

## [Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #375 - David Pakman: Politics of Trump, Biden, Bernie, AOC, Socialism & Wokeism

The following is a conversation with David Pakman, a left-wing progressive political commentator and host of the David Pakman show.

I hope to continue to have many conversations on politics with prominent, insightful, and sometimes controversial figures across the political spectrum.

David and I have been planning to speak for a long time, and I'm sure we'll speak many more times.

This conversation was challenging, eye-opening, and fun.

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One of the things in the darkest of times for me that's the source of happiness is naps.

It's kind of miraculous how you can go to this world and return a new human being.

And you are, in some sense, a new human being.

From a physics, from a chemistry perspective, even from a biological perspective.

But what I'm trying to say is from a psychological perspective, you're also a new human being.

Because in some sense, the chemistry that makes up your brain, the dopamine, all the different chemicals that control mood and motivation and energy, mental and physical, all of that define a human being.

Together, that is the underlying dynamics of personality is really fueled, is catalyzed and fueled and structured by the chemicals in your brain.

And so whatever the hell naps do, and there's obviously a lot of good science on this, but early science, I don't think the science of sleep is solved.

The only thing we know is sleep is kind of good for you.

But the full dynamics of that is hard to understand.

The point is, empirically speaking, for you, for me, naps, or at least a good night's sleep works.

And so you should use the best bed for that.

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Speaking of which, I need to do the same for different kinds of merch that folks been asking. It's not a way to make money, it's a way to share love.

I love wearing shirts that represent the stuff.

I listen to the stuff I consume, the creators, I'm a fan of so many people, and I love celebrating with so many people, and wearing merch or owning merch is a way to once celebrate those people, but two, if it's a thing you can wear, then you can meet other people, and it starts a conversation, you're like, holy crap, we both like the same thing, or holy crap, what is that?

I don't know anything about it.

Tell me about it, and you get to share the things you love with others.

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This episode is also brought to you by ExpressVPN, a VPN provider I've used for many years way, way, way before there was a podcast, way before there was a sponsor, there was a source of happiness, a source of security, a source of a kind of blanket protection and help ensure that to whatever degree at the very basic level my privacy is protected on the internet, everybody should be using a VPN.

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Maybe now it's obvious, but in the early days when they worked on Linux, like early, early days, I don't know how many years ago, but I was like, holy crap, this is so awesome, this is so awesome that they care about this operating system that I love so much.

So yeah, it works anywhere, Android, your iPhone, all of that.

By the way, I should mention that the peer pressure I have to switch to an iPhone, I do have an iPhone, I just don't use it.

The peer pressure is immense, but I remain with the Android, it is the phone of the people, I still like the customization, I like developing for the Android as well, and I have several Android phones, and I love them very much, the customization, the freedom, actually the principles that's behind it.

But of course, I also love beautiful design, Johnny Ives is one of, if not the greatest tech designers of all time, and he's a hero of mine, he's somebody that inspires me as a human being as a designer, so all of that combined, I don't know, I should be using both actively and giving both love and developing for both.

Let's see what the future holds.

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This is the Lex Rudman podcast, to support it, please check out our sponsors in the description, and now, dear friends, here's David Backman.

Are there interesting differences to you between terms like liberal, Democrat, left-wing, leftist, progressive, socialist, communist, Marxist, far left, center left, all of these labels?

Is there interesting distinctions between them?

Yeah, there's two sets of distinctions.

One is if you just want to say let's define each of these as political terms, they're all different terms.

You can be a progressive ideologically, but not be a member of the Democratic Party.

Many say the Democratic Party isn't even really very progressive, so these are certainly terms that we could define in order to have a conversation about the next thing, kind of as a precursor to a conversation.

Sometimes the terms are used in order to tag someone with a certain ideology that's not really linked to policy or any particular political question, but they can be used positively or negatively to just kind of say, here's the image of this individual that I have in my mind.

So like Marxist is right now very popularly being used by some on the right to attack Democrats. There's very few actual Marxists, certainly not in positions of power in the United States, but even among the general population.

So I think it's important to distinguish, are we defining these terms because we want to compare and contrast the ideas that a particular group might bring to the discussion, or are we using them as insults or to stifle conversation?

They're terms that can be used to start conversation or to stop it.

And the use of those terms is evolving rapidly month by month.

So the term leftist I think is a relatively popular term now to use in the negative context to describe what an outraged left wing commentator.

I think what you're kind of grasping onto is that there's probably some set of ideas that would apply to most of those who consider themselves to be on the left.

The discussion of how that term is mostly being used is not about policy ideas.

You're accurately kind of identifying that.

And it does seem like progressive is no longer being used as a smear, and leftist is being used as a smear more at this point.

But sometimes some of these terms are useful, like can we try to pick the terms that are useful like liberal and progressive and Democrat, liberal and progressive.

Is there an interesting definable distinction between liberal and progressive to you?

That's maybe one of the most interesting ones.

Ten years ago, liberal often meant what now we mean by progressive.

More recently, the progressive socialist leaning part of the political spectrum has started to use liberal to mean Joe Biden, to mean someone who is not really left enough.

So liberal is very interesting because I remember talking with my audience years ago, maybe

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eight years ago or something like that, where I identified.

I'm going to now use the term progressive more commonly to describe my own beliefs because liberal has now been made a smear, it's being shifted into something else, and it also means more of like a center left politics.

So it's changed in some sense by necessity, by force, and also because the spectrum has shifted to some degree.

So the term liberal has evolved.

Now, liberal meaning some kind of embodiment of the mainstream Democratic Party, almost.

To some degree, sometimes I'm written off by, within my space, there are all sorts of shades of gray, which I'm sure we can talk about, about where I am versus should be, could be, or am wrongly placed.

And sometimes an attack on me is he's just a lib, meaning I'm not left enough.

I'm not progressive, socialist, wherever else you want to go.

So yeah, the problem with a lot of these terms, and they're used very casually by people who call into my show, is that unless we actually define them each time, they very often mean very different things to different people and often come with an agenda attached to them.

And so I find that they often stifle meaningful conversation rather than encourage it.

Do you sense that there's a drifting of what is the threshold to be a progressive?

Or is there, should be used progressive synonymously with Democratic Socialists?

I think we should not use it synonymously with Democratic Socialists.

And this is where there's another linguistic confusion and a political confusion.

So we'll first talk about the linguistic one.

Social democracy versus Democratic Socialism.

Very similar words in a different order.

My, the way I operate is Democratic Socialism is actually a form of socialism where one would seek to socialize ownership of the means of production as an example.

Social democracy is a very highly regulated form of capitalism, the likes of which we would see in Northern Europe, Denmark, et cetera.

These are very different things.

I associate progressivism in 2023 with social democracy and would consider Democratic Socialism a form of actual socialism that is different.

We're no longer talking about a capitalist organization of society.

So transition from one to the other is a fundamental shift in how society operates then?

Absolutely.

And when you talk about social democracy, you're talking about socializing a couple more things than we socialize in most modern capitalist countries.

I had this conversation with Patrick Bette David recently.

Social democracy is, okay, we've socialized the military already in the United States.

We've socialized some healthcare in the sense of like the VA and Medicaid, et cetera.

We're talking about socializing a couple more things still in a capitalist country.

Democratic Socialism would be something beyond that.

And as someone who is not a Democratic Socialist myself, I'm maybe not the best advocate for

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explaining exactly how that system would function, but it would have some version of socializing ownership of the means of production, businesses, et cetera.

So you mentioned you appeared on the PBD podcast with Patrick Bette David.

The debate was pretty intense.

I should say, I personally enjoyed it.

I thought, actually, you did well and I thought Patrick did well.

It was a good conversation.

I thought it was.

There was a little bit of tension.

Yeah.

And I thought that Patrick actually, so I disagreed with the internet, I thought Patrick just took on a kind of devil's advocate, like he was purposely being stubborn to bring out the best than you, but the internet thought that he's being stubborn, not being open to your ideas.

I thought the tension between ideas, I think a lot of the tension had to do probably with Donald Trump and Trump supporters.

That certainly could be the case.

And people wrote to me the full gamut of everything you can imagine from this was your best thing you've ever done in public to you got humiliated and your mother should have aborted you.

And everything in between.

Yeah.

But the most interesting feedback I got was from people who asked me after was it incredibly tense and awkward and because it seemed so combative.

And I think I'm so used to those types of tensions in the discussions that I have that it's very comfortable to me.

It's not like afterwards, there's a grudge or it's tense or whatever the case may be.

I'm very comfortable, just I disagree with people and that's it.

So I did not find anything that happened inappropriate.

I disagreed with a lot of the things he said, certainly.

So you've also spoken to Michael Knowles, I think about the idea of what is a woman.

Do you, can you speak broadly about your conversations with the people you disagree with?

You know, some of the cases, it feels like it's gone wrong.

The conversations have gone wrong.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean, I think there's a couple of different things.

And I'm the first to tell you that depending on who I'm talking to, I go in with a different attitude about how, quote, seriously I'm taking it in the sense of whether I think it's going to be a deep policy discussion versus whether it's going to be more of a performance for an audience that is expecting a certain thing.

And I think there's different types of shows.

When I was interviewed by this guy, Jesse Lee Peterson in Los Angeles, it's very different,

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for example, than when I'm talking to Patrick Bet David, just to give two examples.

I think the reason I stopped doing the Michael Knowles show was the number of threats I would get after the fact.

That's really the reason.

I was glad to engage with him to the extent that the interviews were interesting and we could organize it reasonably efficiently.

