

[Transcript] The Realignment / 336 | The Realignment Live Part I: Matt Stoller, Julius Krein, Elbridge Colby, Jane Coaston, Yuval Levin, and Jason Willick

Marshall and Sager here. Welcome back to the Realignment.

Hey everyone, welcome back to the show. Quick note before we jump into this live recorded episode session. If you like the work that Sager and I are up to, if you'd like to get access to the Q&A, AMA features, anything else that could possibly motivate you to support the Realignment, we'd love you to go to support our Supercast. You can go to the link at Realignment.Supercast.com, five a month, 50 a year, 500 for a lifetime membership onto today's episode. So as mentioned before, Sager and I completed our marathon nine plus hour Realignment Live recording session in Washington DC last Wednesday. We're going to be publishing these in a series organized by day, so you're not going to get nine hours of content straight up. So for day one, we've got Matt Stoller and Julius Krine discussing political re-alignments, what the new center looks like, and what all of the work we've been doing in the past three years really means. Next, we have Elbridge Colby discussing the Republican Party's foreign policy debate, Taiwan and of course what Ukraine and the broader war there means for all of this. Then we have return guest Jane Costa talking about libertarianism, the political parties, and the broader state of American politics moving forward. Last but not least, Yvonne Levin and Jason Willick joined to discuss democracy, whether we should be worried about it, whether there's a broader threat. For more of a traditionally centered right to conserve a perspective, you don't hear as much on this topic. Hope you all enjoy this series and be sure to check the sub-stack and everything else we put out to get more info on these topics.

I want this to be probably our most meta panel. This actually is inspired by tweets you put out every once in a while, Matt. This is Matt Stoller, the American Economic Liberties Project, Chewious Crime of American Affairs. Every once in a while, you'll put out this tweet which says, ladies and gentlemen, the realignment. Whenever something happens that seems to be very much in opposition to basically the narrative, this podcast is formed under. When I think of guests who've had on the show who exemplify the style of a heterodox thought or new coalitions, I think the two of you fit very well into that. I'd love for this panel to be a panel just checking in on the arguments, the narratives, how much are things changing, how much are we back in 2015 all over again, especially considering we're debating the debt suing again. I'll start with you, Matt. How much do you feel the year 2023 is a year in which I can maintain? There's this realignment. Everything's different. Politics are so interesting. How do you think about the lens of your work? I think that things have been there profoundly different now on both sides of the aisle. Yesterday, there was a hearing on Ticketmaster Live Nation, and every single senator was screaming at the CEO of Live Nation, except for John Cornyn. But they were all really mad at him. They all said, you're a monopoly. I deal with antitrust a lot. That's what I think about. The other thing is that the Biden administration brought a suit to break up Google, a particular part of their business. It's actually the second suit. The first one was brought by the Trump administration to break up Google. I don't see any pushback against that on the Republican side. I think that there's been this profound tectonic shift, even though in the short term, I think there has been a rollback of the interesting rethinking that was going on a couple of years ago on the right. How about you, Joyce? Yeah. I found it helpful recently to take a trip down memory lane back to 2004, which is the last time the Republicans won a presidential popular vote. The Republican agenda in 2004 was anti-gay marriage. They thought that was a big vote getter,

and that is now gone. Abortion, also big changes on the one hand, a big win for social conservatives. On the other hand, it's lost everywhere. It's been on the ballot, including in deep red states. The foreign policy, of course, was Bush agenda, democracy, promotion. That's gone. We have a very different set of foreign policy issues now, most of which are, in some ways, after effects of the failures of the Bush era. Then you get to the economic policy, which was unfunded tax cuts, I like to call them Liz trust tax cuts, and cutting entitlements in social security. That one's still there. The difference is that, on the one hand, that's the AEI agenda. That is not crazy MAGA denialism. That is the height of respectable conservative economic thinking, is Liz trust tax cuts. Literally, they were out shilling for that and cutting social security. Paul Ryan does an event there every month, it seems like. That's the policy equivalent of MAGA election denialism. At the superficial level, that's what the Republican Party is. Interesting, if you wanted to take a more hopeful note, though, two quick points. The first is that the interesting thing about neoliberals or libertarians or the anti-realignment right, if you want to call them that, is that they really only do policy thinking at this point to prove that government is bad. Sometimes it is, but they really don't think about issues other than to say that it'll always fail. Where there is policy thinking, it's among the kind of realignment types. I think you see a lot of interesting cross pollination beneath the surface. Anyone who is ambitious and intelligent on the right is thinking in these directions, and you're getting a lot of crossover dynamics with people like Matt and many others, where you're getting a new center forming. It doesn't look like we expected it to be in Trump 2016, but it actually is happening. The second thing that I think is really interesting is we have a huge disconnect between the federal and the state levels. On the one hand, the Republican Party at the national level is a complete joke, and I would say that the Democrats, well, hardly perfect, have made actually a lot of interesting changes, particularly on China and trade and industrial policy and all of that. But at the state level, essentially the most progressive cities and states are the worst governed, and Texas and Florida are booming. I could say a lot more about that, but I think that disconnect is a really important factor of U.S. politics, that each side kind of discredits the other that I don't think is fully appreciated. That's a really interesting point. Julia, something that you once told me that I think about all the time is that America always has one party rule. It's like in the FDR era, it was the New Deal, and to the extent that Republicans were able to win is because Eisenhower effectively declared peace on the New Deal, then we had the Reagan era, the neoliberal era. What era do you think that we're living in now? There doesn't seem to be one that orients everything. Are we in the realignment rebirth period of that, and what do you think it's going to look like? Yeah, it hasn't consolidated yet. We've actually gone a really long time without de facto one party rule. I've heard many people try to come up with names for it. The consolidationist era, I don't think that one's very good. I don't really do campaign ads, so I'll let somebody else come up with the name. Certainly, I think it will be a revival of the capacity. We actually have an article coming out in the next issue of American Affairs looking at Walter Lippmann's old work from drift to mastery. If neoliberalism was all about emancipation, the new era in certain ways is all about self-mastery on the one hand on the cultural level, but also the ability of sovereign nations to shape their political economy and guide themselves toward national form and deliver national goals. How about the confused era? Confused? Yeah, that works. That was not a bad joke, but I didn't get any...

You got a chuckle over there. Yeah, but it was polite and condescending.

Too soon. We'll try harder next time. Matt, I want to pick up on Julius's point about there being a new center forming that doesn't, by implication, fit into the traditional no labels version of the center. Would you agree with that characterization? If so, how would you draw boundaries around that center? I'm a Democrat and I largely have built my politics around observing what happened in the Obama era. I was working in the Congress during the financial crisis and I said, why is my party foreclosing on everyone and bailing out Wall Street? Out of that, I ended up doing a bunch of research and wrote a report because there's a realignment going on on the Democratic side as well, which I don't think people understand because we're super passive-aggressive and don't like to fight openly. But we wrote a report. This was a really passive-aggressive name. It was called Courage to Learn, which was... I was really proud of that name. Which we went over all of the failed antitrust choices. Why did Obama let Ticketmaster Live Nation merge? That was obvious, but also airlines and Big Tech and so on and so forth. All the stuff besides Obamacare and Dodd-Frank that no one paid attention to. But there's this profound consolidation that was going on and so too big to fail, which was a banking term, all of a sudden it looks out into the whole economy. We built this series of arguments that were saying, look, we have a monopoly crisis in this country and really have radically changed the way that Democrats think about political economy. I think Republicans as well. I don't think this is... One of the things that's really surprising to me, because I always used to think Republicans are evil, and then Republicans started reading my stuff and saying, oh, that's really interesting and the Democrats were mean to me. But that was not... They're always mean to me.

But it was really interesting to see the open-mindedness and the attempt to rethink what was going on. And I think there really is a curiosity on the conservative side.

But the problem, I think, that is going on the right, and I see this with how the Wall Street Journal editorial page controls the Republican policy thinking, is there doesn't seem to be any institutional basis for projecting alternative sources of power other than K Street, the Wall Street Journal editorial page. When you're talking about political economy on social questions, there is, but I don't know where those institutional power centers are come from on the right. But there really is an open-mindedness that's been very surprising to me. And I think that's where the center is. I think that's what you're finding. Yeah, I think that the center is too. And with the institution, that's... I mean, look, we've been elevating, we've talked with some of them today. In terms of the power dynamics, though, there's just no question that the chamber of commerce remains not as powerful necessarily. But if anything more, because now they're also influencing democratic elections. Julius, my question to both of you, and you can start, is around the issue of competence, something that I was just... Maybe I was too naive, but really disheartened by during the Trump administration, is like, I don't really think voters care about competence at all. They care much more about the show. But then, and Matt, you could pick up on this. The Pete Buttigieg thing has changed my mind in terms of the amount of just organic pushback I can see in my own audience and in discussing this, where people are genuinely mad about how shitty that the airlines have been running now for the last two years. So I'd love for you both to just touch on the area of competence in politics and how it will reflect

in the realignment. I was trying to come up with a clever joke, but... We're going to give up on jokes for the rest of this panel. No more jokes. I think they care a lot about confidence. And getting back to my point about the state versus federal level, I think you really see it there. Because at the state level, certain progressive social engineering projects end up having big effects. All of a sudden, we're getting rid of advanced education, advanced math programs. Immigrant voters in the Virginia suburbs care about that. And then you get Glenn Yonkin. We're not going to arrest criminals anymore. People care about that. But it's different at the federal level, where the Republicans have completely given up on competence. And it's like, we're just going to oppose everything. We're going to cut social security without giving any thought to it. That's... You have this huge competence gap at different levels. And as I wrote in my seminal piece, conservatism... Can conservatism be more than a grudge? I forget the title. But where I think you see the coalitional issues mainly is that the lobbying coalitions view the Democratic Party, particularly the centrist elements of it, as the place to get something done. And they view the National Republican Party merely as a way to block or discipline other members of the Democratic Coalition. There's not really any industry lobby pushing the National Republican Party to embrace a positive agenda. You got lots of intellectuals, in a way, like the extent to which I would say we won the intellectual war is actually shocking. But you don't have any actual industry lobby. On the other hand, at the state level for Republicans, the Cattleman's Association in South Dakota tends to drive them in different directions. Yeah. Go ahead, Matt. Yeah, I think in terms of the competence question, I mean, it's an ideological question. And people like to think of competence as non-ideological, but it's not. It is... If you want to address... We have an aviation fellow, which is a fake job title, somebody who yells at people to judge a lot. And we've been talking about advocacy on the airlines and what to do for quite some time, like a year or so. And what do you do about the airlines that are running really poorly? Well, you have to have regulators who are telling them, do this differently. And there's a lot of... It's not just consumer protection. They're gutting entire regions because they just decide not to fly there anymore. And this is something that we've dealt with with railroads since the 1820s, railroads and then airlines. You know, what's interesting about... I've sort of tried to get Republicans to start going after Buttigieg on this because our goal is, look, let's get Buttigieg to regulate better and create a political cost until he actually starts to do something because the DOT does have substantial authority, although there's problems there. But it was almost impossible to get any Republicans to do anything because they just... I guess they just had a problem thinking about, well, we don't want to ask a government agency to tell private airlines to do anything, even though a lot of the cities and towns that are getting screwed by the airlines in this deregulated system are in red areas. And it was only when the FAA had an IT glitch that all of a sudden all the Republicans came out and said, oh my gosh, Pete Buttigieg is terrible. And the goal there is to privatize the FAA. And that you can say privatizing the FAA is a good idea or not. It certainly isn't going to fix Southwest problems or Ohio losing multiple airline hubs or Pittsburgh losing a hub or so on and so forth. So there is this fundamental problem, I think, on the Republican side where they just... I don't want to say you guys, but the Republicans just have not decided whether they want a government. They want a lot of the stuff that governments can deliver, but they are not comfortable with an

