at. But we're told by the government that there were no real penetrations and you know we have to believe that's the case. One thing that's beautiful about our system that's also terrible is the decentralization of it. So the states manage the elections, as you can see some states like California are running really great elections, that have been maximized towards participation, and some states have really kind of like I would call primitive election systems that don't really focus on participation. But the nice thing is it really does can

prevent like a massive infiltration operation. That said, our election security could have been upgraded and the Senate did not take action on that, it was unfortunate. The Senate Majority Leader chose not to and we're just gonna have to keep watching.

Cristal Logan:

How much will suburban realignment matter in 2020? In which states will it matter most?

Tamara Keith:

Oh, the suburbs I'm obsessed with the suburbs though I have not dug into the data yet but certainly suburbs were an area where a President Trump had some strengths and suburbs are where people have gotten grumpy. And if you look at the suburbs, and look at the suburban Richmond, Virginia not even just Northern Virginia but suburban Richmond, suburban Atlanta. If you look at the midterms, these suburban Philadelphia and other parts of Pennsylvania these it was like the revenge of the suburbs.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah, the suburbs are the heart of the bit of Bitecofer model and the underperformance of turnout in the suburbs in 2016 were a key... not the or the only factor in Clinton's lost, but a key factor. And so when we think about Pennsylvania, we're gonna see a massively different performance in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and those suburbs in those states. But when we think about where we're going, we're gonna be talking about the Atlanta suburbs and the Texas suburbs a lot after the election, especially because we're gonna be looking at least you know four maybe six, I mean potentially if the Democrats invested a lot of money, and right now I think with the level of investment that we're looking at Biden just bought an ad in Texas, we're looking probably about somewhere between four and six House seats gained in the Texas suburbs, and those are gonna be in Dallas and Houston but also a couple pickups that tap into the Austin City Limits.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So yeah so we're really talking about the suburbs outside of blue states used to benefit Democrats and red states they benefited Republicans, that's really what we're talking about now is that, suburbs out staying outside of red state cities are realigning to the Democrats now and they're doing so largely due to generational replacement because the Millennials and Zoomers are not growing up to be Republicans like their parents did, which who ironically didn't grow up to be Democrats like their parents did, so we're really seeing a mostly generational change, but it's also independents and some Republicans who are not happy with the party of Trump, like my Lincoln project friends.

Cristal Logan:

Our next question is, who do you think Biden will pick as his running mate and is it important it be a woman of color?

Dan Glickman:

First of all, I want you to know I've told them no. The age difference, I'm much too young for him.

Rachel Bitecofer:

That's what I was going to say. You stole my joke.

Dan Glickman:

Oh, I'm sorry.

Tamara Keith:

I think a lot of people have made it clear to the Biden camp that it's important that it be a woman of color.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Not me. In the New York Times op-ed or anything. So yes, I think it should be a woman of color and you know what, that op-ed ran on a Tuesday, like a couple days after the George Floyd murder, but only at the very beginning of the protest and by the end of the week of that week I think it was like pretty apparent that it would be a really big mistake not to read into this moment that this is a moment and you should get on the roller coaster, get on the ride.

Tamara Keith:

And the interesting thing is that white liberals care about this a lot. This is not necessarily about winning over voters of color, this is about winning over white liberals who say that it is very important to them that... I mean, who wanted the Democratic nominee to potentially be a person of color and who say it's very important to them that the VP or the Presidential nominee are being more reflective of the Democratic race more broadly. I mean, and much as sort of the public opinion and even some of the protests have been driven more by white people than in the past. Woke white liberals are a big part of the story.

Rachel Bitecofer:

I'm really glad Tamara mentioned that actually because, one of the reasons that when the Floyd protest broke out, and even though there was some rioting and looting that accompanied them, I was so pushing that very ferociously on the idea that they would benefit Trump, that there would be a backlash of fact it was because of woke white liberals who for a long time now in public opinion data have been showing an immense propensity towards white or towards liberalization on racial attitudes. So it doesn't surprise me at all to hear that Tamara's seen data that shows that white liberals are very supportive or maybe even more supportive of the idea of a person of color running on the ticket. But for me, I kind of think about it a little differently, I'm thinking about in terms of a turnout booster. And I can't remember who I saw on Twitter but it was definitely somebody of color and they were talking about how their grandma would vote for Joe Biden but if he had a female running mate of color she would also drag all of their aunts and cousins and all of her friends from church to do it too, and I think for me, that's how I think about it.

Cristal Logan:

The next question is, I'm from Arizona which will be a state to watch in 2020. How do we get new voters particularly minorities and Millennials out to vote?