But the reason I stepped away was sort of the aftermath.

But I did find him to be someone who was abundantly clear about his view and where he comes from.

And while I could not possibly disagree more with him in terms of politics and culture and our backgrounds, everything is just so different, I found it easy to engage in the conversation just because of how upfront and clear he was about what his beliefs were.

But the number of threats was too much.

Yeah, it was just too much.

And I don't know how much you saw about this recent Twitter dustup I was involved in that peaked with Donald Trump Jr. tweeting about me and then declining from there.

Let's talk through it.

I didn't see it.

I have to understand.

The way you study Shakespeare, I have to study your Twitter.

I have to understand how much of its sarcasm.

Mostly sarcasm.

I mean, here's the thing.

And I know that there are people who will say, David, you're dealing with such serious issues.

It's really not OK not to take everything you do completely seriously.

But my view is it's so incredible that I've between chance and timing and so different things fallen into a position where this is what I do professionally and it's a career and it's financially sustainable and all these different things.

I don't want to end up taking myself too seriously because I recognize the timing and lock in all of these other things and this could have gone a completely different way.

So my approach to a lot of this is let's not take ourselves too seriously and in particular on Twitter, a platform that the degree to which it should be taken very seriously maybe has changed over time.

I'm always sort of thinking a little bit tongue in cheek on Twitter.

So what happened with Donald Trump Jr. or the full arc of it?

Yeah, to make give you a one minute arc and then we can pick whichever parts we want after a mass shooting.

Now you might say there's like two or three a day, you're correct.

After the Nashville mass shooting at a Christian school, I tweeted snarkily tongue in cheek to point that thoughts and prayers not only aren't particularly useful after a shooting, they also don't prevent shootings, that there's some confusion about how there would be a shooting at a Christian school, given that it is a place where prayer is taking place.

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I think I jokingly said something like, were they not praying enough or correctly?

In my deep journalistic integrity.

You have it.

I have your tweet.

Beautiful, beautiful.

This is the only display of journalistic integrity I will show today.

Okay.

And I have a couple of responses.

Beautiful.

I have tweeted the tweet since then.

Which I regret.

Oh, interesting.

And we can talk about that.

I would love to, because it's such an interesting decision.

Because when you tweet something, one of the things I've also learned is you don't often understand how it's going to be read.

It's going to be analyzed, like I mentioned Shakespeare, like there's certain, the use of certain words that you regret saying in a certain kind of way, maybe just because it wasn't as eloquent as powerful, didn't actually convey the thing, or is the distraction to the main message, all that kind of stuff.

Okay.

The actual tweet is very surprising that there would be a mass shooting at a Christian school, given that lack of prayer is often blamed for these horrible events.

Is it possible they weren't praying enough or correctly, despite being a Christian school?

And a lot of people quote retweeted that, which I'm assuming was the criticism.

So Colin Wright wrote, I used to consider you a reasonable progressive, but you clearly devolved into partisan hackery.

I'm an atheist.

You cannot begin to fathom using the murder of children and adults at a Christian school as an opportunity to dunk on the concept of prayer.

And you responded, I'm dunking on the people who send thoughts and prayers and do nothing else.

And the shootings continue.

Okay.

I'm sure there's a lot of other interactions with this.

There's a few other hundred thousand interactions.

So do you want the arc leading to the leading?

Yes, please.

Sorry.

I just wanted to display the depth.

Do you know what time of day I tweeted the original one?

I feel like it was in the afternoon or evening of on a Monday.

3.42 PM on 27th, March 27th.

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Which was a Monday.

Okay.

So basically I tweet that, and then I finish the day.

So you tweet, and then you go on with your day.

I might have looked once at Twitter and it had 2,000 likes and a few people saying, eh, this might have missed the mark, but it's sort of like it's one of my 20,000 tweets.

I don't know.

I wake up the next morning.

My baby daughter did not sleep till 7.30 the way I would like.

So she's up at 6 AM and I get up and I'm just there starting to make breakfast.

And I glance at my phone and I'm starting to, this was when verified meant a different thing than it means now.

I'm seeing all these verified accounts that are quote tweeting it and demanding a retraction and whatever.

And I go, uh-oh.

Okay.

This looks like it's getting some attention.

I then continue about my day.

Around noon, I hear from my dad that he got 100 messages from you should have aborted your son to we're going to find all of you to whatever else.

My dad has no idea what's going on.

He's like, I don't know what this is, but I have a hundred DMs to everything else you can imagine.

And I start to get emails about, you know, we, you know, your Jewish faith, this and that and the other thing.

And so at that point to me, I thought this is just going to get worse and worse and worse.

And so I deleted the tweet.

And I really regret doing that because over the 48 hours that followed, yes, the attacks escalated.

It went through Candice Owens and then at foxnews.com, Newsmax kind of peaking with Donald Trump Jr.

And it was horrible.

I mean, thousands and thousands of the, okay.

But once I told my audience about what happened, I got thousands of messages from people saying, David, only someone who doesn't know you and is determined to interpret this in the worst possible faith would think you're blaming kids who died for getting shot.

Of course you weren't doing that.

I wish you hadn't deleted it so that it would still be up and you would now see the tide kind of turning on it.

This was not a fun three days, regardless, but I do regret having deleted it because it was, I wanted to do the quickest thing I thought I could to get people to stop trying to find family members and send them threats.

And so around noon, that's what I did.



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And the truth is the threats didn't stop anyway because everybody had screenshoted it. And I do wish I'd left it up.

Is there some degree, maybe stepping outside yourself, do you regret tweeting that? In that it feeds the mockery engine that fuels Twitter.

So like, does that tweet really represent what you believe?

It absolutely represents the disgust with a politics that includes saying, we can't touch guns.

We just, we can't, but we're willing to point to mental health or say we need more prayer in schools or whatever 1000 percent.

It represents that view.

Is it the type of snark and sarcasm that I would use if given an hour to discuss the topic rather than whatever the number of characters is now on Twitter?

No, definitely not.

And so I am very cognizant of the fact that it was unnecessarily provocative how it was written.

I think I asked a similar question to Ben Shapiro.

Do you worry that this style of presentation can turn you from being, you know, a deeply thoughtful, objective political thinker to somebody who is just a partisan hack or partisan, what's a good word, talking head?

Do you mean with regard to Twitter or the format of my show in general?

So Twitter for now, let's start with Twitter for now.

And can you silo your style of communication on Twitter from being a virus that affects your mind?

Right.

I don't have deep thoughts about the Twitter component beyond, I think, across all sorts of disciplines.

This is not the best way to most effectively solve problems and figure out solutions to complex issues.

You're talking about Twitter.

Right now, I'm talking about Twitter.

That being said, I think all of us, to some degree, have to adapt our content to the platform that we're using in the same way that what I post to YouTube is different than what I post to TikTok.

What I post to Twitter is also different.

Do I think Twitter has been an unmitigated good for society?

No.

Have I chosen to step into Twitter as one of the ways in which I get my message out with the good and the bad?

Yes.

And I think that there is a deep conversation to be had there.

I think zooming out a little bit in terms of what I do, and I was hoping this would come up because I think it's really interesting.

I will often get emails from people who say two things.

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You would have such a bigger audience if you did X-type emails, and usually they are plays to sensationalism, salacious and titillating content, more pop culture stuff, et cetera. On the other hand, it's folks who say, listen, what you're doing really isn't as serious as it could be, and it seems like you could do something more serious, and you should consider doing deep dives.

Once it was do a deep dive into Calvin Coolidge, and I was like, nobody will watch that. It's not by accident that my show is the way it is.

In an hour, I'm thinking of all the platforms I'm on, and I'm saying, okay, I want to do a relatively deep dive on the federal budget, and I want to talk about some of the political tumfoolery going on within the post office, and I'm going to do a segment about the wacky rally where Trump said crazy things and made up three words and said he endorsed a candidate who's named ... I'm crafting that in total to find a balance between, let's build this audience as much as I can in order to have a bigger base to get my message out there, and include the more serious stuff with the hope that there's a little bit of something for everyone, and I'm finding a balance between those two sides of the spectrum.

It's a deliberate thing, and I'm aware that if I were producing my show 50 years ago, the balance would probably be different, and it would probably change again if the show was audio only rather than having all these video platforms.

It would also be different, but it's a decision that's proactively made to try to get the best and most out of the hour that I'm creating every day.

It just feels like there's an entire machine fed by Twitter and journalism that wants to divide people, and the drama of that division, highlighting the partisan division.

The drama of that division feels like it's a tension with objective clear thinking sometimes. That's the ... I worry that there's a drug to it.

There's too much fun to mock ridiculous people on the other side.

I think you're right about that.

The fact that that is true to me supports ... I've talked with my audience about the old food pyramid, which I guess was wrong, but let's imagine that there was a pyramid that made sense.

What's at the bottom, bread?

I think whole grains, maybe?

I don't remember.

It's been a while since I saw it.

Junk food is at the very top.

I'm very open with my audience.

The vast majority of what I do is the top of that pyramid.

I tell people very openly, I don't consume a lot of the type of content I produce.

I think it's really important to, as a base, be doing critical thinking, epistemology, how do we believe the things we believe, basics about the world.

After that, reading history, economics, philosophy, etc.

Now we're getting into current events, I would mostly be looking at consuming primary source reporting, things like associated press, whatever.

I know everybody will have a different list of what counts there.