administrative state and with the capacity of publicly elected officials to address private actors. And in particular, when you're talking about a monopolized economy, because that's what we have now, you're really talking about private governments. And that's why there's incredible suspicion on the right towards big business. It's not that people have turned against business. It's that when they look at dominant firms, they're not seeing business, they're seeing private governments, which look a lot like administrative states. But on the right, there just don't seem to be the institutional mechanisms to say, actually, we need governing capacity to do something about this. You do see it, I think, on the cultural side, there is a willingness to wield power. But there's tremendous fear, I think, on the right in terms of wielding power, particularly in political economy. So I would just add, it's not just cutting social security and entitlements and unfunded tax cuts. It's about dealing with every cons... One of the things Reagan did that people don't think about is he relaxed antitrust law and facilitated massive consolidation and the end of small businesses. Clinton did it too. It's not just Reagan, but we're having serious problems in defense industrial base and so on and so forth. Thinking about that problem is something that Republicans are starting to do, but I don't know where the institutional basis for actually addressing it comes from, because they do listen to the chamber and when you do get someone like Alina Khan in the FTC, who's great and is doing a lot of the things that conservatives demanded the FTC do, the Wall Street Journal will just write 15 articles about how Alina Khan is a woke Marxist and then all of a sudden in Congress, all the Republicans are like, she's a woke Marxist. And then you're like, what has she done? And they're like, well, that's not the point. And I don't know how you have a coherent politics if you can't actually root it in any governing details. I'm really curious to the two of you how you see different figures ambitious up and coming folks responding to different political circumstances. So I think Buttigieg and Alina Khan are interesting counter examples in the sense that Buttigieg very much comes out of post-2009 Barack Obama politics. He's a Rhodes Scholar. He's at McKinsey. He's in the Naval Reserve. He's so smart. It's not really about being able to name any specific thing he has like expertise or technocratic competence in. By Alina Khan's counter example, she's actually a deep expert. She becomes notable not because of charisma or a specific title because of a law review article, but it's deeply researched. So that's kind of what I'm maybe seeing. There's an opportunity on the democratic side of just this era selecting less for Obama category. Once again, 2000s issues and maybe something new in the 2020s. But what would you think about that? And then same question to you, Julius, on the Republican side, in the sense that it's a little more complicated there because there hasn't been as much of a political reward. JD Vance wins the Ohio Senate seat, but he matches like the Republican norm. It's unclear that the new right populism solves the popular vote issue that you're bringing up from 2004. And until that happens, I struggle to see the more like normy, unintellectual side of things jumping onto it. But Matt, you first. Yeah. I mean, first of all, I would like to make Pete Buttigieg an honorary boomer. I think that's important. There is a generational change, I think, in both parties, in every institution where just people who came of age prior to the Iraq war and the financial crisis are being replaced by people who have seen these dramatic institutional failures. And a lot of the people in the democratic world under the Obama

administration,

the people who were in charge under the Obama era were people who were junior people in the Clinton era. And Clinton screwed everything up and consolidated power everywhere, except he did it when there was a bubble. And so they all thought, this is great. We're all getting rich and poor people are making more money too. So this is what we do. We consolidate power and all of our friends get rich and poor people benefit. We figured it out. Let's make the West Wing now. And then under Obama, those people were in charge and they said, well, we know what to do. Let's consolidate power and then everybody will get rich and poor people will do well too. And it didn't happen because there wasn't a bubble underneath. And instead, there was sort of the opposite. And the people who were junior during the Obama era are now, you know, the 23, 24-year-olds are now in their early 30s and mid 30s. The people who were just going into economics or law or whatever, they've had 10 years to study what happened. And so you're

seeing this generational turnover. And I think you see it with Lena Kahn and a variety of others who are kind of part of that world. But I mean, I think even with somebody like Pete Buttigieg, who's an enormously talented politician, he's getting real, like if you think about him as a kind of a proxy for Obamaism, because I think he's as talented as Obama was as a politician, he's getting a lot of pressure for not delivering in the same way that I think Obama was getting benefits for kind of being like you could place all your hopes in him. And people didn't think about, you know, a policy deliverable with Obama and they did with, but they are with Buttigieg. So I think that just sort of reflects a generational turnover, but also an ideological turnover. I have to tell a story first. I was talking to a reasonably prominent liberal, you would know the name. And I asked, who's your favorite? You know, who do you want to be president?

And he said, Pete Buttigieg. And I said, what do you think Pete Buttigieg has done that he's really done well? And he thought for a second, he was like, nothing. So Matt also has a tweet that's, ladies and gentlemen, the Democrats. And I thought that that one.

Yeah, I'm caffeinated, so I'm optimistic on the Democrats. But that's, if I hadn't drank coffee, I'd have a very different attitude. No, I think, well, I think actually, the realignment agenda does work. And you can see that with JD Vance's win. And you can see it, you know, I think with, you know, candidates that lost or only narrowly won without it.

But I don't, I would agree that at this point, right wing populism is not particularly credible, because it's a lot more sort of moga noises than anything that, you know, and I don't know that people are looking for the 10 point plan, but they want to see an actual sense that there's something serious behind it. And in many cases, there isn't. I think if we're being realistic, the way, the way politics has worked for at least all of my adult life, maybe longer, is that if you want to get something done, you get the centrist Democrats to do it.

And then you got to get 10 Republicans or whatever, and you got to get them without screwing up the, you know, the progressives don't screw up the compromise. And I suspect that's actually what we're looking at. And to the extent the Republican Party has really influenced the big direction of national policy, it's that Trump won showed that these issues mattered, basically scared everybody. And then they took them up. But until you actually see a real lobbying coalition, that would actually fund like the serious policy work from a right wing perspective

and, you know, really push an agenda. It's very hard for me to see, speaking frankly, like the right wing side kind of leading the effort, even though it can do a lot of interesting things in the background. Julius, can you tug a little bit more on what you were saying about Texas and Florida booming in contrast to the, to like broader Republican politics? And then what would a successful Texas Florida populism, if you were to, if it even is such a thing, what does that look like on an operationalized national level? Well, I haven't heard anyone really argue the case that Texas and Florida are not booming. Their economies are doing well, their populations are growing very well. And in those states, certainly things like zero income taxes worked really well. And I'm not here to mess with Texas. But in places like Kansas, it does not work so well. In places like Indiana, Aaron ran wrote a very good piece for us sort of going through the Republican kind of slash and burn cost cutting agenda and what that's meant for that state. Though even so, I think, you know, would you rather have the government of Indiana or San Francisco?

I'm, you know, but I think the national GOP needs to, needs to, you know, politicians in these states, even Republican ones, don't have a problem with like promoting their own industries and looking out for themselves. You know, this is not the industry I would promote, but the mayor of Miami, you know, went all into crypto. And you can, you can find better examples than, you know, the natural resources sector in Texas and so on. And they also wouldn't, you know, a governor of a red state, particularly a rural one doesn't have a problem going after the airlines if they cut their routes. But at the national level, the way that the National Republican party that core donor base, they basically just want low taxes. And so there's just no, no agenda there. But if I think if the government, you know, the governor mentality, if they're willing to carry that into the national level, well, recognizing the difference between what national government does and the national administrative state versus what a state government does, that would be a start. So I just want to, like, there is an agenda just lying there for you guys, hot like health care costs are 20% of the economy in no other country are they more than eight, nine, 10% of the economy.

And we don't get worse outcomes, we have less capacity, because it's all corrupt middlemen paying each other stuff. And you see some interesting things going on in both red and blue states. So Indiana is a good example. Jim Banks is doing some interesting things on hospitals. He got the highest hospital costs in the country. Also in Pennsylvania, UPMC, Summer Lee is doing some interesting things there. There's this 10, you could get rid of 10% of our of economic spending on health care and dedicated to something else. And you would be going after just basically monopolies and waste on a lot of the people who are involved in that are Democrats. So you could even have fun doing it. Anyway, there's an agenda that's kind of waiting there. And so I know that, you know, looking for some, you guys, you know, Republicans often think that Democrats want single payer and we're like, what's our agenda? And it's like your agenda on health care is right there. It's waiting for you. And the Democrats are starting to get wise to the hospital problem. So this is something that I think both parties can work on. But the party that gets there first might be the party that governs for 50 years.

Great point. Another, it's been during the end, another angle, especially like left listeners to the podcast would appreciate is basically, when we started the show three years ago, it was right populism, left populism, that the story of it, you're telling Matt of how like the Democratic

party is realigned is ultimately, in many respects, a like center left project, as in like center left Obama figures have looked back and said, Hey, like, let's do things differently. That isn't like the DSA Club of New York City taking over the Biden administration. So like to the two of you, like what happened to to the degree it ever existed, like to like the populist left cohort, that like we spent a lot of energy on like the first season of the show.

You mean, why did the center left sort of?

Basically, did the center left like successfully like, did basically the typical like populists come, they raise some good points, they have some incoherent things, then ultimately like the center takes that and like moves on, is that basically what happened to like this Democratic Socialist category? So the Democratic Socialists are not necessarily populists. I hate to get into these distinctions, but you know, they're, a lot of them are socialists, they want to socialize things, and they are actually some of them are great on antitrust, but some of them are really skeptical because they believe consolidating, you know, drift and mastery, right? Lipman was writing that when he was a socialist. And that's what some of them believe and that's what some of them, you know, don't believe. I'm a populist. And I think a lot of the, a lot of people have kind of absorbed our thinking and said, okay, what did we do wrong under under the Obama administration?

I think Elizabeth Warren had a lot to do with that. Elizabeth Warren is a populist in the way that she thinks about the world on political economy. The other thing is I wouldn't, I guess I shouldn't overstate the change. Most of the Obama, particularly the boomer Obama people are furious,

like really angry and are trying to, to, to push back. They just haven't been successful yet, but they could. I mean, Jeff, science, he is going to become the new chief of staff who knows where he goes. You know, there's, there's, you know, Janie Yellen is, is pushing back aggressively on some of this stuff. So it's like there are battles on the Democratic side and the populists on the Democratic side could very much lose. It's not like it's, there's been a takeover.

And, you know, Pete Buttigieg could still be president, right? I mean, I want to think that people understand that there's a, you know, he didn't do his job. And I also want him to do his job so, so that we have a better air system. But, you know, maybe that won't matter. And I think a lot of the critiques of the sort of professional managerial class that are accurate, you know, they don't necessarily care about substance. They are a bunch of lawyers in Des Moines suburbs and DC suburbs that really kind of care more about kind of cultural questions than political cotton questions. So I don't want to make a sense that like the battle on the left is over. But yeah, it has been the intellectual sort of anti-monopolism has come not really through the far left or the center, but this kind of like traditional populist set of arguments.

I will, to say something, I mean, first of all, I wrote a piece about this. It's called the other realignment that you can check out if you're really bored. But no, I mean, to say something in, I think populism really scared the center on both left and right. And to speak to some of the maybe less visible dynamics, I mean, one, I think actually the people that do the left wing foundations

are a lot smarter than the right wing counterparts. And they've been much more proactive. Whereas the

big right wing foundations, it's I don't know if it's 2004 1984, but it's definitely not 2024.