Tamara Keith:

Well I mean, the first part is registering people to vote and there had been a real lull in voter registration especially because farmers markets and places where people go to get people to register, colleges, things were closed. There has been sort of a resurgence in voter registration and another part of that is

voter education because first time voters are more likely to have their mail-in ballots get thrown out for one reason or another. So I'm not running campaigns but voter education is certainly part of that in voter registration.

Rachel Bitecofer:

I have two words for you. Pie and punch. Otherwise known as the South Park strategy rap to get young people excited to go out. So I argue, kind of the ship has sailed on the candidate being exciting, I mean you know we're just talking about that actually being an asset in a ironic weird way that Joe Biden is boring and comforting like a nice fuzzy blanket at a fireplace, but the one downside is that he isn't particularly exciting for the under 30 and especially at the under 25 sect. Now, for some degree though really won't matter, the Democrats weren't particularly exciting in terms of their candidates in 2018, the couple of exceptions, and yet we saw in the districts that I analyzed in the voter file youth turnout rates of 1,000%, 2,000% in some of those districts for the 18 to 24 year old group over 2014.

Rachel Bitecofer:

So I think youth turnout is going to go up over 2016 no matter what. That said, I do think that would be helpful to get you know someone like Pamela Harris does have some coolness about her, right, she knows how to use social media more effectively than Biden, who is like literally does not know how to use it at all, so anything that can get young people engaged in that way. But young people like coolness, I mean that's why Obama and the whole reason Obama pulled up person turnout wasn't as policies dude, it was a school nurse.

Tamara Keith:

And then he goes out we're in dad jeans, I don't know.

Rachel Bitecofer:

But you know what, if Bernie Sanders can be cool, dad jeans can be cool, right? Just depends, you never know what's gonna happen, right?

Dan Glickman:

It shows you that what the essence of politics is all about.

Rachel Bitecofer:

No doubt.

Cristal Logan:

Our next question is how much will gerrymandering affect the electoral college and the election outcome?

Tamara Keith:

Rachel you want to go?

Rachel Bitecofer:

Gerrymandering is just an institutional constraint that's been there, and it was there in 2018. People were saying crazy things like, "Oh they have to win by 10 points to win the house," I'm like, "Do you

know?" I mean it's there so it's gonna be... it affects things that certainly affects, it's a more impactful and in some places than others, like Ohio and North Carolina and Texas where the gerrymanders are more profound. I mean I think the more impactful thing to talk about for gerrymandering is that it's the 2020 cycle reapportionment and [inaudible 00:51:53] off of this cycle. And given the salience that gerrymandering has obtained on the left, which in our Virginia polling when I was at the Lawson Center, very few things surprised me in public opinion data, so when something does surprise me I'm like, "Oh that's interesting."

Rachel Bitecofer:

And my colleague had started pulling redistricting questions long before I came on board and he had pulled it all the way through, and by the time I got into it, 50 something percent, 60% of people in Virginia were knew what redistricting was about, they understood the issue in a pretty sophisticated way, I mean that's that's really big, okay? So it tells me like Democrats are under utilizing the salience of, this is the year people, like the next 10 years are gonna be determined off of these state legislative and gubernatorial elections and I've barely heard a peep about it. So you I think really that's where gerrymandering conversation is probably most important.

Cristal Logan:

Our next question is, what are your thoughts regarding the Hispanic vote and how much will that come into play in this election?

Tamara Keith:

It was really interesting in the primary. Of course the primary is now behind us and it didn't last very long, but you know Bernie Sanders was able to really do something with the Hispanic vote, in particular in Nevada, he put a real emphasis on it, it was organic to his campaign. Tio Bernie was sort of this calling card and it proved wildly successful for him in the State of Nevada. But then the primary moved to South Carolina where the Latino vote isn't as important. So obviously there are three states, that are battleground states, where the Latino vote is very important for. Nevada, Arizona, Texas I guess we're going to call it a potential swing state, and Florida. Now there's a lot of diversity within the Latino vote. The Latino vote is by no means a monolith, and depending on which state you're in, particularly in Texas, a larger share of Latino voters are conservative. But in a state like Nevada and in a state like Arizona, it is absolutely important, and the Trump campaign knows that and the fact that they're talking about it and trying to convince reporters like me, that they are going to know win a larger share of Latino voters than you expect in a state like Arizona means that they also expect it to matter to the outcome.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah, funny you should mention Latino voters because the very next episode of the Election Whisperer, shameless plug, is going to have a whole special on Latino voters and it's bringing in Chuck Rocha who was the political director for Bernie's Latino outreach effort in Nevada because what he did was so extraordinary. And actually what it was that made it so extraordinary, was that he did something right, like the Democrats usually don't actually spend a lot of effort and time organizing Latino voters, which seems a little crazy, given how important that voting black would be to their efforts to win Texas and Arizona and Florida and Nevada, of course which they tend to do better in. But we do know Biden at least understands that this is an important part of the effort to win Arizona and Florida, because he hired Latino Decisions, that was announced yesterday, which is a very good public opinion firm for Latino polling, and that was just announced yesterday.