After that is when I'd say indulge in some of the commentary type stuff that I do. If you find that I'm thoughtful enough to make it into that, but I'm very open and really what I try to do on my show often is, in being that at the top of the pyramid, tell people there's all this other stuff that should be forming your foundation that I hope you're consuming in addition to just watching me. I'm very open with my audience about that. What about the shape, the dynamics, the characteristics of your audience? Is there some degree to which you're through mocking maybe Republicans that there's a lean to that audience and then you become captured by the audience? Do you worry about the audience capture? I worry about it. I'm relatively comfortable that it's not shaping the program to a great degree in the sense that at this point, I have a pretty good sense of the things I can say that will upset what I might call my core audience. One of the interesting things just to briefly go back to the Twitter thing was those people who were furious with me on Twitter and they contacted my advertisers and some advertisers dropped me and on and on and on. None of them are actually in my audience. None of them are regular consumers of my audience. They were kind of weaponized against me by people who said, hey, look at this, the people who follow Candace Owens on Twitter, other than for their kind of shock value, they're not in my audience. And with my core audience, I know there are things I can talk about that will generate displeasure, I guess you could say with my audience. Sometimes when I touch the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that will happen. Sometimes on vaccines, there's a portion of my audience that is more generally skeptical of vaccines. Sometimes on some foreign policy issues. Or I'm not a big fan of Marianne Williamson nor Bobby Kennedy Jr.'s challenges to Joe Biden, not because I love Joe Biden, but because I don't consider them to be the most serious challengers. I know there's people in my audience who don't like that. They get mad at me about that. And I'm totally okay with that and that tension with my core audience. So in that sense, I don't feel as though I've had that audience capture take place. But I know it can happen and I'm very open to being told ways in which it may be happening without me noticing. So I've made a call for questions on Reddit for this conversation. There's a lot of good questions that I'll probably bring up. But one of them was about Marianne Williamson asking why David thinks she is a garbage candidate, which of course- I've never said. But perhaps you have more eloquently criticized.

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So let's go there to the 2024 election.

Okay.

So Joe Biden officially announced that he's running again.

Donald Trump officially announced that he's running again.

If that's the matchup, who do you think wins?

If the election's held today, I think Biden.

Why?

Well, first of all, I believe he won last time.

And if I start with the results from 2020 and I think to myself,

what has happened since then that would push or pull voters one way or the other,

I have a hard time making a case that Trump is in a better position today than he was in November of 2020.

So that's kind of my starting point, which is it's a rematch of an election with a known outcome.

What has changed?

And I can't make a case for circumstances having changed in Trump's favor.

To give a couple of state-level examples, Florida seems to be kind of moving more to the Republican side since 2020, but Trump won that state already in 2020.

So it wouldn't really change the outcome.

Arizona was close.

I think Arizona has moved to the left since 2020.

So I don't see Trump taking that one.

Wisconsin, I think the same sort of thing applies.

So being very practical, that would be kind of the start of my reasoning.

Do you think Joe Biden is a better candidate now than he was in 2020?

I think he's a worse candidate.

This is going to sound agist, but I think he's a worse candidate in that he's even older and there already seems to be an appetite for younger candidates, particularly on the Democratic voting side.

So he's going to be four years older and, in a sense, that could be a liability.

However, he also is going to have four years of accomplishments.

Now, you might not like the things he's done, in which case that would hurt him.

But he has started to accumulate a not insignificant number of accomplishments, some of the big things that are known, Inflation Reduction Act and COVID stimulus, but also less well-known things like a bunch of little tweaks to healthcare, a bunch of little tweaks to student lending.

There's been a lot of little things.

At the macro level, I don't actually think Joe Biden has that much to do with this.

The same way I didn't credit or attack Trump for a lot of the macroeconomic stuff, but Inflation has started to come down significantly.

The stock market's quite steady, these sort of things.

I think looking historically, it's a pretty okay environment for Joe Biden, with the exception that he was already the oldest president to be inaugurated in 2021, and he would beat his own record in January of 2025.

And I just don't know how voters are going to see that.  
So in terms of just a public human being, how would you compare Trump and Biden?  
So if I were to give criticism towards Trump, it would be that he's chaotic, maybe to the point of being disrespectful to a lot of different groups, to a lot of different ideas, to a lot of different nations and leaders and all that kind of stuff.  
And then the criticism towards Biden would be that he, maybe perhaps because of age or any other kind of cognitive capabilities, is not really there mentally, in the way that perhaps you could say that Barack Obama was there. Just mentally being able to handle all kinds of aspects of being a public representative of a nation to the world and to the people of that nation.  
So in the competition of personality flaws, which do you think is more powerful?  
You've laid out fair and I believe accurate assessments of elements of both of those men. You haven't weighed in on to what degree you value each of those assessments, which is where I think the kind of meat of this question really is.  
I don't see, and I know that Biden's going to get us into World War III, World War III doesn't seem to be happening, I don't see the Biden deficits you listed, which I agree with you on. I don't see them as dangerous or threatening to the standing of the United States in this kind of environment with our traditional Western allies and geopolitics, et cetera, in the way that the sort of unhinged personality of Trump, combined with his lack of knowledge about most issues, is a threat. So for me, if those two are the candidates, Biden would be my choice. Now, are there people I would rather see on the Democratic side?  
Yes. If I knew the president would be a Republican, can I think of better options than Trump?  
Absolutely. It's so funny, when in 2012 it was Obama versus Romney, the difference seemed so significant between them. Thinking back, I'm sure I would disagree with Mitt Romney about tax rates and his views on LGBT, or I know are different than mine, but it seems without looking at him with rose-colored glasses, so comparatively benign given the four years of Trump. So that's kind of where I come down. Even McCain and Obama, the differences seemed quite drastic. Yeah. McCain was interesting because Palin, as his running mate, opened the door to the sort of cartoonish stuff that we've started to see on the Republican side. Palin, Trump, Marjorie, Taylor Green, it started going in that direction, which has made the party a bit of a joke. Aside from what you believe the tax rate would be, you can say taxes are too high, but Jewish space lasers come on. But I agree with you on McCain also.  
So going back to the political terms we talked about, where in that spectrum do you place yourself today? Which of the label do you think captures your political views?  
Progressive Social Democrat, which again is a capitalist. I own my own business. I pay the taxes I'm legally required to pay and not a penny more and all those things. That's where I place myself. Would you place yourself to the left of Joe Biden? Yes. Where does the AOC fit into that?  
That's a good question. What do you think about AOC as a candidate? Do you think she eventually runs? I think that if she doesn't run into some kind of scandal, and I don't mean scandal in the sense of some personal impropriety, but I mean some kind of major political problem, it seems that she has the staying power to be an American elected politics for a long time. Whether she would even want to be president versus maybe going to the Senate or being governor or

whatever the case may be, I have no idea what her ambitions are in that sense. But certainly, policy aside, she has this combination of charisma, likability to some, but also something about her personality that angers the people who don't like her in a way that only fuels her sort of presence, which I think applies to Trump as well, that I do think that she has the potential to be, to have significant staying power in American politics. President, I don't know.

Do you think that's the future of political elections and politics in general, is people who are able to skillfully piss off the other side, like AOC and Trump did?

I think it's an aspect of it. I think it's also understanding how to communicate policy ideas.

Trump, I have things I can praise Trump about if we want to get to that segment at some point. You let me know when that is, but I do think that there are some things Trump is very good at, and this is why it's very hard for me to believe that Ron DeSantis has what it takes to actually fight Trump in a national primary. And one of those things is Trump has a, even though he often says very strange things, that if you transcribe them, you go, that's what language is that that doesn't make any sense whatsoever. In the moment, the way he relates to adversaries on stage, et cetera, is very good in that he is very much aware of how it is going to be seen by the audience. And so that's why a lot of times it's more about, doesn't matter that a word salad came out of his mouth, how he immediately responded and related to the person, very good. So I think that knowing how to be good when clips are shared all the time, often out of context, is extraordinarily important. Knowing how to use social media, which every election cycle, that means something different. But understanding how to use social media, very important. Those things are absolutely so important. And whether you're able to do a deep dive on the deficit, it's certainly useful, but I would say it's a bad thing. It's becoming less important in terms of figuring out who we want to represent us. So just lingering on the AOC, and then maybe let's throw in Bernie Sanders on that. Yeah. So where do you place yourself and how do you do the layout of the land of Bernie Sanders, AOC, Joe Biden, and David Pakman?

My instinct is, and I'm going to answer it, the thing that makes this tough is, Bernie says, he's a democratic socialist. He ran as a social democrat. He didn't run on anything that was really socialism. So I'm going by their public facing platforms.

I've been listening to him for many, many years and all the way back to the Tom Hartman show. And I think using the terms as you've been using them, he has, I don't think, ever been a democratic socialist. I haven't heard him speak about socialism. I think I've heard him speak about social programs and the value of social programs throughout the history of the United States and how they've been beneficial. My understanding is very similar to yours, although there may be stuff from the 70s where he really was talking about-

We've walled this shit in the 70s. Yeah, you and I even who weren't around, we were doing stuff in the 70s. I feel like we did, yeah.

My sense would be Biden is like center left, and then I'm to the left of that.

But maybe just inside of where AOC and Bernie are, very, very similar to Bernie. I mean, I identify with a lot of Bernie's ideas. Maybe their implementation I'm more flexible on.

I'll give you one example. Medicare for all. One way of trying to get healthcare to everybody, which Bernie's very big on, is you take the current Medicare program, you just eliminate the age limit, make it available to everybody, pay for it through taxation. Interesting. However, I'm open to other models if they get everybody healthcare that is good quality and affordable.