And and at the same time, I feel like right wing donors are actually pretty comfortable. There's a lot of people complaining about them, but they don't really, they're not facing any real challenge or real issues. Where I do think left wing populism made some of the left wing donors not not uncomfortable in a material sense, but I think it forced them to really think through like, am I really a Democrat? What is this? What is liberalism supposed to be? And they recognize we're willing to think through some of the failures of kind of neoliberalism in a way that has not actually happened on the right, where I think perhaps some of them could either get really into the Trump Trump craziness or just blame everything on the Trump craziness. Great points to you both. That's why we love talking to these guys. Give them a round of applause. We're here with Elbridge Colby of the marathon initiative have done some amazing episodes with him. So if you want to get the longer than 30 minute version, definitely check those out. Obviously, you're also the author of the strategy of denial, which is just like the must read in this space. So let's start with the depressing news first. Asia, Europe, broad picture. Are you confident? Do you feel safe? Do you feel secure? How should we think about this? Well, thanks a lot, Marshall. Great to be with you guys. A real privilege to this important conference. No, I don't feel great. I mean, it could definitely be worse. But I mean, the most recent news that's been coming out is that our defense industrial base, which produces the weapons that we need, is just manifestly and woefully inadequate for a conflict with China. And in fact, it's even lagging in a lot of respects in the Ukraine conflict and my own personal impression. And I'm careful about this because others know this better. There's been a lot of surprises, unpredictable, but it looks to me like the war in Ukraine is going to become protracted. I mean, it's possible that there will be significant movement back and forth, but I would be surprised if there's a decisive outcome. It's possible. And even I think the US government, Mark Milley and some other people, the NATO Deputy Secretary General was signaling the same thing. At the same time, a lot of people like there's, we were just talking about Davos, people at Davos were saying America's back. But actually, we've kind of put ourselves in a bad position on Ukraine where essentially everything is dependent on us. Whereas what we really need is the Europeans to be taking the lead. So actually, if anything, the Leopard's decision by Berlin is maybe a very small positive sign of the Europeans taking more responsibility. But if Ukraine is consuming and it's not ending anytime soon, and it's really dependent on us, that's a problem. When we look at the Taiwan problem, which is in really bad shape and getting worse. And I don't think the changes you've had like Liu Hei, the economic chief for China, he was at Davos, signaling all nice and stuff. I don't think there's been fundamental change in Beijing's fundamental strategy or policy. They're just kind of turning down the temperature. The pushback I often hear, though I do not agree with, is, well, Bridge, what happens in Ukraine determines what happens in Taiwan. By putting forward all of these resources, we're sending a message to global authoritarianism that if you try it, we will fund it, we will make it as difficult and hard as possible for you. But you just said that you don't think Beijing's fundamental calculus has changed at all. How do you square those two things? And what would your response to those types of people be? I just find that argument kind of tendentious and annoying. I don't think it's that serious of an argument because it's sort of a half-baked deterrence sort of argument. Well, I mean, the Chinese leadership, if you look at it from a kind of real politic kind of way,

is going to look at how successful it's going to be. That's going to be largely a function of what are our weapons like? What's the readiness of our forces? And how credible are we in this context? This puts everything in this kind of global, everything is connected context. That's sort of the worst part of the domino theory type approach. I mean, I think the better argument against what I'm saying is, hey, look, a lot of the weapons that we're using in Ukraine and so forth are not exactly the ones that we would be using and we're eroding the Russian military. Now, that argument would make more sense if a couple things, ground weapons and ground forces are really important in a Taiwan fight. The Taiwanese would be really important. And what's clear is that they almost certainly would benefit from having more. What's become very clear in the Ukraine conflict is whatever you thought was necessary is going to be 10x of that or something like that. Secondly, the defense industrial base is creaky and it's not Ukraine's fault, but that doesn't matter. And there's a lot of things, and I mean, you guys have plumbed into this, you know, as you go into the defense industrial base, subcomponents, amount of time, workforce constraints that will involve trade-offs. And especially when we look, you know, if the war ended tomorrow favorably for us, that argument would have a lot more force. But it's unlikely to do so. The Russians are mobilizing. I don't like it. It's not, they're not good. They're bad. Vladimir Putin's evil. Okay. That's not the point. If we're looking at this from the standpoint of American interests, we are running a real risk. And the weird thing, actually, I will say, it's larger to me, is I actually think administration national security officials agree with me. Yes. That's the weird thing. And yet they don't seem to be acting with the urgency and the sort of clarity of purpose that would address the situation. Yeah, you kind of stole my question, because the thing that, because it weren't our what, like 10th New York Times, Washington Post, like Wall Street Journal, like broad, you know, Beltway consensus that there's this industrial based problem, that there's, that there are these shortages. And to, you know, bring up Kevin Roberts's point from the last panel, like, it's the what time is it question? It seems like, aside from public statements, everyone agrees that it's not a great time right now. So what's happening? Like, what do you see as the gap between clear understanding, public or private, and just what it feels like a lack of, we're going to keep hearing these stories for the next year or so? It's weird, because the weird thing, you were very kind of mentioning my book, but like, I don't get people often sort of directly arguing against my book and saying, like, you're totally wrong. China's not a threat. We're going to go back to the Bob Zellick world. No, you don't get that. You get, yeah, China's the number one threat. And we, you know, there's a potential for them to use military force and we could lose and they have enormous economic leverage and they're expanding their influence, et cetera. And it's like, okay, well, if that's all true, and you look at like just the raw numbers, shouldn't we be acting in a different way? Instead, we're obviously prioritizing Europe and the revealed kind of behavior of the administration and a lot of Republicans is that the most important place to be is the Munich Security Conference or Davos and not Asia, despite the fact that in the commercial world, clearly Asia is the center of the world. That's where the money is, right? So I actually really struggle with why this is, the analogy I've kind of come up with is like, you've gotten a diagnosis of acute heart disease and you're way overweight and you know you need to lose weight like stat or you could die and you think you're on a diet. You know, we've all met people and like, we've probably been in a situation where you think you're on a diet. You think you're doing my, I love them, my dad

does this sometimes, but it's like, it's not actually happening. And how do you change that behavior? Like all this defense industrial based stuff, manifestly inadequate production and capacity and responsiveness. And then people are saying, well, we're going to put multi-year contracts and we're going to like give more money to the defense. I'm not even sure that giving more money at this point is, well, I mean, it's probably net beneficial. Well, it's probably beneficial, but is it like net beneficial? Is that a good use of the taxpayers money to fund a broken system, a manifestly broken system? Seems to me that there's a real bipartisan, you know, and I look at people

like Matt Stoller and Ro Khanna and others, there's a real potential for like smart bipartisan, not blobby bipartisan action on this to say, we need to spend more on defense, we need a better defense industrial based, but we also need not just to give to the current, you know, oligopolist sort of model that is clearly inadequate. And one quick thing, sir, could you sum up your book real quick for folks who haven't read it yet either? Yeah, I mean, basically the year of unipolarities over in the 1990s and the 2000s, we didn't, we could basically beat up anybody we wanted. And we pursued very ambitious ends with the rise of China and other powers like India, etc. We have to take a hard look at our foreign policy and particularly our defense strategy and say, we can't do everything. So what do we really need to do in that light? I say long story short, Asia is the most the world's most important region. If somebody could dominate 50% or more of global GDP, they could intrude in our lives and undermine them. That is a real very direct peril to Americans, prosperity, security and liberties.

Okay, can anybody do that? Yeah, China about fifth of global GDP and growing even if it's even if it's lying. So we got to prevent China from dominating Asia can't do it ourselves for various reasons. We need allies and partners in what I call an anti hegemonic coalition.

Long story short, I think the real danger to that coalition, despite a lot of chin stroking nuance to kind of soft power matters. No, honestly, the Chinese and I think if you read the news, the Chinese are going to have exceptional difficulty turning their enormous economic leverage into the ability to dominate Asia and break apart that coalition. Look at the big story in the journal about rickety Chinese infrastructure in Ecuador or the actually the times had one on the Solomon Islands where there's resistance means that military power is more important. So what really matters is the regional military balance. And that gets your question saga. It's not about, you know, what we do in Syria or even Afghanistan, let alone Ukraine, it's about what the military balance is and the perceptions of our credibility in Asia.

That really matters Taiwan, whether we like it or not is very important for that. The key is to defend Taiwan. And if we can defend Taiwan, we can defend our other allies. That coalition will work and we'll check China from regional hegemony. We'll have a stable balance of power. And then we can negotiate the terms of their continued rise. One of our highest rated episodes is actually with Peter Zion. I know I've asked you about this before, but look, I mean, he's got a popular point of view. And we look at some recent data. You got the worst demographic official data in 60 years, marriage ability seems at an all time low. Chinese middle class dream doesn't seem to be what it is. Zero COVID kind of took away the idea that these people are particularly like much more competent, the one state about economic disaster on their hands. Is this the great power that we should that we were kind of conjured up and thought of in 2020? The way COVID hyper competent state, how do you evaluate that data in the picture of looking at Taiwan and in China as a possible

China threat globally? I'll answer in two parts. One is like when we're thinking about it from the important view of American strategy, we can't bank on one particular future. The second is, I personally am skeptical, but that's the main point is number one, which is Peter Zion could be right, but we don't know the future. And the Chinese, they seem to be recovering. And it stands to reason there's huge numbers of Chinese who are still not living middle class lives. And you hear that the Chinese are breaking through the front, sort of into the front on things like artificial intelligence, hypersonics, et cetera. So we can't bet on that. We have to bet on something more reasonable and protect against the downside. And if Peter, the basic point is, if the China is going to grow enormously, then we better have prepared militarily, then we'll have done well. If Peter Zion is right and they fall apart, we will have overinsured and we may have wasted some money, but it's better than the alternative. On the second one, I confess

I am skeptical. And I'm not an economist or anything, but at some level, maybe I grew up in East Asia and you look at the East Asian Tigers and their similar culture and so forth. China for centuries was an economic titan. It kind of went into a period of self-harm, partially caused by the British and the others in the 19th century and so forth. So not their fault entirely, but typing rebellion, the Great Leap Forward, the Civil War, et cetera. And now they kind of got on the right structure. So yeah, they could slow, but even if they decline dramatically, there's still a billion people. It's a lot more than the Americans. And by the way, Japan's declining demographically. Taiwan's declining demographically. South Korea's declining demographically. I think Kevin was talking about this. So it could be true, but I'm skeptical. I'd love to hear you talk about allies in the coalition, especially in the Asia Pacific. We were very doomer on Japan last panel, but Japan's obviously making moves towards like rearming itself. So what's your take on that side of things? Well, that's great. I mean, allies are critical and not in a sort of hippie-dippy rules-based international order way, but like in a very practical way, if we're thinking about what's in Americans' interests, we don't have the willpower or the power on our own to take on all the world's problems. So we need allies. And the allies that are most reliable and that we should most invest in are the ones who share our interests and where possible our values to some extent. But India is more important than Belgium. I like Belgium. It's a nice country to visit. They've got great food, but India is, and the relationship with India is a function of the shared fear of China, which has become increasingly clear in India. And that's the way, and I don't think that kind of realism is antithetical to the America. I think that's actually thinking about what's in the interests of the American people. And it's very similar to the kind of approach I think you guys take, which is like instead of these sort of abstractions that tend to ratify the status quo, or what have you, we may need to change things to make sure that it serves Americans' interests. So I think what Japan is doing is very commendable. It's a bit late and it's going to take some time. The Australians deserve a lot of credit. They've actually been way out there. India is there. There are other countries like Vietnam where there's a promising relationship. They have a tough neighborhood. Europe is a problem, I would say. This is one of the things where I think the Biden administration's focus on Europe seems successful now, and it gets plotted to Davos. But I think long term is going to be a problem because we've doubled down on American leadership when actually what we need is the Europeans to step up and carry more of the burden. And

they, at the end of the day, I don't think the Europeans are going to be that active or bail us out in Asia. They'll talk, but I mean, don't take it for me. Schultz and Macron just met in, I think, in Paris, and they were like, we're not going to do a couple from China. And I don't even think it's reasonable to expect them to do that much on Asia because they're taking a huge economic hit on the Ukraine war. And I think we should be asked, and look, take care of your own defense. This is what I tell the polls. Big fan of Poland. They're really stepping up on their defense issues. They're spending 5%. They're taking the lead on the Ukrainian issue. And they say, basically, I don't know about China. And my point is like, well, okay, like you take care of your problems. That's far away. You've got bigger fish to fry. There's an alligator closer to the boat. Don't stab us in the back with the Chinese, but you don't need to go crazy on the topic. That's sort of my view.