Rachel Bitecofer:

But yeah, I think literally if the Democrats put in the kind of effort Bernie Sanders did in that Nevada primary on Latino turnout, it's not like you're inventing the wheel, all you're doing is it's a simple thing, the mechanics are there and you just have to implement it. There's no doubt in my mind they could flip Texas this cycle but it's a matter of do they get that, do they get the money and they do it. That's where the ifs start to come in.

Cristal Logan:

So with one minute left we have a really long last question but it's a really good one. You talk about how deeply entrenched each party is in its own belief system, do you think that's how it will always be regardless of who the President is in which party they're from? If so, what do you think the impact will be on society, will people go further into their corners, what will it take to bring our nation closer to the middle at least civilly and politically?

Tamara Keith:

That's a good question. I do think that over time our society corrects. It doesn't always correct but if you look at after Watergate, you ended up with Congress passing a bunch of bills to sort of restore norms or put norms into law. And I do wonder if the potential exists for a backlash against partisanship. I mean certainly what you've seen is that, and particularly at this time on the Republican side, though it could happen on the left, if there was the right President or the right leadership to cause frustration, but there have been people who don't feel like they belong in the Republican Party anymore, people who feel like they're kind of on an island. And I mean it's certainly not enough for there to be a real third party or you know a middle way, that's not happening. But there is some, at least on the margins, realigning of a partisan identity.

Rachel Bitecofer:

I mean the Lincoln project is very, very clear about their goal. Their goal is not to through this election cycle, disrupt Trump, and then get back to running Republican campaigns, their goal is to destroy the current version of the Republican Party, which is a distinctly different party all right, we are not talking about... we have had a party that has had a rebellion, a revolution, a civil war that was waged, a losing faction, the mainstream part of the party lost, and those who did not go along to get along with the reconstruction got kicked out or had to leave, right? And we're talking about exiles now are waging this war, right? So we don't talk about that but that's the case. And we're not talking about Donald Trump is the leader of a different Republican Party supporting and advancing issues that are way far away from traditional Republican... Russia? Like that stuff that... I mean think about traditional republicanism. So, is a story that is we're on like chapter 12 and it's getting written and you, if you're listening to this or involved in any way are in the story, even if it's a small part, so I would definitely consider, urge you to consider that you're part of the story in the way that you act all the things that you're doing, the checks that you're writing and the activities you take part in going forward.

Dan Glickman:

And Crystal I would just add the two issues, not time to talk about today national service, some form of national service to bring Americans together.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Need an identity.

Dan Glickman:

And then somehow dealing with this issue of civic engagement, civic education, so that we try to educate people a little more about what their country's about and the values of our country. Those are the two other things.

Rachel Bitecofer:

And Dan if you'll indulge me, that's literally what one my work is that the Niskanen Center. It's not that, it's identifying the fix. How do we fix. Because a lot of the focus is on the elites but we need to really fix it at the ground level.

Cristal Logan:

What a great way to end this event ,thank you Rachel.

Rachel Bitecofer:

Yeah, it was such a pleasure.

Cristal Logan:

Thank you Tamara, thank you Dan.

Tricia Johnson:

Rachel Bitecofer wrote the book, The Unprecedented 2016 Election. Tamara Keith is a Whitehouse correspondent for NPR and co-hosts the NPR Politics Podcast. Dan Glickman served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Clinton. He's a vice president at the Aspen Institute. Their conversation was part of the McCloskey Speaker Series held by Aspen Community Programs. Make sure to subscribe to Aspen Ideas To Go wherever you listen to podcast. Follow us on social media @AspenIdeas. Listen on our website, aspenideas.org and sign up for our newsletter. Today's show was produced by Marci Krivonen. It was programmed by the Aspen Community Programs Teams which includes Zoe Brown, Katie Carlson, Crystal Logan and Julianne Scott. Our music is by Wonderly. I'm Tricia Johnson, thanks for joining me.