Singapore has an interesting model. Germany has an interesting model.

I am more agnostic about how we do it than just saying, let's expand Medicare. Whether that puts me to the right of Bernie, I don't know, but I'm not exactly right there on it has to be Medicare for all. Yeah, that's more of just flexibility versus dogmatism. So I don't know if that puts you to the left or to the right. I don't either. What do you think about the, the term manipulation or the corruption in the DNC that perhaps tipped the scales against Bernie in the election? Do you think there was such a thing? 2016 or 2020?

Both, I would say. In different, the dynamics there were different with Hillary Clinton and the pressure from Hillary Clinton as a candidate and so on. Yeah, what, I mean, was there, why didn't Bernie win? I guess there's one, one way to ask.

Okay. I think there's a couple of things here. First, the DNC, I'm not a Democrat, just your audience may not know. I'm just a independent. I mostly vote for candidates that end up being Democrats in local elections. Often there's no party designation. So okay, I'm obviously on the left. I'm not denying that, but the Democratic party as an institution has never really been interesting to me. You're still a rebel that resists belonging to any institution.

Exactly right. Exactly right. And whether it matters, I don't know.

The DNC and the RNC really are organizations that to some degree exist to justify their own existence because if they were no longer necessary, they would go away. And so they have to assert their value and their importance. They do this in a number of different ways, organizing the way that the nominee is chosen, the convention, working with states on everything from redistricting to whatever else the case may be, setting the order of primaries and having some involvement in how that's all going to happen. And also coordinating behind the scenes, I guess they would describe it as making sure our candidates don't get in each other's ways. We might see it and say they're picking the winner. There's nothing illegal about them being involved in picking the winner, but we might say it's not in people's interests. I think the 2020 primary was really interesting. Bernie supporter, myself, I started telling my audience after a couple primaries and even before based on polling and different things, I see a real uphill battle here for Bernie. And it's really important. People in my audience are not the average union worker in Michigan who is mostly working and raising a family and then goes to vote on primary day and goes to vote on election day. If you spend a lot of time on Reddit and Twitter, you're going to have an inflated sense of Bernie's popularity within the Democratic Party. That was my sense. And to some degree, we saw that in certain states. I don't have the exact primary order and results in front of me or in my head, but the big turning point was South Carolina. South Carolina was when Joe Biden, one in one handily, understood to be because of the larger African American population in South Carolina. And right around that exact same time, I actually don't remember now, whether it was the day after or the day before, some of the smaller Democratic candidates, smaller in terms of support, got out and said, I'm endorsing Joe Biden. And to some degree, of course, it was all organized and timed to help Joe Biden. There's no doubt about that. This is what the DNC does. It's hard for me to be mad at the DNC because this is sort of like, if we believed they were there to be unbiased arbiters and to stay as much on the side as possible, it would make sense to be furious that they've gone against their stated mandate. But we know that the DNC negotiates and is it working behind the scenes and has a favorite, that favorite was Hillary in 2016, 2020. So I share the frustration about the power that the

DNC has, but for people who were saying they did something illegal or whatever else the case may be, that doesn't seem to be the case. But this is part of why, I mean, I would love there not to be this duopoly of Republicans and Democrats. And there's probably four major changes that have to happen in order to make that a reality. But I share the frustration of folks while recognizing that Reddit was not accurately representing Bernie's level of popularity. Still, I wish that the bias wasn't towards what could be negatively termed a deep state, towards the bureaucracy, towards the momentum of the past, which I think Joe Biden kind of represents versus new ideas, which is funny to say that Bernie Sanders somehow represents new ideas because he's also an older gentleman. Well, it's a lot of framing. And the other aspect to that is on paper, Joe Biden's platform was arguably the most progressive of any Democratic candidate who won the nomination. Now, of course, there were people who challenged the nominations who were to Joe Biden's left. A lot of this is perspective. And that's how you end up saying the guy who's a couple of years older than Biden is actually the guy with the fresh perspective, which is interesting because I don't disagree with you. Yeah. And then you also have to say the perspective doesn't always align with the policies. You're right. The actual policies of Joe Biden are different than maybe the perception of Joe Biden. Or what he ran on. I mean, just two examples that I would give are during his campaign, he played up a little bit his interest in doing student loan forgiveness and something on cannabis. I never bought it. I told my audience, I think he's saying this stuff because this is the way the tide is kind of, the wind is blowing and he's being advised to say this stuff. I don't think he's going to do very much on either of these things. He did actually do some student loan stuff. But that would be two examples, I think. Okay. Let's go to the, something you alluded to, which is the pros and cons of a particular candidate. Well, what do you, as a critic of Trump, what do you are the pros, the strengths of Donald Trump? And what do you are as big as weaknesses? The strengths of Trump. See how I can frame them in a way that is both accurate and accurately assesses my feeling about it. It could be taken out of context most masterfully through the clipping process. Yes. Trump's strengths are mostly superficial and in terms of presentation. Trump was able to, I call it a grift, some on the right say he's just so good at relating to different types of people. Trump as a rich guy from New York City was able to convince people that he spent most of his life trying to be kept isolated from, that he had their best interests in mind, that he knew why they weren't doing well in the 2016 economy, and that he had solutions that he was going to bring forward. The truth is, he never really liked those people. And as soon as they weren't useful to him for a brief period of time, he, you know, that love affair with his followers stopped, and then now it's back that he needs them again, he didn't really understand the causes of the problems that those folks were experiencing. And his solutions were laughable, right? Like Jared was going to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in year one. He was going to replace Obamacare in 2017. Things that were never going anywhere, anywhere. But what he did really well was, he put up a united front of, I know what is ailing you. I know how to fix it. And I know how to fix it, I guess, because he's a businessman, and he's been above the fray of politics for so long, knowing how to use political donations to his advantage, he called that smart, etc. I think that's his greatest strength. Why do you say that the Jared plan for Israel-Palestine and the plan for healthcare to improve



Obamacare, why do you say that's laughable? Well, only someone, I would include the North Korea plan as well, which I'm glad to talk about. Only someone who doesn't know anything about the size and scope of these issues could so arrogantly say that they could solve them in that way and on that time frame. I'm all for optimism and bringing a new face to things, absolutely, without a doubt. But a wall with Mexico that Mexico will pay for at the end of my first term. I know there are people who believed it because they would call into my show and say, I'm voting for Trump because of it. But it's hard to believe that anybody serious would fall for that unless you were deliberately wanting to just believe whatever was being fed to you, or you just hadn't ever thought about these issues before. The healthcare plan, in 2017, they proposed one would have led to 24 million or so people ending up without healthcare, didn't go anywhere because it was so terrible. And then in August of 2020, Trump said, in two weeks, I'm going to finally have my healthcare proposal. It's 2023. We still never got it. With all of these things, when you think them through, it was just sort of arrogance. And I get the perspective of, I want optimism and I liked that optimism. It worked. I mean, fair. A lot of people saw it and liked it. As someone who followed a lot of those issues closely, they seemed, of course, impossible promises. Well, it's a double-edged sword to push back a little bit. If you look at the things I have a little bit more knowledge about, which is the space of artificial intelligence, there's a company called DeepMind and there's a company called OpenAI that will laugh at for a long time when they were talking about that they're going to solve intelligence. And now they've made, especially DeepMind, and now most recently OpenAI with GPT, they've made progress that most of the community would not have imagined they'd be able to make. Everything from AlphaGo beating the World Go champion, just all the different steps in progress they can get into were surprised to everybody and they are legitimately fearlessly pursuing the task of solving intelligence. The other aspect, he gets a lot of criticism now, but another example is Elon Musk. I can say a lot of things like SpaceX, so commercial space flight. He was laughed at for a long time that that's possible. Same thing with autopilot in Tesla, autonomous vehicles. His approach was harshly criticized by all the experts and still criticized, to this day, deeply criticized. And I as a person that I believe objectively can look at the progress of autopilot as a semi-autonomous vehicle system has been incredibly surprising. So the reason I mention that is sometimes it feels like you need the guy or the gal who makes those preposterous, ambitious statements like, we're going to solve health care this year. And then there's experts yourself that are looking, thinking, have you read anything about the history of Israel? Palestine is a good example of that. Do you know there's a history there? Do you realize how complicated, how many people have tried, how many people have failed, how many millions of people hate each other in this little place in this land? Sometimes the expertise can really weigh you down. So to push back, sometimes you have to have the almost be naive and stupid and just rush in with an optimism in order to actually make some progress. I agree with you 100%. I think it's interesting that all of the examples you gave of successes are from the technology space. Not politics, yes. Not from politics, which I mean, listen, I would love to be able to make headway on some of these issues more quickly without a doubt. I do think at some point though, when it comes down to voting and saying, one of these people is going to be ostensibly in charge for four years through all of the departments and secretaries and choices that they make,

we do want to apply some level of realism with the understanding that your examples are from the tech space and they're good examples. There's no question about it. One thing I'll add to this, I recently read Bradley Hope's new book about North Korea. And it's really about an activist who doesn't even really matter. But in the background of the book, it's written much of what is written about happens during the Trump era. And when Trump did the first

and then the second, I guess you'd call them summits with Kim Jong-un. And it actually did seem like to some degree, Trump's, we're going to handle this like I do a business deal approach to Kim Jong-un. In some sense, it actually was logical because of Kim Jong-un and the way that it was so ego driven and they both as sort of authoritarian strong men types to different degrees wanted that there was actually a kernel where I actually thought, as I read it, Trump's initial idea wasn't crazy. The problem was he knew nothing about the backstory of the relationship. He fell for all sorts of lies from Kim Jong-un and he made offers that didn't make any sense to me. It fell apart. Fine. But that's an example where I think Trump's personality was not actually at its base, the problem

when it came to North Korea. Well, there's other things of this nature that could go and some people argue goes into the strengths and pros of Donald Trump, for China, for example, terrorism, China. Can you make the case that there's some positive outcomes of the way Donald Trump acted with China? It's really tough. And I'll give you a couple reasons why. Okay. Then also cons. I'll give you a, it's tough to make. So the China thing is really, so just very recently to when we're recording this, Trump was on Fox News interviewed by a guy named Mark Levin and Trump proposed a new, I call it a conspiracy theory, maybe it will strike you as something different, about China, COVID and tariffs. And Trump's suggestion was that the tariffs cost China so much money. China sent the US so much money in tariffs that they released COVID as punishment. Now there's a couple problems with that. One, American companies pay the tariffs.