Yeah. And I think that's the difficult part here, where the way that we even conceive of, quote, allyship specifically in the international context appears to be entirely Eurocentric in my view. I'd love for you to dig deeper in the France and Germany question. Because again, I'm hearing the same thing like, Hey, look, we stand for them. Ukraine like we basically backstop 95% or whatever of the what's actually going to Ukraine. And they'll do similarly for us. We're talking at the end of the day, Germany is what the largest continental power is the largest economy on the continent. I believe France is number two. So these are not people that we can just put aside whenever it comes to the China question. But why then does their act of stepping up for defense in Europe matter so much for our ability to basically handle the globe as we see it since we are both in Asian and European power? Well, at the end of the day, and in the book, I make this argument, I think that we should be prepared to take risk as the military kind of planners say in Europe in the sense that Russia, even more than when I wrote the book, has turned out to be a diminished power. I don't think they're done in Ukraine, but there's the chances that the Russians would roll to the English Channel are essentially zero. But I also think we've got this alliance system that has real latent potential. People like to say our alliance structure is so much bigger than all the others, but it's latent. It's not actually activated. They don't spend enough on defense. And those defense forces they have are not ready to fight. It's not like the German military is ready to fight really the Russians manifestly. They've trained with broomsticks a few years ago. So I think let's try to use it. Let's try to get as much out of it as possible.

And then instead of, I call the administration sort of like the Tony Blinken kind of approach, the three musketeers approach to alliances, all for one and one for all. And I just don't think that's, it's not how human beings, not how international politics works. And I think it, frankly, I don't think it's how American politics works. I've become increasingly convinced that realism explains American politics better than I had appreciated. But that's a digression. But I think if we can get, you know, encourage them, it's better off. So when I make the argument to the Europeans, to their faces and in the press, you got to take more responsibility. We're going to shift to Asia. I think I'm being a better ally to talk about allyship than all these rules based international order types saying we'll always be there with you. Well, that's not true. Are you being, are we being good allies? If we're, you know, telegraphing something that is actually not a credible and reliable pledge, I don't think so. Okay, that's an interesting point, though. So you're saying like, we can't claim we're always going to be there for them, but like, you could always claim you're rhetorically and morally there. So like, so when you say that we

won't actually always be there, what does that mean? Sorry, I mean, I just mean, we're not going to be there to the, to the nearly the extent that they expect. So what do they expect? Yeah, I mean, my view is that the United States should remain in NATO, and we should provide a big fraction of the nuclear deterrent and, you know, things that we can do that are consistent with a focus on Asia, you know, maybe very selective ground forces, space kind of things. But basically, the Europeans should expect to do the big bulk of the conventional defense against Russian, against the Russian armed

forces. That's totally within their capacity. I mean, Germany alone is a bigger economy than Russia. And we let them off the hook all the time. And they're falling back on this, on this site invented announcement to go to 2%. I mean, there should be a crisis in transatlantic relations with Germany over this. But nope, instead, they get a pass. So I think that's, I think it's better off to say, and I, and then we should hold up the countries that are doing the right thing, like Poland, because the main thing is for them to do their part on collective defense, what they say on China. And in fact, that reversal is true. And I've said this to the Lithuanians, for instance, the Lithuanians were very supportive of Taiwan. My point to them was, look, we don't need symbolic rhetoric on Taiwan. And if you pick a fight over there, don't expect that to change our fundamental strategic calculus. It's great that you want to support Taiwan, but it's not going to change the fundamental strategic orientation towards Asia. So the more important thing is for you to kind of take care of your own self defense as much as possible. As much common sense as this seems to me, I think to most people, I do think we should acknowledge this is an incredibly heretical view here in Washington, much to my chagrin, I wish it wasn't the case. And it seems that the architecture of whatever you want to call it, the blob Eurocentrism, in my opinion, or just general, like the three musketeers approach, that is here to stay. And it seems entirely bipartisan. Or do you think that there is some fracture in that coalition, a space for people who think differently to be able to enter the strategic calculus absent a major international crisis? Well, that's a great question. I have to believe there's changes possible. Otherwise, I get too depressed. But I think you're absolutely right, soccer. I mean, you might not agree with anything I'm saying, but I think everything I'm saying is like, I mean, I almost sometimes think of myself as like, isn't this obvious? Like, I don't think what I'm saying is that novel, like, right? It's just basic common sense. Do you care about Ukraine? What you don't care about Ukraine? Yeah, exactly. Right. No, it's crazy. But I would say I get sort of depressed about it sometimes with some frequency. And I think to myself, well, at least we have strategic reality and the voters on our side. I mean, I think my impression, you guys would know better. I think the voters on both sides want a foreign policy that's more in line with a concrete self-interest in America, it's not in a cruel or nasty way, or sort of bigger than neighbor way. But you know, really, you know, and I mean, you see that element like the foreign policy for the middle class or the trade policy for middle class that the administration's carried on from the Lighthizer and the Trump administration. So, so I think that what I would say is the worst

outcome will be that we get punched in the face and it's too late. So, God forbid that it takes a punch in the face, that it may come to that. I am encouraged that I think a lot of it is generational, frankly. I think the way I put it is a lot of people in their 70s and 80s still think Chinese are riding around in mouse suits on bicycles. People in their 40s, even 50s, certainly their 30s,

they don't think that way. And that's true across the political aisle. And so, you know, I actually think not in a corny, blobby way, there's a bipartisan potential. The problem is, especially in the Congress, there's seniority. So, I think that the presidency is a really important mechanism of change. Now, you see people like Jim Banks, Josh Hawley, on the left, people like Ro Khanna, who are pushing for a different approach. They might disagree on a lot of things, but there's a different approach to the whole problem. I think that the presidency is important. In some ways, I expect that we will look back on the Biden presidency as a sort of Indian summer of blobbiness, because I doubt that future, even future Democrats, I mean, Barack Obama himself was not really a rules-based international order guy. I have to confess that some of what he's saying I agree with, you know? I mean, I thought he was, and he was complaining about burden sharing and the allies, and he was skeptical about this rules-based international order thing. So, hopefully, we're seeing sort of an Indian summer issue. I think the, so I'm confident it will change the question as to whether we change in time. I think it's interesting that your read on it is that we're seeing the Indian summer, because from my perspective, especially looking at like center-left spaces, rules-based international order is actually more popular than ever would be my perspective. And this is kind of getting at my political question, because my read on the commitment to Ukraine has always been, if Ukraine had been rolled fairly early in the war, as was predicted, that would have been very bad for Taiwanese defense. If you'd had Kabul withdrawal, Russia dominates Ukraine, very little ability to translate that energy to something productive in the Asia Pacific. Now, obviously, there are these tactical and strategic things you're talking about here, but what I'm kind of getting at is there seems to be energy at least on the center-left for this space that didn't exist last year. How would you say politically that energy should be rededicated? Because now we're in a period of like possible like stagnation in the conflict. So it's like, look, Kiev didn't fall. The germs are supporting. Now, let's pivot back to Asia. Right. Well, I think it's, you know, I mean, to put a little more nuance, and I think you've added that Marshall Kudos to that, but like, I mean, in the sense that a lot of the seven-to-left people you're talking about are also very worried about the Taiwan issue. I mean, take a guy like Seth Bolton who's like a leader on the Ukraine thing, he's very worried about the Taiwan issue. And so I think he's very commendably focused on it. So whether he or the political movement kind of segment that he represents conceives of it as rules-based national order, that is more consistent with a center-left, you know, progressive transnationalism. It's not my views, but it doesn't mean it's like wholly incompatible in practice, right? We may be able to agree on things. You know, somebody might want to fight for Taiwan because of to save a democracy. That's not my argument, but I want to do it for the American people's practical interests. But if it leads to the same result, that's politics, right? I also think the, it's not suppression, but the dormancy of the anti-war, anti-establishment left cannot go on forever, right? I mean, in the sense that like, and I don't know what's going to trigger it, but I mean, it's weird that the people who always were skeptical of the CIA and the military and stuff are now like saying that's all great. I think that's like a deeply rooted intellectual political part of being particularly on the left, you know, the Bernie Sanders of the world. And again, like, I don't, I don't agree with them on a ton of things, but there's certain other things that maybe you could agree on. So I

just, I think this sort of, you know, unity or whatever is inherently transient. And I mean, look, I mean, you go back, the Iraq war was extremely popular in 2004. The Vietnam war was extremely popular even as late as like 67, I think as late as 68. So, you know, if and as things become tougher, and the consequences become more, more directly felt, then I think there will be more realism. And the thing is, I mean, it's not like when I make these critiques to the point earlier, it's not like the administration says, oh, you're totally crazy. They're like, no, no, we're doing it. We're doing the thing that you're saying we're doing it better than you. So it's like an empirical argument, actually. So in a sense, like, I don't think we should, I agree with you that the rhetoric of like the MSNBC and the sort of Washington Post op ed page, but actually the administration itself, which not a supporter of, you know, the but like, they are actually closer to a lot closer to what I'm saying. One quick follow up. anti-war right. This is titled like the rights foreign policy debate, like, where do you see the right on the issues we're talking about today? Then I think it's very open. The way I put it is like, I'm trying to make an argument that, you know, we should move away from neoconservative, but not go towards isolationism, which I think is a form of libertarianism. And I just don't think it's realistic or conservative, like what conservative wants to get rid of the police, the police are always be with us, right? My fear is we may go away from neoconservative, which I definitely want to eject and leave behind, but past what I'm talking about, which is kind of a middle way between those two things, and end up in isolationism territory, which and again, isolationism is a fraud and sort of loaded term. So I don't even like to use it. But it's just the idea that we can sort of pull back and not have to confront these issues. I just don't think it's realistic. But that's what, you know, when I spoke at National Conservatism Conference on the Taiwan issue, it was addressed specifically on this point in ways that connect to the American people's practical interests. And this is why I emphasize that I was an opponent or skeptic of that majority of the military intervention the last 20 years, because it's not like I'm looking for an excuse. But we also have to be clear eyed about what the future holds. And I think that's, I'm hopeful that's where we end up. And I certainly think for a future Republican administration, it's the natural equilibrium. Who would want to light their presidency on fire pursuing the freedom agenda on the one hand? But who would want to run this terrible, crazy experiment of isolationism on the other? I think what I'm saying broadly in that middle, and I don't say like in a roadkill way, but just like via media kind of, if you will, is that that would be like the sound saying, and it's consistent with the kind of like what's in the American working person's interest that you now hear from the Republican Party. Yeah, my follow up was on the Biden administration. They talk, Mark Milley says he wants a peace plan. Does it matter? I mean, from my perspective, it seems that outside of the no fly zone on a long enough timeline, Ukraine gets anything that it wants. Patriot missile systems ruled out, now they're there. M1 Abrams tanks ruled out, never going to happen. Now on their way. 50 billion, that's it. Don't worry about it. 50 more billion on its way. So it seems, you know, with the administration, they could talk all they want, but their actual actions tell me that they are run by the Washington Post editorial board because they're terrified, seemingly of being

criticized by those people. So who do you think really is in the power here?

Well, I think you put it well, which I think they kind of intellectually know that or believe that what I'm saying, at least in large part is correct, but they are, I mean, the Biden administration, in my sense, at least the national security side, sociologically is quite conservative, you know, not like it's, you know, properly credentialed, and they worked out their way up the Curse of Sonoran. I call them the mandrons, you know, like they sat for examinations, right? Like, I mean, I don't, mandrons were well respected, but it's like a certain type. And it's not people who've told their bosses to take a hike. And, you know, so, and I mean, I don't say that dismissively, I'm just trying to be like, explain it kind of, but I do think it that that that Washington Post Munich Security Conference, you know, Bloomberg or whatever, that does, Bloomberg's probably not

the right example, but you know what I mean, like that, that really shapes them. They're trying to have it both ways. And it's expressed by a phrase which drives me nuts, which is walking chew gum at the same time. So they're trying to say we can do both. But it's like, well, yeah, but you didn't like massively increase the defense budget, which I'm not even in favor of necessarily. I mean, I think we need to increase the defense budget smartly. But I, I think, and I think that will be their undoing. That's exactly, exactly what they're undoing is to get back to the diet analogy. It's like, if you're going to do the diet, like, no, no, like really do the diet. Yeah. So the last quick question, you know, Republican House just started, like, what's your advice to like members coming from coming out of this conversation for the next six months?

I mean, I think the biggest one is don't take the foreign policy blob establishment, you know, hook line and sinker, like, you know, think independently and, you know, trust your judgment about what you think. If you have to question, quote unquote, orthodoxy, that's fine. I mean, and hear people out, you know, and just because the Republican member from your district or whatever,

whatever, or the guy that you respected, who's a generation older, who was your mentor, you know, was associated with such and such policy, don't take that policy. Think for yourself. And I think there's a real need for change. I mean, there's not much that the Republican House is going to do on the foreign policy side, frankly, I do think supporting Taiwan is very more than putting pressure on Taiwan is really important. I also think, you know, I mean, just unlike the whole investigation of the intelligence community, I think there are real questions, you know, like, we should have an accountable national security establishment. We need an effective national security establishment in a dangerous world. But I think it's, this is one of the things I like about the new right is it's like, you know, is that it's like, it's not taking, oh, just because some former Muckity Muck says something that I have to take that for granted, we've seen where that leads us. And I mean, my view is the last generation, you know, look, I don't want to go on too long, but like, I remember I'm older than you guys, but like, you know, 1999, the American, we had a balanced budget. We just won a small unnecessary war probably against, you know, Serbia. And I remember the summer of 2001, the biggest issues were shark attacks, chandelier, and stem cells. So like, the last 25 years of policy have been a disaster. That financial crisis, the opening to China was an unmitigated disaster in two ways. One, it failed to liberalize China. But the most important argument about that was that we would still outcompete them, despite their using massive industrial policy. That's the important part that's

been invalidated. And now, despite spending much, much more than anybody else on defense, we're worried about losing a war against China in a naval war, which is our wheelhouse.

So it's like, I think the presumption should be, don't trust the old ways. But that doesn't mean that you need to go and like, just say, burn everything down, you know, we should be, look at it first principles, this is what I tried to do in my book, look at it and examine it rationally and practically and test everything. But that's the sort of, that's the advice I've

got. We always fulfill your insight. Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

We are here with Jane Kostin of the New York Times. Fun fact, Jane, you are our last in-person recording at Hudson before COVID. So we were off for two months, but it sat there for a while. So it's always, always great to chat with you. So today's topic is here, because especially when you, I'm sure you've noticed this, when you, when you speak to like younger audiences on podcasts, you get a lot of like, I hate the two parties, I hate the system, burn it all down. So I want to kind of like channel that energy today and so are you definitely seeing some breaking points too, of course. And just like talk about how like you're perceiving like the political system as a whole from your nuanced perspective.

Wow, that's not even a question. So it was more of a statement.

You definitely, I love that you gave me like the classic ESPN talk about question.

Yes. Well, it's complicated because I think that there are a lot of different goals with politics.

Politics is not itself a goal. Politics is the process by which we are attempting to do things.

Some people get extremely horny for process. I do not. This is why when I write about sports, I'm like, I don't really care how you scored the touchdown, but you scored the touchdown.

Congratulations. So I think that right now we are in this ongoing conflict and how we think about parties in terms of, are you, do you like the process or do you like the results?

There are some people who are really fixated on the process of politics and there are people who are really fixated on the results of politics and those two groups of people don't like each other very much. And so, name names or directionally name like, give us examples like issue example, you're talking about voters or politicians. I was talking to a pollster yesterday and he was saying that when I have a whole piece that I'm working on and thinking about the idea of normalcy, how people are crying out in my view for like a particular type of political normalcy.

The problem is that running for office is not a normal thing to do. People who care a lot about politics are not normal. I don't mean normal isn't good or normal isn't bad. I mean like adhering to norms. Most people like, I don't know, NCIS Hawaii, most people like to watch sports but not too much. That's the norm. And so he was talking about how for most voters, the least important factor in determining why they're going to vote for someone is how smart that person is and the second least important is how nice they seem. The most important is getting things done.

And I think that in our politics right now, like let's take, you know, issues having to do with culture war, culture war issues. Culture war issues are perfect for smart politicians because there is not, they cannot be done. There is no completion to a culture war issue. The culture war has been ongoing and it will never end because it can't end. There is not a like, so on the way here there is a lot of traffic on K Street because the roads are bad.

There is an idea that like you could improve the traffic on K Street and make the traffic better but then the issue would be gone. With culture war there is no end to the issue. The issue becomes a build on to the issue which becomes a build on to the issue. And I think that for a lot of voters

they see that and they see that like there's this ongoing pursuit of politics as an issue on top of an issue on top of an issue that never really gets resolved when they're like, can we put up a stop sign? Can we like, you know, make this end this roundabout? Can we put up barriers on a bridge? Can we do this thing? Can we complete? Can we get to the end of the politics? If politics is the means by which we are getting a thing done, can we complete the thing? And smart politicians, which again no one likes, don't want to get anything done because the process of politics is what keeps people in office. I think about, I used to work in the olden days, I used to work at the human rights campaign and we were working a lot on the marriage equality issue and there was

the organization Freedom to Marry. And like the second the Obergefell decision came down, they were

like, all right, great, we're done. We did it, we're done now. And I remember thinking like that, I really respected that because they had a thing, they solved the thing, the problem was solved, job done. But if you're in office, obviously you don't want to do that.

To what extent is this a politician issue and a voter issue? Because I could turn it around, I'd be like, do they actually care about getting shit done? Are they voting accordingly?

If you look at some of the things, okay, let's take the midterms for example. What's the number one reason that people didn't vote Republican? Stop the steal. That's not even really like a thing getting done, that's like a thing not getting done. They don't even give a shit what somebody's actually going to do. They're like, as long as you don't do that, I guess I will vote for you. You could say the converse in terms of a lot of Trump support in 2020, it was, I hate Black Lives Matter and I don't like the riots going on. And I just want to say screw you to a lot of elites. So to what extent is this downstream of like small D Democratic preference?

I think it's, it is downstream of small D Democratic preference to some degree, but I also think it has to do with like the performance of politics. And I think that what we got, and I know we've talked about this because early in the history of the realignment, I think you talked to, you both have talked a lot about Trumpism as being kind of the forward march of a specific type of populism. And I remember coming on the show and saying, no, it's not. No, sorry. And then I was sort of right. Sort of wrong, but let's ignore that part. I think that there is a means by which, and I was intrigued, and I've been talking about this lately, that the people who attempted to perform Trumpism did not attempt to perform the don't touch social security, let's put more money

into something, they put, they, they performed assholery. And like not even a believable type of assholery, like there's a level to which I'm like, come on, man, this is like a bad wrestling work. But I think that voters also have, I think, been so ignored to politics ever leading to anything, politics ever getting anything done, that their votes have in some ways become performative. Like, you know, you vote for performative candidates to send a message, but you kind of also assume the message is never really going to get sent. Like you vote for somebody who you think is a maniac, but you kind of think that their maniacness is also performative. And I think that that gets us in a really unfortunate cycle, because of course the people who get voted for are like, I got voted for to be a maniac, and thus I will be a maniac, and nothing ever gets solved. And meanwhile we have like long running issues and big problems that people are largely unwilling to solve, because solving them would, one, end their purpose of being in office,

but also would be hard and controversial, and people might get mad at them.

What I'm curious about, and you know, Kevin Roberts from Heritage, we did this good session towards the start about how if you focus on local issues, there are these things that could be solved and worked around, like there's a, I mean, there's a way you can make the K Street streets issue partisan, like it's pretty straightforward. How many national issues are actually like that? Because that's the defense of politicians. I think if you actually take a look at the most contentious issues, if they were solvable, they would have been solved.

So how many things are like the K Street parking nationally?

I think that a lot of national politics is, are, is, are, that subject verb agreement's going to bother me. Oh boy. I think that a lot of national political issues are local political issues that have been blown up. And I think about this a lot, the nationalization of local politics, in which you are more aware of what a school district is doing in a state in which you do not live, in a state in which you importantly do not vote, than you might be aware of what's going on in your own city. And so I think that a lot of, and then we do this thing, and I, by we, I mean people in the media, being like, this small kid, this small school is has a lot to tell us about the national story. And I'm like, no, it doesn't. Connecticut's for weirdos. I don't know why they're doing that. Like, I think that there is a lot of local issues that would have local solutions. And when you go back to those stories later, sometimes it's like, oh, it got resolved. Because like, it turns out everyone got super annoyed at a school board meeting and yelled at each other. And then it all worked itself out. I think that a lot of, when we get to kind of the national issues and the nationalization of that local politics, we are removing ourselves from the best available sources of solutions to those politics. Because at a certain point, you just wind up playing political whack-a-mole across the country, when we live in a country that is staggeringly politically and culturally diverse in a lot of different ways, where there are going to be a lot of solutions that aren't workable in a lot of different areas and a lot of solutions that might be, but you'd have to try them here and they might not work there. And I think that, again, there is this tendency we have to, you know, the bigger an issue becomes, the more profitable it becomes, but the more profitable it becomes to not solve it. When you make a local issue, it becomes about like, you know, the highway near where I went to high school had an on-ramp that was like suicide machine. So why don't we fix that so that kids who are just learning to drive can get to school more safely? If we blow that up to a national issue, it becomes about like, are fewer kids driving because they're too woke to learn how to drive a car? Like, that's not a problem, that's like a thesis statement. So I think like, more focus on local issues, but treating them as local issues. I think that that's why, I mean, people talk a lot about like, the perils of losing local media, but one of those perils is that you have local media who knows what the issue is and can talk about it in the context of, here's a thing that's been going on for a long time, not a reporter from somewhere else talking about how this has a lot to tell us about Trump's America or something. That's an excellent point. I guess one of the questions, though, is that how do you, and you don't necessarily have to have the answer, but maybe you have some ideas. How do you get out of that? So if you have a vote, and by the way, I mostly agree, I think a lot of voters are conditioned to think that these people aren't going to do anything. So might as well pick the guy who pisses off the person who I hate. I actually deeply empathize