Trump still doesn't seem to know this. Trump seems to believe that when he puts a tariff on Chinese imports, someone in China is cutting a check to the United States. American companies buy the stuff from China. And then American companies cut a check to the United States for the tariff. Trump doesn't seem to get that. But it still has the sting to the Chinese economy.

You can make the argument that if there is a suitable alternative domestically or from a different country, that it will reduce imports, but it didn't happen. And we actually have reports now that the tariffs on China cost about a quarter million American jobs. The other problem with that

idea is China created and released a virus in order to hurt you. But as of today, 5.7 of the 6.8 million deaths were in other countries. It's a very indirect way. You're mostly killing people in other countries to hurt Trump. Maybe there was a... This is the sort of thing where when I think about how Trump dealt with China, it's very scary. Because given another four years, who knows what he might do if he still doesn't understand how tariffs work?

So geopolitics operates in complicated ways with carrots and sticks. And Henry Kissinger has written quite a lot about this. And in some sense, the positive aspect here that Donald Trump is willing to take big risks in the game of geopolitics with this giant superpower that is China. And a lot of others are too afraid, too afraid to call them out, to come to the table and criticize. I certainly think that's an argument that can be made. My question would be what

tangible

positive outcomes did it lead to? And it's tough to identify any. But I think it's a great thing. I mean, listen, one of the things you're kind of getting at maybe indirectly is that there's been this sense that politics has been done very similarly for a long time. And even between Democrats and Republicans, still, even with some policy differences, there's still the kind of feeling that it's disconnected folks in DC mostly dealing with issues that don't directly affect... I get that. I'm with you on that. I think the question is to whether Trump's bluster was positive rather than extraordinarily humiliating in many ways. I just come down on it was an absolute and total humiliation. But I understand that you can recognize Trump doesn't know a lot of stuff, but his attitude was refreshing in some way. That's a reasonable position for someone to take. I disagree with it, but I understand it. But it's trying and feeling better than not trying. This goes well beyond politics. Wayne Gretzky is waiting about this. Michael Jordan is waiting about... I mean, is it better to have tried and failed than never... Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved? I don't know. I mean, listen, we lived through four years of Trump. We know what that four-year term was like, and it's very hard for me to say that the things he tried were overwhelmingly reasonable. But I get the point you're trying to make, and I appreciate it. And if we don't do any of it, then where do we end up? Sure. We know where we ended up with Trump, and it was pretty embarrassing. Okay, let's linger on some more strengths. We didn't start any new wars. Is there something to that? Yeah, it's interesting. There's a few different approaches to dealing with that. First, it's really important to remember that the counterpoint to that

from the folks who like to say that was that Hillary Clinton was going to start three wars. Sometimes they say four wars. Sometimes they say five wars. Okay. The geopolitical situation during the four years that Trump was in office, I don't know that they obviously lent themselves to wars that Trump just barely was able to keep us out of. I think the Russia thing is interesting, because now it's very popular to go back and say, you know, the reason Putin didn't do the Ukraine thing when Trump, right, and to somehow give Trump credit for that. There's a counterpoint to it, which is Putin under Trump, particularly if Trump got four more years, would have been able to maybe

consolidate power in other ways because of his relationship with Trump. I'm not coming down around one side or the other. It's not my area of expertise, but it's not the open shut slam dunk that, you know, Trump likes to say it is. Putin didn't invade because he knew I would crush him. Okay. So it's not obvious to me that there were imminently wars that would have started during that time. That being said, you know, for all the criticism of Obama during Crimea, Trump seemed to just kind of forget about that after all the criticism and say, I'm not actually going to do anything about that. And so there are foreign policy criticisms that could be made, but it is true. No new wars were started under Trump.

And I like that. I don't like wars. What do you think about his handling of COVID?

Can you say what are the pros and cons of his handling of COVID?

The con for him is he'd be president right now if he had handled it differently.

I think it's abundantly clear. Early on, and there's now a lot of really good reporting about the conversations he was having with Jared Kushner and others, he became convinced either because of things he was being told or because he decided this is the way it's going to be,

this is going to go away. Fine. It's in China. Okay. It's in China and Italy. Okay. We have 15 cases, but it'll soon be zero. We'll be opened by Easter of 2020. None of it happened. If he had handled it in the following way, and I've said this to Rogan and I've said this to Patrick Bette David, and they tend to all see my side of this. If Trump had said, listen, we don't know how bad this is going to be, but I care too much about the American people to take a shot. So it's not going to be two weeks. It's going to be a little bit, but I need your help. We're going to bring everybody together. I don't care if you're a Democrat or a Republican. We're going to have MAGA masks, and he could have kept 50 cents on the dollar to pay off Stormy or whoever.

Right. But it would have been, I think he wins reelection because the perception was and reality is a version of that. The perception was that he was way too cavalier about it early on. People died who didn't need to die. And I think that it was arguably the one area where he could have all but guaranteed that he was going to get himself reelected.

To push back on that, I mean, because you mentioned sort of masks and lockdowns kind of a solution to COVID. I didn't mention lockdowns, but I'm glad to talk about policy.

There's several solutions to a pandemic, broadly speaking, and one of them is vaccine. And so you didn't mention that. He'd fast-tracked the development. His administration fast-tracked the development of the vaccine, which, surprising, he didn't really take much credit for. I think he did. I think he tried. There's a couple, there's a lot there.

Well, to me, it seems like you could make the case with the Trump hand gestures that his decisions for fast-tracking the development of the vaccine saved tens of millions of lives. You could, in the Trumpian way, make that case.

So a couple different things. I know you don't necessarily follow Trump's rallies as closely as I do, and I'm jealous of you for that. But he did tout the vaccine stuff hugely for a while until his audience turned against him. And then he had to draw this line where he was going, I made the vaccines, which none of you have to take, by the way, freedom. You don't have to take them. But it's fantastic. And nobody else could have done it. But don't worry, nobody's going to make you take the vaccine. And he actually got booed at a couple of his own rallies when talking about the vaccines. But let's back up a little bit. Fast-tracking. My understanding of what he did is he did what any president in his situation would do and what many world leaders elsewhere did as well, which is he agreed to pre-purchase supply of vaccine in order to provide money to pharmaceutical companies to scale up the manufacturing, which is absolutely fine. But he wants, one of the stories he tells is, it usually takes 12 years to develop a vaccine. We did it in nine months, thanks to me. Decades of mRNA technology being developed created the platform in which you can make a particular vaccine in nine months. Didn't have anything to do with Trump. He did pre-fund and say, we will buy huge supply, and that provided liquidity to the pharmaceutical companies. But he also delegated control to people, to experts that enable that kind of fast-tracking of vaccines.

He was very eager for the FDA to approve it because he saw that there would be a political benefit. And he didn't get in the way, I guess. He didn't get in the way. Fair. I think now we're on the same page. He did not get in the way of vaccines being developed, which is good. Presidents and bureaucracies have a way of getting in the way.

I don't disagree with that. I'm not aware of really any governments that got in the way. I mean, it seemed given the global situation, everybody, European countries were pre-purchasing vaccine. African countries who were going to be later to receive vaccines were partnering with the European countries that had pre-purchased. But the most interesting thing about all of this is Trump did play up the vaccines for a long time until his crowd didn't want to hear about it anymore, which was crazy. It was sort of like he became a victim of the monster he created to some degree. One of the effects of all this that makes me truly sad is this division over the vaccines has created distrust in science. And also what makes me sad is the scientific leaders, Anthony Fauci, being one of the representatives of that community, I would say completely dropped the ball. They spoke with arrogance. They spoke down to people. They spoke in a way that a great scientist does not speak, which is they spoke with certainty without humility. They have all the wisdom and all of us are too dumb to understand it, but they're going to be the parent that tells us exactly what to do versus speaking to the immensity of the problem, the deep core of the problem being the uncertainty. We don't know what to do. The terrifying thing about the pandemic, we don't know anything about it as it's happening. And so you have to make decisions. You have to take risks about, well, maybe you have to overreact in order to protect the populace, but it's in the face of uncertainty. They have to do that, not powered, empowered by science somehow, and the deep expertise that somebody like Anthony Fauci claims to have. I'm really troubled by the distress in science that resulted from that, and that you have to blame the leaders to the degree. Leaders take responsibility, and I think Anthony Fauci was the scientific leader behind the American response to the pandemic, and I think he failed as a scientist, as a representative of science. I'm less, I don't know if interested is the right word, but the Fauci review is less interesting to me in terms of what comes next than the first part you mentioned, which is the distrust in science. And sometimes I'll get voicemails or emails from people in my audience who say that I have had to backpedal on certain things related to this. And one of the things I tried to do from the beginning was not speak in certain terms when we really didn't have complete information. So there was this period where hydroxychloroquine was first sort of mentioned as a possible treatment, prophylactic or proactive treatment for COVID or active treatment for COVID, along with a bunch of other stuff. There was ivermectin, there was vitamin D, all sorts of different things. And I tried to be careful to say, right now, we don't have rigorous science that tells us that some of these things work. It doesn't mean that won't come in the future, at which point, if there was something as cheap as hydroxychloroquine that treated COVID effectively, unbelievable, fantastic. It's not there's no way it ever will be determined. We don't have that information right now. So it's not super wise right now to go and start taking this stuff. We eventually learned, like with vitamin D, having an appropriate vitamin D level does seem to be, based on what I most recently read, generally protective and a good thing when it comes to infections of different, great. Okay, so that one we figured out. One of the really difficult things is that the quote truth about the vaccines did change. And the original, again, this is all, I don't pretend to be an expert, but just someone who's synthesizing the medical data and writing about it. Originally, the first vaccine related to the wild type strain did seem