with that on an often basis. So, though, how do you get to the point and have an incentive system where you have to cut across this grain, actually do something, be difficult, and be politically rewarded for it? Because I often find and see that people who actually do want to be serious, there's almost no political reward and almost always major political downside for doing so. Well, I think that it really depends. I think that we see this in the ads that people make for their primaries, and the ads people make for the general elections, in which everyone in the primaries tries to come across as a maniac, and everybody in the general election puts on their, you know, the fleece vest that says, I'm a serious person with a 401k. They put on that vest, and they say things about their families and their dog, and they've got a kid just like you. They're not just like you. And so, I think that there is a rationalism mechanism that happens when more people are participating. Part of why we've seen that a lot of our elections have had more people getting elected who are these kind of bomb throwers. They're not even bomb throwers because the assumption of a bomb thrower is that you throw the bomb, and then theoretically you would be around to see what would happen. They never are. They're always just like, oh, weird, I'm somewhere else now. I think that when more people are participating in the system, we see an inherent rationalism mechanism. We see that the more people participate, the more people's kind of inherent radicalism gets ratcheted down as they attempt to appeal to more people. So, I think that wider participation is a means, but I also think our expectations of politics are of kilter. Politics is, again, the process by which we do things, but it is not the process by which we self-actualize. It is not the process by which we guarantee that everybody's going to like everything. I've been thinking a lot about this with drug policy, for example. There was a piece today in Business Insider that was talking about ketamine use for depression. A lot of the quotes were from somebody who had started using ketamine in these controlled environments to help with their depression. Going to those centers was really expensive, so he started buying ketamine off the street, so to speak, and just snorting it, which is not what you're supposed to do. He was like, there are all these people talking about how ketamine is a wonder drug, and I was like, we keep, there's a difference between drug policy and how we talk about drugs, but also we seem to have this weird vacillation between talking about all drugs being terrible and all drugs being wonderful, because we seem unable to recognize that something being legal doesn't mean it's good, and something being good and legal aren't the same thing. I think that in our politics, we have this idea that politics is intended to be a moral arbiter or a moral corrective, and that politics is intended to ensure that people do the right thing, which for many people is, people do the thing I would like them to do. I recognize, and I think about this a lot, that many people are going to vote for things that I don't like or that are going to make me deeply annoyed or unhappy, and that's how politics works, that's how life works, and I think too often we want our politicians to not just solve the problems of politics or policy, we want our politics to solve the problems of culture, of our kids not listening to us or having too much sex or not enough sex or whatever we've decided the problem is. I think that we need to put our politics back in a place in which the politics can solve a problem where people have come together to decide about a regulation or the lack of regulation, but I think that we're asking our politics to do too much and inherently disappointing the people who want that. I want to return back to your

opening normalcy piece you're writing about, because political performance, especially when you interview people, you get very interested in like, why is the politician saying this thing to me in this exact manner? Yes, I think about that all the time.

Right, there's something there. I'm curious, how do you see, what are the implications?

Pretend you're like a comms director. No, not even a comms, you're an ambitious

Jane running for office. How does a return to normalcy expectation shift how you be thinking about the landscape and the ecosystem? Well, first I would not say return to normalcy, that was Warren Harding's campaign in 1920 and he could not do it. He spent a lot of time having sex with people in coat closets, so don't do that. I think of it as, but I was actually thinking he gave a speech in 1920, in May of 1920, in which he talked about how the American people weren't looking for essentially, they weren't looking for revolution, they were looking for normalcy, they were not looking to be saved or thrilled, they were just looking for normal stuff. And this is coming off of the First World War, Red Summer of 1919, the Spanish flu pandemic, people just wanted normal things to happen. And I think if I were running for office, which I would never do, I think about how sometimes, and I've been thinking about this a lot, we, our politicians now are attempting to either inhabit either our greatest dreams or our worst impulses.

When my entire argument, I think about politics, I joke on the internet that it's kind of a cool dad libertarianism, like what would a cool dad do? What would a cool dad, my dad is a cool dad, he thinks a lot about the Second World War, football and drinking beer. And building models of World War I by planes. He does not think a lot about culture war, he thinks that most people are probably pretty agreeable if you get to know them, and he would just rather everybody leave him alone. And I think that for many people, most people, that is how if they have a politics, that is how they think about their politics. It's not something that's tightly held, it's sort of like I think about these things sometimes, I'm a little confused about this particular issue, I could change my mind, but mostly I would like all of you to go away and leave me be with my beer and my World War I by planes. And so I think that a politics that promised not the world, not to like lower the tides of the oceans or end American carnage, but was just like things could be more calm. I can't do everything, that's on you. I cannot guarantee that your kids won't turn out to be jerks. I cannot guarantee that your elderly parents won't start becoming weirdos on Facebook. But I can focus on these specific issues and I can generally leave you alone. And if you have questions for me, I will be available. That is all I'm going to promise. I'm not going to do any more, but I'm not going to do any less. That would be my campaign.

No, this is not workable. Also, I would never pass betting. But I think that a politics of normalcy that recognized that most people... Why isn't that workable? I think that our politics we have now had, let's see, 50, 60 years of an expanding executive branch and an expanding understanding of what not just the presidency, but what politics is supposed to do. And I think that it would be very difficult for somebody to try and be a Calvin Coolidge now, when there are a lot of issues that people would want you to be engaged with, but also a lot of issues in which people would want you to perform engagement with. I keep thinking about how there are these people who are running for local office in a bunch of elections during the midterms. Local office. As in, you will have no impact on whether tanks go to Ukraine. But they all were like, I got to put out a statement on whether tanks should go to Ukraine. I'm like, no, you don't. You're running for Cincinnati City Council. Just make sure the I-71, I-75 interchange doesn't become

a complete murder fest. Like, simmer down a little. And so I think there is a sense of the expansion of politics and expansion of political hobbyism in which everybody is like, oh, I got to have a statement on this thing. If you're the person who's like, no, I don't know enough about it to have a perspective on it. It's not my bag. It's not my deal. I don't know if that would work for a lot of people, especially because, again, with the nationalization of local politics, it then becomes a story of like, why won't this person running for local office make this big statement about this national political issue that actually she has no authority to deal with? Yeah, this is where I keep going back to, which is in terms of the genuine democratic nature, whenever you have a decline in institutional participation and especially non-governmental institutional participation, and politics becomes one of the one venues that you actually have, at least some say, or an illusion of a say through the vote, as opposed to, let's say, either church or union or Rotary Club, right, the bowling league. These are all places where traditionally we like to romanticize, but there were areas of outlet for someone to exercise some sort of control. And if politics is all that is left, then how do you get out of it whenever politics and I cannot necessarily bring back, let's say, the bowling league, or some sort of replacement for that? Everybody should just get really into CrossFit or something.

Hey, Russ, what's up? I think that there is that kind of the bowling alone concept that people are looking for community, and you see that now in how people have increasingly made their politics into an identifier. They are their politics in a way that I find personally anathema, but then again, I identify in many ways as a sports fan or someone who is very interested in sports, and that's how I identify myself. Now, that identifier is perhaps even more meaningless than a political identifier. Like, you know, you're not going to live and die whether or not you think that Michigan football should hire the former Ravens offensive coordinator who suspiciously just

left his job and might be available. Like, I think that there is a, like, we will never lose the need to self-identify, choosing to self-identify based on our politics, or what I find even more interesting is people who are choosing to self-identify based on their politics in a politics of the current moment. For example, the people who are self-identifying, like, in a way that is so massive, so all-encompassing based on how they feel about a particular candidate who's running for office right now, who in 10 years is just going to be an answer at a trivia thing you go to at a bar. And I think that that concerns me, but I also think when you think about it in terms of people seeking community, then I become much more sympathetic to it. I think about all the people who are, you know, they are looking for something. Politics is offering them that something, and politics has one of the great attributes in that you can never go to, like, there's always somewhere more you can go in the realm of politics. And that's true of a lot of other institutions, but it just so happens that politics is the one that I find the most irritating right now. And so I think that when I think about people engaging in politics for the pursuit of community, particularly when I think of politics as a means to an end, that in turn makes me think a lot about why people are choosing to engage in kind of the cultural world politics that can fill up all of your time because it'll never end. And so, yeah, I think that this is, I think, one of our biggest challenges is that when politics becomes a hobby, becomes a culture, becomes a identity, it gets in the way of politics as a means by which you do things.

I'm curious, it seems like when you're talking about why this would be difficult to actually

pursue, why a lot of what comes in are political primaries and interest groups in those different aspects, like what are your broad thoughts, especially someone with heterodox politics, about the political reform movement? First pass the post, rank choice voting, etc. I am interested in rank choice voting. I'm interested in a lot of these political reforms. But again, I think that the challenge is you want the reform to make things better, to do what? To get different candidates in the office? What if you passed, I mean, that's what I, when I ask people, what if we passed all of these reforms and people still voted for that guy you hate? Then what? Because I think that we see that with, for instance, calls to say, pack the Supreme Court. The idea would be that a larger Supreme Court would then not do the thing you don't want them to do. I think that that type of motivated reasoning really gets in the way. But that's not to say that I am not interested in other political reforms, especially because I'm interested in political reforms that managed to, that could, oh, if it could, make it so that our politics became less totalizing and more individual. I'm married to a New Zealander. And New Zealand has many political parties. And watching my spouse vote is really interesting. One, you can vote by taking a pick. If you live outside of New Zealand, as large number of people do, you can vote by like taking a picture of your ballot and submitting it via email to PDF. And then they're like, we got it. And they're like, wow, that's great. But also, because there are so many political parties, it incentivizes a type of working across the aisle that no one could do now. And it incentivize a type of inter- and intra-party diversity that is almost unimaginable in America. For example, people may have heard that Jacinda Dern, or the now former Prime Minister, or soon to be former Prime Minister of New Zealand, has stepped down. When she first came into office, she is part of the Labour Party, which is left-leaning party. Again, it's New Zealand, so everybody's going to sound left-leaning, as I'm about to explain. She was in a partner, Labour was in a partnership with New Zealand First, which I've seen described as a far-right party, which is sort of true, but also as a far-right party largely controlled by rural Maori groups, the indigenous group of New Zealand. And one of their major things was raising the minimum wage from \$15 to \$20, and to doing a bunch of major environmental reforms. Their biggest thing is that they are representative of older Maori and indigenous peoples who were very worried about Chinese incursion in New Zealand. Chinese incursion that is very real, they attempted to Huawei in New Zealand attempted to release a cell phone that used the indigenous language as a keyboard, and they tried selling it really hard to members of the New Zealand All Blacks, very famous rugby team. This turned into a giant thing, but anyway, that type of inter- and intra-party diversity is just something you don't really have as much, and also it's not nearly as totalizing. Like my father-in-law is a national voter, which is kind of like the center-right party of New Zealand, but also like he's voted for Labour. There's a lot more across currents of politics because there are so many parties, and you are expected to form some sort of agreement or alliance. And so I would want reforms in America that would make it so that we did not have this conceit of like this like dumb mid-90s comedy, you might be a Democrat, if you might be a Republican, if idea of our politics, especially because that's not how most people think. I am not going to be the independent voter that creates a hagiography of being an independent voter, as if I'm a better person. I'm just annoyed by everyone, and they all annoy me.

But I think that a lot of, and we've seen in the polling that a lot of independent voters still vote one particular way, but we've also seen that people do not want to be a part of a totalizing atmosphere that makes it so that if you vote for Republicans, you are a Republican. You're signed into all of this. If you vote for Democrats, you are a Democrat. You signed up for all of this. It's like if you sign up for something in an email, and it automatically checks all the boxes of all these other newsletters, and you're like, no, no, I don't want any of these. Go away. I think that's how I feel about our politics right now, and I really reforms whether it's, you know, first pass the post, whether it's ranked choice voting, which we've seen a couple of areas. Anything that makes our politics less totalizing, I think would be good. Well, I think in a lot of ways there is a case to be optimistic. I mean, there's never been more swing voters than in the last two elections. People actually swing all the time and actually pay very close attention. And we'll be like, well, based on this and this court decision, I'm going to do this, even though I voted for Joe Biden or even though I voted for Donald Trump. My question to you is, how does that manifest at the party level? Because right now, I haven't seen any actual evidence that it does in terms of the actions, let's say, in the Speaker's fight. I don't think that had anything to do with the midterms. I don't think Chuck Schumer's election or Mitt Romney's, sorry, Mitch McConnell's relatively interchangeable. Soggy, go ahead. The answer is it's totally Gabbard. She's the only person who, to her lack of success is attempting to operationalize this. But yeah. How's that going? She's got great hair. I think that there is, I mean, I think that this is one of the things where we will see the knock-on effects eventually. I mean, we are in the midst of a time in which much of our politics are run by people who have been running our politics for a very long time. And I think that we see this in kind of the conversations, but I think we see this in the conversations not within parties, but outside of parties. Because I think that, for one thing, I think that people, I mean, you hear this all the time when people are swing voters is that they'll vote for specific people all because they want, say, a contested Congress because they want to force people to work together.

Now, I think that's lightly silly because they won't, but that's neither here nor there. I think that encouraging more diversity at the party level, and I think that we see this a little bit not in the national party, but in the state parties. For instance, Jared Polis in Colorado, I think who's become, it's funny because I can't tell, sometimes I can't tell if people are excited about a politician because he's a good politician or if they're excited about a politician because they like them, which are two different things. There are many politicians who I dislike very much, who I think are very good at being politicians, and there are politicians I like a lot, but I think are hot garbage at doing their jobs. But I think that what we've seen at the state level is, I mean, currently right now, the Colorado GOP attempted to run less Trump-y, less national party adjacent Republican candidates, and the Colorado Democratic Party was like, whatever, and Colorado Democratic Party did really well. And so I think when we look at the state party, especially how state parties can be more responsive on state issues, when we see candidates who are running at the state level who are, even if it's in attempting to adhere more to what they're getting from their districts or what they're hearing or trying to sound more like normal human beings, I think that tells me that there is more intellectual diversity at the state level.

I don't know how long they'll take to get the national level. I don't know what that looks like, but I think that's kind of what I've been thinking about. I think that's an excellent place to leave. I think the one actual question would be, so you're thinking of normalcy. What are some other closing topics you're going to explore this year? I've been thinking a lot about, I've been writing a lot on conservatism and the history of conservatism, and I am so fascinated by a term. I might be the first person to say this kind of thing, but the horny bro conservatism. I think about this, I don't remember if you people remember the Barstool conservatism article from a couple of years ago, and how then Dave Portnoy then responded to the Supreme Court's ruling on abortion and the idea of what does a post-religious conservatism look like? What does the return of neo-conservatism look like? But also thinking a lot about what does this have anything to do with how most people interpret their politics? There are a lot of pro-life voters who are also pretty pro-divorced too. And for a lot of social conservatives, they who are very opposed to say no fault divorce, that's an interesting road to hoe. So I'm thinking a lot about these things, but also this idea of how do you build a politics that is more adjacent to how most people do things when most people aren't into politics? It's a great area of exploration. Jane, thank you for joining us. Jason Willick, good friend of the Washington Post. You've all lived in of the American Enterprise Institute. You've probably noticed this, breaking points, the realignment. There's been a lot of discourse around American democracy being under threat. I want to take that idea seriously, though, in a way that I think recognizes that there's been an overproduction towards one very specific direction of the argument. Yvonne, I'd love to start with you. What is your assessment of the health, the state? This language feels so vapid, but that's how it's kind of discourse.

How do you feel about the state of American democracy today?

Well, thank you, first of all, for the opportunity and for this very interesting event.

I think that it makes sense to worry about the condition of the American Republic. I don't think that it would be right to panic about the state of American democracy, and I think the difference between worry and panic is a very important distinction for us to draw now in our politics.

It's become almost impossible for us to take any issue seriously without panicking about it.

We can't talk about the environment unless we persuade ourselves that people are going to be drowning in the streets of Manhattan. We can't talk about the budget unless we persuade ourselves

that we're on the verge of some kind of debt crisis. I think similarly, we almost can't get ourselves to talk about American constitutionalism unless we persuade ourselves that the whole system

is about to fall and democracy dies in darkness, no offense. It actually makes it very difficult to think seriously about these questions if we insist on behaving in this kind of panicked way.

So let me make the case for worrying and not panicking. I'm Jewish. Worry is a way of life.

It's a way of exhibiting strength and taking problems seriously. Worry has to start from understanding your own strength and then from understanding the ways in which you face challenges.

In one sense, American democracy is in a very strong place. It's easier to vote than it's ever been in America. There is much, much less fraud in our elections, and there would have been at almost any other time you could have looked in on them in the history of the United States.

Voter turnout rates are very, very high. This is easily the highest period of sustained

voter turnout that we've had in our history. All of these are reasons to think that American democracy is in a strong place. I think where we face problems that we ought to be worrying about is when we show contempt for the legitimacy of our institutions, when we treat the system as not worthy of our regard and respect, and when we, in a kind of passing way, say it's illegitimate, it's contemptible. I think you do find that in the way that some people on the right, including Donald Trump, of course, have talked about election results. I think you find it in the way that some people on the left talk about the core institutions of our constitutional system, the Senate and the Electoral College, but also the courts, the Bill of Rights.

These are reasons to worry, and they're reasons to make the case for strengthening the American Republic in all of its parts, including the Democratic parts. I think we should worry, and we should make that case, and we should act on that case, but panic is not going to help, and I don't think that panic is the right response to the moment we're living through, but I do think worry is maybe that first start. Jason, worry or panic, or neither.

Well, first of all, it's great to be with you guys. Marshall and Sagar are some of my oldest friends in Washington when we all graduated from college and were roaming around DC in 2015. We all got together, and so it's great to watch the realignment grow and become so successful.

I agree with everything you've all said. I think everybody believes in democracy or says that they do, and I think somebody said political science is the art of proving the obvious, but there's more political, you know, empirical support for this, that basically you ask people, they'll say that they support democracy, that's their ideology, that's the load star of our political system, whether they're on the right or the left, but it's almost precisely that ideological conviction that makes you so convinced that what the other side is doing is wrong, because it's violating democracy, whether it's, you know, voter fraud or misinformation or, you know, Supreme Court ruling you don't like and so on and so forth. It's cast as a violation of democracy, and people, so people's, you know, definition of democracy varies based on the partisan circumstances, and so it's within this one ideological frame that, as you've all said, we're sort of eroding institutions, and the appeals to democracy are used to do that, so, you know, any system of governance contains the seeds of its own undoing if it's mishandled, and I think democracy is the same, that's long been recognized by political philosophers, so I think, you know, we need to also focus on other, you know, political virtues, not only democracy, because in some ways that's a self-undermining proposition.

When I think about, and even say the word democracy, it's difficult for me not to immediately hear the tinges you've all, like, you reference both from the left and to the right. At the same time, I do see a deep reluctance, I think, with a lot of right-leaning people and right-leaning institutions at the idea of expanding small D democracy, you know, an almost an instant opposition at any change to the vote system with the suspicion, Jason, specifically of what you're talking about, like, no, that's going to lead to more left-leaning results. How do you think that people on the right should think about small D democracy? Should they want more people to get involved in the political process? I personally do, and how should they think then about what the future looks like instead of just simply defending, let's say, the status quo of the way people vote in a particular battleground state? I think it's a very important question. It's actually a question that the team on part of the AI has been working on for quite a bit in the last few years, because I think that this is a moment when we have to see that there are reasons to think about structural

change that strengthen participation in American democracy, and there is an instinctive reaction on the right to think these changes are just going to help the left. There's even an instinctive sense that just greater voter participation will help the left, that higher turnout helps the left. That is not true. There's a lot of evidence now, 70 years of evidence, that counters that argument, and you confront people with it, and while they're in the room, they say, okay, that's very interesting, and then they walk out and have the same attitude they had coming in, which is more people vote, the other side wins, fewer people vote, we win. I think that's a very bad attitude with which to approach voters. You're giving people the impression that you don't want them to participate, that you

want to exclude them from the system. Sometimes it's more than an impression, let's be frank. There are real efforts to exclude people from voting. I think those are a terrible mistake, and it's also just not the case that more voters means more Democrats winning more elections. One of the things it's going to take for Republicans to come to terms with the changing nature of the electoral coalitions in our politics now is to recognize that they actually could be more popular than they think. If they try to win votes, imagine that, and if they appeal to a broader segment of the electorate than the people who are already dying to go and vote for them on election day, I think to see that, Republicans have to overcome a certain kind of reluctance to think about the Democratic system as serving them. Put it this way, right now the left dominates every institution except those to which you have to get elected, and that should suggest to people on the right that the institutions of American democracy can actually work in our favor in some very important ways. I think that does mean being much more open to more voter participation.

I think it also means thinking about changes or experimentation with the election systems in ways that treat the problems created by the primary system as real challenges to American governance. The move to primaries in both parties in the 1970s was a terrible mistake that has left our politics populated with people who have no business being in politics, who have no interest doing the jobs they're elected to, who basically run on a platform of saying I will never do this job, and we have to think differently about how we're populating these institutions. So if you had asked me even 10 years ago, what do I think about rank choice voting? I would say that's a gimmick that'll get more Democrats elected.

I don't really think that way anymore. I think we have to think about things like rank choice voting in primaries in particular. We have to think about ways to experiment with the system to overcome a terrible mistake made by reformers 50 years ago that has left us with a politics that's just less functional than it could be. And to get to a better, to a more functional system, we've got to be open to thinking about the ways in which institutions create incentives that then create political realities. And to change incentives, you've got to change structure. Jason, what do you think of the reformist impulse year 2023?

I'm a little more skeptical. I mean, depending on what reforms we're talking about, I think I agree with you, Val, that we should experiment. And frankly, our states should be allowed to experiment. We talk about first past the post and single member congressional districts, there's nothing stopping states from adopting different forms of representation in their state legislatures like they had in the early 19th century, except probably some federal laws like the Voting Rights Act. But the federal government could allow states sort of more experimentation.

And I just think all of our states have the exact same structure and almost the exact same electoral system. There's one with a unicameral legislature, but they all use single member districts. So that could be experimented with. And the state should do more experimentation. We're seeing some experimentation with ranked choice voting now in Alaska and other places in Maine. I think what I would say about, I don't love mail-in voting for very long periods because I think one function of an election isn't just to get people to participate in it, but to build legitimacy in the process. And I think people sort of doing it in the same way at the same time helps to build respect for the outcome. And I think there's some worry that mail-in voting creates an incentive for mobilization rather than persuasion. How many people can you recruit to vote in the weeks ahead of the election and you want people being persuaded and thinking up to the time of the election? So we have to think carefully about what these reforms are.

But overall, I'm very open to experimentation.

Well, just to dig into that, and I think this is an important point, though, is the pushback I hear from the primary defenders is, yeah, but in the 1970s, it was run by party elites. And before that, and if you go back, I mean, even direct election of senators, relatively recent phenomenon in the history of the republic. So when we think about reforms, how do we think about reforms that are more democratic and not more elite driven? Because that was kind of, as I understand it, one of the reformer impulses for the primary in the first place was to get away from the quote unquote, you know, smoke-filled back rooms. So look, I think our system seeks a balance between

elite power and popular power. And I think that is the right thing to seek. It's not the case that the more popular power you have, the better the system of government. There are advantages, obviously, to more democratic power. There are also advantages to elite power. And the American constitutional system recognizes that you need some way to strike a dynamic balance between these two. They move back and forth. I think that the impulse behind the move to primaries was misguided.