to be very effective, not only at preventing death and serious illness, but also transmission. There were people then saying it doesn't prevent transmission. Over time, as the variants came forward, the vaccine became less effective at that. At that point, I started telling my audience something different because as far as I was concerned, the reality on the ground had changed. In my mind, that's how science works. It's not backpedaling. We're adjusting our beliefs to what is taking place in the real world. Well, to be fair, the scientists, many of whom are my friends, virologists and biologists, they have way more humility than people like Anthony Fauci who was speaking about this, or the CEO of Pfizer who was speaking about this. This is the fundamental

problem here is the way science works is there's usually a lot more humility and a lot more transparency about what we know and what we don't know. People like Anthony Fauci thought it would

be beneficial for the world if he speaks with more certainty. But because of the political division that formed around that, that certainty resulted and became completely counterproductive that people didn't trust anything about the vaccine, didn't trust any institutions that contained the experts that actually knew what they were doing, and basically didn't trust anything that was coming out of the mouths of scientists. Some large percent of the population. That made you completely ineffective at scale as a society trying to respond to a terrible pandemic.

And that's where I put a lot of blame on leaders. So political leaders and scientific leaders are the ones that should inspire us to all get together and respond. That should be the case for the pandemic. That should be the case in the time of war, all this kind of stuff.

I generally agree with you. And for me, it's really about shared blame. And there were a lot of different reasons why that the early communication wasn't good. Part of it was, I mean, for me, I prefer accuracy rather than overconfidence. I would prefer, listen, we don't really know right now whether masks do X or Y. What we do know is the supply is really limited of this type of mask. We're going to try to keep them for the frontline workers. I love that. That's the way I want to be communicated to. A call was made to do it differently, which was to say, the masks don't actually help. But the real reason is they want to keep them for healthcare workers. And then later, the masks are what's going to solve. I'm with you 100%. I think the other layer to it is you can't ignore the political situation at the time. If Trump had one reelection and the vaccine distribution had taken place while Trump was president rather than Biden, my belief is that the same number of Democrats would have gotten vaccinated, but way more Republicans would have as well because they were following not science, but political leaders. And when it was Biden in DC instead of Trump, a lot of those people said, I don't trust the vaccine. But wait, it's Trump's vaccine, I thought. Yeah, but something about the way Biden's distributing it. So I do think you can't ignore that political layer. I agree with you. The communication was a disaster.

Well, let me ask you about Joe Biden. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Joe Biden? Weaknesses, I think, are some of the things you've identified. He is not seen as high energy. He is not the same Joe Biden that debated Paul Ryan in 2012 and ran circles around him in just an incredible debate performance. He is not inspiring in the way that someone like a Barack Obama was to people coming up and starting to get interested in politics. I think a lot of those are fair criticisms. I think on policy, he's not interested in a lot of the things that younger

voters are interested in. I mentioned cannabis reform. I mentioned student loans. So I think that that's a deficit for Biden. I think the upside to Biden is when it comes to foreign policy, diplomacy, high-level negotiations, knowing how to engage with allies in a productive way, it's tough to find someone with more experience than Biden. I know that there are counterpoints to what I'm saying, and those include that was the old Biden, the new Biden doesn't have it. That includes that's just a sign of rot because he's been around for so long. Nobody should be around that long in politics. Perfectly reasonable criticisms to talk about, but I do see that as one of his strengths. He also is good at knowing when he can work with Republicans and when he can't

and not wasting more time than is expected for posturing reasons. I think that that's a good thing. Do you think he's actually there in day-to-day operational government given his cognitive capabilities? Do you think he is an active and practicing executive? I don't know that I can say that it's because of what may be going on cognitively, but my sense from the people I talk to is that he's very much involved in the highest-level geopolitical and big domestic economic stuff, but that a lot of the smaller issues that presidents might or might not be in sort of plugged into that he's not plugged into the details of a lot of the lower-level stuff. You could probably apply the same exact criticism even more so towards the Donald Trump administration in terms of being

a practicing active executive who's paying attention. For example, Vladimir Putin is somebody who loves the role of the executive, has a huge amount of meetings, has constantly tracking information about agriculture and all the different subsystems of government. Stalin, funny enough, was also extremely good at this. Certain people just love the job of being an executive and I'm not sure if Donald Trump did and I'm not sure if Joe Biden in his current state has the cognitive capability to. It's a good question. Kim Jong-un is another one, by the way. There's videos of him examining a factory where they make plates and making very specific comments about how the plates should be made. I think that in that case, there's a lot of propaganda value to it. With Trump, I think you're probably right. He did get involved in the minutia of things. I mean, once he pulled out a weather map and with a Sharpie drew a different hurricane path that was more politically convenient to him. That's pretty micro saying the weather channel's wrong. I see what you did there. Okay. So that's a micro. He went to Puerto Rico and he gave out paper towels after a hurricane. Now he was shooting them like free throws, which didn't look very good. So he will get involved in the micro when it's advantageous. You know what I mean? But I do agree with you that he wants to just kind of make it so. Build the wall. I don't know. Just build it. Figure it out. Get it done. Quick pause. Bath and break? Sure. You're hilarious. And just for the sake of completeness, I should mention the subreddit, what Biden has done. There's also what Trump has done, but it's not as active. And it has like this master list of all the accomplishments. I recommend people look at it because there's a it's kind of rigorous and interesting with links, a list of all the things he's done. Just list some of them restored daily press briefings, cancel the Keystone pipeline, reverse Trump's Muslim ban, required masks on federal property, rejoins the Paris climate agreement, extends student loan payment freeze, extend eviction freeze, historic stimulus bill, as you mentioned, ends funding for border wall, and so on and so forth DACA, border strengthening of DACA, rejoins the World Health Organization. And the timing of this, of course, is important. Yeah, several historic

stimulus bills, which of course, you could criticize or support, raise the minimum wage for federal contractors and federal employees for \$15. There's a lot. There's a lot. It makes you realize, with both Trump and Biden, that there's a bunch of small details that matter. Yeah. Like that matter on people's lives, like actual little policies. Trump did a lot of stuff as far as I heard for the military, like not big stuff, but small stuff. Yeah, I'd be curious what you're thinking of. I know one of the big things under Trump was we're going to get trans people out of the military. That's not what I was referring to. You weren't referring to that. Trump's hilarious with these stories that he tells, and one of the stories, and you get to know them if you follow him at all, he tells the story, when I came into office, the generals came to me and they said, sir, the cupboards are bare. We have no bullets. And so I rebuilt the military. The cupboards were bare when Obama left it, and it was just terrible. But I rebuilt it. And the generals, I've got the best generals. They said, sir, it's incredible what you were able to do. You look into it, and it's like, yeah, that's not really true. It is true that there are armaments that just on a schedule do get replaced, and that's part of the military industrial complex. But there's nothing special Trump really did. But these stories become, they take on a life of their own. And it's interesting to sometimes try to dig down and figure out, was there any policy connected to that, or is that just a story? Do you think it's possible to have a good conversation with each of them?

Donald Trump and Joe Biden in a podcast context or in a debate context?

Absolutely. Yeah, you're saying like, could I with either of them? Oh, 100%. Joe Biden too?

Sure. Yeah. But can you dig into that a little more? Well, I mean, I don't know what,

I think there's maybe something implicit in your question, but

that's deeper about the nature of politics and politicians. Yes.

I think with either of them, I mean, the political differences wouldn't be an impediment to having a good conversation with either of them. I think one of the things that's really tough in my experience when talking to elected officials is they could be super interesting about 100 different topics, but handlers decide or try to get you to talk about something you don't really care about and something really narrow, which doesn't bring out your best nor their best. And that's a frustration. But I think that given an unstructured three-hour conversation, I think it would be interesting to talk to both.

I mean, listen, with Biden, aside from his view on cannabis or whatever, his background and the incredible, unimaginable family tragedy that he had in his first wife and multiple kids dying,

I mean, it's just incredible. And with Trump, I think also you could have

an interesting conversation. Yeah, those are the human beings with a life story.

Yes. And they're some of the most successful humans who I've ever lived to have rose to this highest office in interesting, complex ways.