It was the sense that if you only put more power in the hands of a broader populace, you'll end up with a more responsive politics. But what you actually end up with is a politics that's responsive to the people who have the time and the intense inclination to spend a lot of energy being engaged in politics. And that is not a broad swath of the American population. I think that we have unquestionably ended up with a less representative politics as a result of the primary system, less representative of the population at large, more representative of the most intensely engaged fringes of both parties. And that's not good for the country. I think we have to be willing to say that the amount of democracy we need is not infinity. There is an answer to the question, how much of this do we want and how much of that do we want? And we've got to think in terms that are realistic about human nature and the character of democratic politics. And so we can't go back to the pre-primary system. We can't go back because just as a, again, being realistic, what politician is going to say to his voters, well, actually, you people are the problem, and we need to pull power back to a place where you have less of a say in whether I get to be in the balance. And that's why we've got to think about ways of moving forward from where we are that recognize the need for this balance. And so, you know, one kind of appeal of ranked choice voting is it says we want somebody who is going to be capable of being a lot of people's second choice. Right? Why is that? Because what we're doing here is populating a set of political

institutions. And what happens in those institutions is bargaining and compromise and accommodation, especially if you're talking about Congress. That's the job, right? If you don't want to do that, you should seek another job. There are a lot of job opportunities for capable people in the United States economy. You really shouldn't run for Congress if you don't actually want to be involved in legislative work. And at the moment, we've got a system with incentives that drive a lot of people who don't want to be involved in legislative work to run for Congress. We've just got to think practically about how to change that. And that's not all about democracy. That's not all about more power to the people. I think there does have to be a balance here that lets us be governed well, but also in a way that is responsive to public pressures. Speaking with two younger listeners of the realignment last night, and they brought up the episode I did with Shadi Hamid where we were talking about Shadi's point that we can't keep acting as if every single election of our lifetime is the most important election of our lifetime. That really resonated with them because they said on a college campus, that is a helpful mentality to bring in some of the culture war debates. But taking a step back, I have a hard time resonating with that argument because looking at the past several elections, you look at the world where Hillary Clinton wins in 2016 versus Trump, and those are just like way different. Same thing goes for 2020, and barring the status quo continuing 2024 would be similar. So how do the two of you think about this dynamic of how do we not over-escalate our national politics at a turning up the temperature level? We'll also recognize that no, there actually are a couple of times we're choosing here. How do we balance that? Jason, you could go first. Well, I think you can't tell in advance which elections are going to be the most important. So you have to consider that they all may feel that way, but may not turn out that way. The other thing is unlike in a, you asked me about reforms, unlike in a parliamentary system, a proportional system that some people prefer in other countries where you really are giving the government entirely to one party in the United States. You don't do that. You don't have to do that in an election. We used to do it less. We used to give one chamber of Congress to one party, the presidency to another, and so on. And then meanwhile, the courts sort of persist in sort of like an averaging of which party has been in power over time. But yeah, I mean, it's certainly a good mobilizer to say that every election is the most important. And I think that there's something to be said for the fact that the presidency has grown and the government has grown. So control over the government is a higher stakes proposition. And so we would need some sort of reforms to pair that back, starting with putting more power in Congress, which is, I know, something you've all has worked on. We have institutions like the filibuster, which are intended to prevent dramatic change. Those are trying to be exploded by partisans, and I assume at some point will be. But I guess I don't have a good answer, because people do have a point. Elections are very important. So I guess this gets back for me to the distinction between panic and worry. I don't think it makes sense to panic about presidential elections. They do matter. But in our system, there's a lot of back and forth. There are also a lot of restraints on power, so that who the president is at any given time only matters so much. I would say, I mean, it's true, the presidency has grown in stature and power. But I think that presidents Biden and Trump are probably the weakest presidents of my lifetime. And the reasons for that are very different

between the two of them. But neither one of them has really dominated the work of our government in a personal way, in a way that the power of the president suggests are possible. We're seeing a kind of diminishment of the presidency. Unfortunately, we're not seeing a rise of Congress to fill that vacuum. We're seeing a vacuum. There are a lot of ways in which in the Biden years, running on autopilot. Now, it's running in the wrong direction, because autopilot points left when you look at the federal bureaucracy. But how much of what's going on is really Joe Biden's personal priority. How different would it have been if another Democrat had gotten elected in that election? Really, how fundamentally different would it be if a Republican had? The answer's not at all. But it is an answer that suggests that we're not living in a moment when every presidential election has to be thought of as a life for death question for the American Republic. When you think of it that way, you justify making stupid decisions. And I think it is very important to see that we do not face a situation in which we should suspend all the laws of rationality, because we've got to make this one decision correctly. We've got to think in a broader perspective about the condition of our government. We do have a mixed result from an election now. We've got a Republican House. We've got a Democratic Senate. We've got a very weak Democratic president.

I think that's better than unified government in the wrong hands.

Elections matter. Look, I spend my life working in politics. I think elections matter a lot.

I wish they mattered less to the life of the average American. I'd love to vote for somebody who says they'll make the matter less. I guess it's unlikely. But the idea that this next election is the most important of your lifetime, or that it's really ultimately all that matters, and you should suspend all your other powers of judgment to make sure that this one thing goes well.

I don't think that's the right way to think about our politics, and I don't think that it ends up being justified by the results of the last few elections. One of the things you're getting out there in talking about the federal bureaucracy is the anti-democratic nature of autopilot.

Even President Obama once famously described the presidency as a ship captain who's really only able to turn a super tanker two degrees one way or two degrees the other way and hope in 30 years that you go somewhere. This was, at one point, allegedly one of the most powerful people in the entire world. The counter to that, as you say, is to try and have Congress consume more power. But in our current system, you have legislators you know I'm not particularly interested in being legislators. More interested in doing what we're doing here. Podcasters, most of them, aren't even particularly good at it. It's a bit of a catch-22. The power resides in the federal bureaucracy. The response to that is, well, then we should get rid of the federal bureaucracy or enact more power on that, but we don't appear to have legislators that are capable of doing that. So how do you think that that compromise system, how will it work itself out in the next decade or so? I think the question when you face a vicious cycle like that is where can you break in?

Not where is the problem biggest, but where can I actually do something about it?

And those are not the same question. So for me, the answer is really that we have to think about how to change the incentives that confront members of Congress so that they have more of a reason to do their job. A big part of the reason why the federal bureaucracy is as powerful as it is, is that Congress has stepped back, withdrawn from using its power, and given that power over to the

federal bureaucracy. That doesn't have to be the case. Members of Congress have the power to

change

this. No one else does. And so they're where we have to focus and to help their ambition be channeled

into actual legislative work by changing the way the Congress works, by changing some things about our election system. I think that's the place to focus not because that's a silver bullet, but because that's where it's actually imaginable that you could change the kinds of incentives that drive the rest of the system in the direction it's been going.

I'm curious, Yvonne, and then Jason, cut in please. What you think about then the weakening of the speaker or how general like the... I love it.

Look, I think what happened in the fight over the speakership was great.

It wasn't perfect. There were a lot of bad things about it and embarrassing things, but life is full of embarrassing moments. What you've got now is evidence of the possibility of decentralization of power in the House. I think a big part of the reason why members don't care about legislating is that they're not actually permitted to do any legislating.

What they do in the committees actually doesn't matter, so they're not stupid for treating it like it doesn't matter. Changing that, allowing it to matter more, giving some more power to the committee system, and empowering intra-party factions, groups within the two parties that allow for more internal diversity, I think is a great way to try to think about how to strengthen Congress again. On the whole, I think what's happened here has been a good thing for Congress.

Jason? Well, if too many congressmen are podcasters, I'm waiting for the NJETI for Senate.

I hear that Virginia, there's a contested seat in 2024, but no, I agree with Yuval. I didn't have a problem with it. I didn't care really who the speaker was, and in so far as the committees are stronger, that's 100% a better thing. It shows how hard it is to think about this in terms of democracy or more democracy, because committees are kind of anti-democratic.

They're based on seniority. Positions on them are not elected. They're doled out by the speaker versus the speaker who's elected. Also partly based on seniority, it depends which state he's in may help. If he's in a safer seat, it may help. So thinking about it as more democratic or less democratic, that's another example of it's better to think about it as what's a better structure for this institution. I think one of the themes of this is it's not about more democracy or less democracy. It's about where do we need more democracy? Where do we need less democracy? We probably don't want a popular vote over interest rates, but we probably do want more democratic accountability, it seems to me, over things like the big tech company's decisions or over parts of the administrative state. So it's really a question of where are we focusing more popular energy versus more elite power, and I think we have the balance wrong is the main thing.

I think a good closing question for the two of you is to bring up what Kevin Roberts brought up when I interviewed him an hour or so ago, just the question of the conservative movement needing to answer what time it is. So from any personal perspective on the two of your ends, I'm curious what time is it? Like in the year 2023?

What time is it? I mean, I do think there's an element among conservatives.

Or maybe it's not even the right question, and that's an answer too. Well, I mean,

I think if you look at something like the Senate race in Indiana with Jim Banks and Mitch Daniels,

there's a sense among Republican voters, I do think that we can't do politics the way that we did in the 90s and 2000s when there was more overlap between the parties and in the pre-information

age, and it was just a different model where compromise was more possible. And I think voters just fundamentally want to see their politicians really represent their views unashamedly. And so I think that's what conservatives are getting at when they say, we need new leadership that's focused on this. And I think there's definitely something to that given the new circumstances. Part of it is just our leadership class is very old. Younger people have a better sense, I think, of the direction of the country and the needs. I guess I would argue with the question just a little bit. I'm a conservative, and so I actually don't think what time is it is quite the right question to ask because it's always time to help a rising generation be formed into better human beings and take on citizenship in a serious way. That's always what time it is. The question is, what does that mean right now? What kinds of challenges stand in the way of our doing that now? I think it's a lot easier at this moment to see what's different about this time than to see what's the same about this time. And for that reason, we should think about some of the durable problems we face. Sustaining the balance of our system of government, helping it function well is a constant problem. And the fact that we get tired of it, that we get bored of it is not a reason to stop thinking about it. It's not an excuse to say, well, let's put that aside, that's an old question, and let's think about some new questions. I don't think we're going to do a good job of thinking about new questions, of thinking about the kinds of challenges we have to face now that are distinct and different. If we're not doing the basic work of allowing the American constitutional system to reflect the ideals of the American Republic in a way that enables us to govern ourselves well, so that basic work always has to be done. And I think we as conservatives should never forget about it, should never put it aside because now things are different, should never think, well, in this moment we can't worry about the system and the process. That's precisely when we do have to worry about them. And it's a reason for change. It's not a reason for doing things in the same way. I don't think that we should take the ends of the sentences that Republicans were uttering in the 1980s as though they are dogma. Our sentences do need to end differently now, because we're facing different problems. They need to start in the same way. They need to start by saying our challenge is to govern this country well so that another generation can be prosperous and free. And therefore, the challenges we now face with China, with tech, with all kinds of problems, cultural challenges that weren't the same 50 years ago, do require us to think differently, but to achieve the same ends. And we should not forget that that is the case. That's, to me, that's ultimately what makes a conservative.

Well said. Thank you for joining us today. Thanks, guys. Appreciate it. Thank you. Hope you enjoyed this episode. If you learned something like this sort of mission or want to access our subscriber exclusive Q&A bonus episodes and more, go to realignment.supercast.com and subscribe to our \$5 a month, \$50 a year, or \$500 for a lifetime membership. Great. See you all next time.