Yes. I mean, one of the things I'm troubled by, maybe you can speak to is why we're so negative towards presidential candidates and presidents. Why? It's just they go through this shit storm, no matter who they are. Yeah. They're like, hate it. Like all the conspiracy theories and just the dynamics of how we talk about them is vicious. If you just look at reply,

Steven Barack Obama on Twitter, it's like, what is going on here? Why? Because we look at other leaders and other spaces and we're generally positive about it.

Yeah. There's a couple of different things. There's this dynamic, which is really unfortunate, which is you ask people, do you approve of the job a particular president is doing?



And very often, if at any point while they were in office, they did something you don't like, people will say, I don't approve. And so by its nature, what that means is just like, the longer you're in office, the lower your approval rating is going to be. And very often, that's the way it works. I mean, there's major events like 9-11, Spike George W. Bush's approval to an incredible level. Then it came back down with the Iraq War. But there's this unfortunate thing that when people are just asked, you think Biden's doing a good job? If four months ago, Biden did something on healthcare that somebody didn't like, even if you like most of it, a lot of people from that point forward will say, I don't approve. They might still vote for him because they like him better than the alternative or whatever. It's just the dynamic of politics. And I agree, it's very... Does it have to be that way? I don't think it has to be that way. But to unwind it, so many things would have to change. I think our election system is part of why politics is the way it is, where you have two choices and it's first past the post. And we have this electoral college so that depending on which state you vote in, the kind of meaning and significance of your vote is different. If you vote in Montana, it's the Republican candidate's going to win and that changes the dynamics. I think that's part of it. I think that at a personal level, I've experienced this in my life a lot. We've become, and by we, I mean people in the United States to some degree who talk about this stuff, we've become uncomfortable

when there is disagreement and it bleeds over into now we can't have a normal interpersonal relationship anymore. I'm from Argentina and in Argentina, it's really common even in my family. There are incredibly heated political debates at the start, the middle, the end of some kind of gathering. But then everybody just goes back to like, okay, we disagree on some things, but that's okay. And we can now go and finish cooking the beef or whatever it is that we're doing. And I experienced this even with people who come up to me on the street and they go, just earlier today, a guy came up to me and he said, RFK all the way, baby, talking about Bobby Kennedy Jr. And I just kind of said, oh, all right, let's see what happens. And then there was another moment where the guy ended up standing next to me for maybe longer than he thought. And I could tell this guy's getting so awkward because it was an utterance he thought that would just be on the fly and he'd be gone. But now we're standing next to each other waiting for our sandwiches. It's like no big deal. It's just, oh, okay, you like Bobby Kennedy Jr. I don't plan to vote for it. It's fine. And that's like a sociocultural thing. I think there's lots of other countries. I've spent time in Italy. I have relatives in Israel where like shouting at each other is sort of like normal. And then you just go back and finish them. It sounds like shouting. I'm sort of exaggerating, but very animated, what seemed like big disagreements. And then everybody's cool. I wish it were more normal. So maybe the mechanism of going from shouting to being cool again, needs to improve. Because maybe we can't solve the shouting at each other. Maybe not. So maybe we need to somehow figure out the de-escalation, like making up. I've had a few recent fights with friends like that.

Really? For politics?

No. But political style, emotionally drenched stuff. And it was interesting to go through that full process and then make up at the end. But it was a process. And it was a process that required being in person, talking through it. And it was stressful, the whole thing.

And then maybe because most of our interactions are online, we don't get a chance to do that in

person, making up again. I don't know. But do you think it's a feature or a bug of the system that we're so... We just hate the powerful?

You mentioned the online part. I think you mentioned it earlier perfectly, which is you take contentious political issues, you create a platform that rewards controversy and disagreement and limits the number of characters you can use to express yourself.

You kind of throw it into a baking dish and mix the entire thing up. It's complete and total chaos. And one of the things that I've talked before about all the angry emails and threats and stuff that I get, I'm acutely aware that if I had in-person conversations with most of these people, the conversations would basically be like, oh, we have different views about how to solve some of the problems we're facing. We probably agree about what the problem is. And we probably share many values. But on these particular four issues, we may have very different views.

But that's okay. Online, that's not the case. And it leads to the mess that we get ourselves in.

But I think that it's a feature of a lot of the systems that are being used to disseminate information. Again, let me linger on that. Do you regret some of the mockery in the snark you use on Twitter and even in your show that kind of feeds that division?

I don't regret it in the sense that it's a calculated part or tool that I use in addition to figuring out how to simplify complicated concepts and choosing stories that I think are underrepresented. It's all part of the package of what I'm doing. I recognize that my show is not the audio visual version of a peer reviewed, randomized controlled trial about views on abortion or whatever the case. I'm very much aware of that. But I don't regret including it as a tool that I've used to build the community in some total that I've built over the last more than 10 years. I guess I could ask about the different trajectories you think your show might take.

So the dynamic you had with Donald Trump Jr. and maybe Candice Owens is the more appropriate comparison. Are you okay having that dance for the next few years between you and Candice

Owens and just kind of the mockery, the derision that's a part of that process and taking part in that? I'm fine with it in the sense of personally I tolerate it well until it crosses the line and people pull my family in. If you set the family stuff aside, if I set that aside,

just in the digital space, you're okay with it. I'm glad to mix it up. Now the truth is Candice Owens has had me blocked for years up until this incident. She unblocked you. She unblocked me just

to tweet about what I tweeted about. I don't know the backstory of that genuinely. I have no idea. So I don't have a sense that she's super interested in engaging with me on that. But all of these people, Candice Owens is welcome on my show anytime. Don Jr. is welcome on my show anytime. It's been a decade since I had Ben Shapiro on. He's welcome at any time. I'm glad to have these conversations and I think it's an important thing and also I wish that everybody was willing to have the conversations in good faith rather than as performance, it's not even really performance art, rather than being simply performative for an audience that you have. In terms of your motivations, do you worry about the effects of something you spoke about offline or like the YouTube algorithm? Are you driven by the number of views your videos get or are you driven by something else? In my world, I guess I would say, the number of views that any platform generates is a metric that I can choose how to interpret. I can choose to interpret it as I've created content that's interesting to people or I've created content that's really

angering people and that's why they're showing up. They don't actually like it. It's because they're angry or whatever else the case may be. But it is true that there are algorithmic changes that can take place. Something happened in early January that affected us on YouTube or there are periods on TikTok where you can tell we're doing all the same things, something has happened and then you never usually figure out what it is. For me, it's sort of just like a general tool to see what is the level of interest in what I'm doing and are the numbers so out of whack with what I would expect that I should look into whether something deeper is happening. Has there been some change to an algorithm or whatever the case may be? I had a debate once with someone who accused me of using clickbait to generate views and we had a really interesting conversation where I said, tell me really what you mean by that. Is your argument that I'm using titles that don't actually represent what's in the video? No, what's in the title is in the video. I go, okay, so it's not that the title is dishonest. Are you saying, saying I'm deliberately picking titles that will garner a larger audience? And they said, yeah, that's kind of what I mean. And I said, isn't that kind of what we're all doing? The alternative would be choosing titles to generate a smaller audience, which seems like a real kind of waste of time. So I'm trying to navigate and play the game in a way that's comfortable, but use the metrics more as a tool than as something to obsess over. Nevertheless, the metrics are what they are and that they are able to affect your psyche. It's very difficult, which is why I have a Chrome extension that hides all the views and all that on YouTube for me. It's difficult not to let it affect how you think about ideas. So maybe your extensive exploration of a particular topic like healthcare generated very few views. It's difficult for you to still care about healthcare. There's some aspect of the human mind that starts being affected by those views. And I think that's a really dangerous thing. Mostly it's probably beneficial because it probably makes you a better presenter. If you do care about a topic a lot, you become more charismatic, more you learn sort of in a Jimmy Mr. Beast way how to present the idea better. But it also can affect which topics you choose to cover, what you choose to think about those topics, the audience capture those topics. And that's a really scary effect. I'm really worried about my own mind and that. So I run from that aggressively. One of the things that I include in my overall approaches, I don't think about any one clip. I think about an entire show or a week of shows or a month of shows. And so it's less about does any one clip do well. My view going in is I'm going to do stuff that won't do that well, but I think it's really important to do. And I want to make it part of my show. And so when I did a clip with 10 ideas for reducing gun violence, I know that that's not going to get 500,000 or a million views. I know it's just not going to. And the first day it'll get 12,000 and I'll go, I don't care. That's that's fine. There's a group of people in my audience that values this stuff. And I want to keep doing this stuff. I'll end up surprised sometime. And two weeks later, has 150,000 views because it started being shared. Great. But I don't go into it thinking these all need to be home runs by that metric. I always go in saying I want to put out a diversity of content, including stuff that is less titillating and salacious, but is important to do. It's more researched, et cetera. And so that's the way I try to resist exactly what you're talking about. And I think you have to probably know yourself. Like for me, metrics, I just like numbers too much. And for me, metrics do affect me. That's just why I don't pay attention at all. I would love to hire somebody in the team who

cares because we currently have folks who all of us just don't care because he probably is good to care enough to kind of just do good thumbnails and this kind of stuff to pay attention. But to me personally, I just find inner peace and focus if I don't think about the numbers at all. Because I find myself... I just remember a long time ago when I started a podcast, I would think that I failed if it didn't do well. Like if I didn't celebrate the person well enough, I didn't do a good job enough of a conversation. Well, that's not necessarily at all what that means. It's hard not to... This is tough stuff. I mean, yeah, I know exactly what you're saying. And part of it is... I mean, it starts... You have a little bit of a different situation than me because you're doing long form conversations with people and the prep is a little bit different. One of the things in my space, because I'm reacting mostly to what's going on in the news and then also picking topics to dive into a little bit more deeply, is I have very little control over the news cycle. And there is a metametric or a macro metric that affects me that will quadruple my audience and then take 75% of it away, which is the seasonality of election cycles. And the first few election cycles, it's very tough because I go... It's October. I'm like, at this rate, we're gonna have 20 million subscribers by next... These numbers are unbelievable. And then it's January 30th, the inauguration's over, the debate is about the debt ceiling and nothing's going on. And I go, nobody's watching my content. I must have forgot to upload it. Something must be wrong. It's completely beyond my control. So I just... And I think part of what you're saying is, I try to focus on the things I can control and understand those that I really have no control over whatsoever and try not to worry about them. And try to do the things that make you happy at the end of the day. You mentioned RFK, the guy you met. What do you think about some of the other candidates outside of Joe Biden in the Democratic Party, RFK Jr. What do you think of him as a candidate? I've met him. We once had dinner and we have a number of friends in common, which is what makes this a little more awkward. But I think his campaign is basically sort of like a chaos candidacy to raise awareness and maybe raise money either for his book or his anti-vaccine organization, Children's Defense Fund, I believe it's called. I think there's some reporting that Steve Bannon really liked the idea of him running as a Democrat, again, to just generate chaos. I don't find it super interesting. I don't find it worthy of that much discussion. Smart guy, nice guy, has been doing anti-vaccine work that I don't find particularly inspiring. So it's not just anti-COVID vaccine? It's more broader than that? He's been in that space long before the COVID vaccines. Yeah. Yeah, I don't find it super interesting. Well, he also wrote the book *The Real Anthony Fauci*. Is that the name of the book? Did he write that? That's interesting. I don't know. I'm not sure about that. I'm aware of that book. I didn't know he wrote it. I think, but it's been on my reading list to get, I've been trying to get a good balanced reading list about the COVID pandemic to understand what the hell happened. And anytime I start to try to go into that place, I'm exhausted by it. Well, it's interesting to me that you wouldn't wait longer before delving into those books to have maybe a more clear hindsight. But I think this is a pretty good time. You don't think so. It depends on your goals. If you're thinking of it as a historical event, yes, you should probably wait longer. But if you're thinking about understanding what is broken about our system that we respond to so poorly, that there was so much division, what is broken about our political system that it didn't unite us, it divided us, who's to blame? There's probably a lot of different

narratives. But I feel like the more you learn about this, the better you can understand. I read on just Vladimir Putin, I read like five biographies already, maybe more. Just it helps to really understand the people involved, the organizations evolved, I don't know, everything from the scientists to the political leaders. It felt like the blog posts and the tweets didn't quite capture the story. They didn't quite capture. No, one of the things I read a ton, I don't read any like modern political books. So I don't read the memoirs of elected officials, I don't read any, I just feel like I get enough of it in my job. So my reading list is just other things. It's history, it's narrative nonfiction, economics, etc. And that's my bias, because I'm so overloaded with a lot of the stuff you're talking about. I haven't read any of Obama's books. I didn't read John Bolton's book, or I don't read any of that stuff, although I'm sure there is value to be gleaned from it. What about the other candidate that, according to the subreddit, and as you mentioned, you've criticized a little bit, Marianne Williamson, do you think, what are the pros and cons of her as a candidate? This is another area where many in my audience really are angry with me. I don't find her candidacy super interesting. I'll tell you the pros and the cons as I see them. I do think that we have elected officials in the US, particularly presidents, from a really narrow range of backgrounds. So it's lawyers and sometimes business people, very, very often lawyers, I think we would benefit from a much greater diversity of backgrounds. And I once said, and that would include people from education, people from the science world, people with backgrounds maybe running nonprofits, etc. Now, Marianne Williamson did, I guess, at one point run some kind of small nonprofit, and some in my audience thought that credential alone would make me fall head over heels in love with the idea of a Marianne candidacy. I've interviewed for her. It's just not for me is the way I like to say it. The background of the woo-woo type stuff is a bit off-putting to me. I understand that someone with literal Christian Bible beliefs that also I don't like, maybe I'm more willing to accept as most of our presidents, of course, have had those views because they're otherwise more qualified. But some of the things that she says just strike me as, I just don't know. I'll give you an example. When she was on with Russell Brand, she said, there's no such thing as clinical depression. It just means someone in a clinic told you you have depression. I don't believe that to be the case. I think we have an understanding there's two types of depression. There's like a genetic predisposition depression. There's like a acute something's happening in my life, temporary depression. When she was asked about it recently, she said, I didn't mean it. I was just trying to impress Russell Brand. I don't know if I'm more bothered by the things she first said or by the fact that she wanted to impress Russell Brand, but it's just like, it's just really not for me. And I agree with her on we need to take the climate more seriously. We need to expand access to I'm with all of that stuff. Now, I want to say one other thing about this. Anybody who wants to run should run. I am not suggesting there should be an uncontested primary for Joe Biden. Absolutely. So you think it should be contested? Well, what I mean by contested is, so there's two parts to what we mean by contested. Will the DNC organize debates and we'll get that in a second. But should anybody who's on the left get out of the way because Joe Biden is president and he's running for re-election? Absolutely not. The question about should there be debates, I would like there to be debates. The DNC pretty clearly isn't going to organize them. I think if you did them, you would have to say at what polling level do you qualify? And I don't know exactly where you put that number. But I think it would be a great thing

to put Joe Biden on a stage with if you can get what, 6% 8% I'm not really sure what the number would be. I'm totally all for that. Why is a set of candidates, at least from my perspective, so weak? Do you have an understanding of this? There's a lot of different answers to this. One aspect to this, which I think is more of a socio-cultural thing, which I've recently read about to some degree, is the job actually turns off the people who would be best at it because of what you need to do to become president. And it includes all but completely abandoning your existing day-to-day life job, which you may depend on, and family to some degree. It's horribly negative, as we already talked about. And at the end of all of that, you either lose and then have to rebuild. And maybe you're not in a position to be able to do that, or you win. And then now you've got four years of being one of the most hated people, no matter how good a job you do. So I think by its nature, it turns off a lot of people that would otherwise be good. I also think that there's a lot of posturing from within the parties about, well, you might be good, but it's not your time yet, so you should wait. And then let's talk about maybe a Senate seat here and there. So it's like a company, essentially, and they're figuring out where they want to place people. I think all of these things make it so we end up with candidates most people aren't super thrilled with. So it's difficult for somebody who's young or an outsider to quickly become a candidate. I think that that's true. And I think also, in a lot of ways, it's just not, I mean, would you want to be president? No. I mean, I can't because I wasn't born in the U.S., so it's easy for me to say, but... If everyone says no, then we'll get the people that we have. No, I understand that. So I would love to help somehow. Sure. And I feel like there's not even a mechanism for helping, except through the democratic, through the voting process. But I'm just annoyed how little technology there is in the whole process, how little innovation there is in the whole process, all of this. The sad thing is this is written about a lot, which is there's this thing called political hobbyism. And I think there's a good chance that some of the people in my audience are political hobbyists in the sense that they follow this stuff as entertainment, to some degree. And I've written a lot about how... I've read a lot and talked a lot about how, okay, we vote every two years or every four years in our local elections, et cetera. And then we think about politics all the time. Neil Postman wrote about this in his book, I'm Using Ourselves to Death. But what are you actually going to do about the kids starving in this country and the nuclear buildup in that country? It's okay. If everybody refocused their attention on their immediate communities, and that could mean any number, it could mean the town or city you live in, or it might mean an athletic club or whatever. If everybody, this time they spent on political hobbyism, they moved somewhere else, which might put me out of a job, that's okay. I'm willing to lose my job because I think it would be so beneficial. Then our communities would just be that much better. Because you can actually affect change in a much more tangible way locally, whether it's, people talk about potholes, but other things as well. Yeah. And I wish our system was more amenable to that kind of contribution, hopefully through the digital space it would be. Let me ask you about, on the Republican side, Ron DeSantis, what do you think of him as a candidate, running against Donald Trump? I think in the couple of weeks before our discussion today, his campaign, which hasn't

even started, has sort of started to implode. And this was something that I started thinking about in September, October. He really doesn't seem ready for prime time, in the sense that just being confronted, and confronted is not even the right word, just being asked about some topics he didn't really seem to want to talk about, he responded in such a sort of disproportionate, unhinged way. During his recent trip to Asia, he was asked about, why aren't you or why are you responding? But in this weird way to Trump's attacks on you. And he went into this weird bobblehead thing with a weird smile. And something came out that didn't make any sense. And he sort

of got mad at the reporter. And it was just like, if you can't handle that, you can't be on a debate stage with Donald Trump. And again, for all my criticisms of Trump, the guy gets you on a debate stage, he can make you look pretty silly. He was recently asked about his role at Guantanamo Bay when he was an officer in, I forget, which branch of the armed forces. And he just sort of attacked the journalist asking the question. And it just looked very bad. And there are increasingly big Republican donors who are not fans of Trump and were sort of hoping to put their eggs in the Ron DeSantis basket, who are saying, this guy just doesn't have what it takes. I don't think he can do it. So I don't know if DeSantis will be able to get away. Once you're polling 20 something like he is, and you haven't even announced, it's very attractive. And he probably to some degree is thinking, if I wait till 2028, I might not have this opportunity again. But Trump's polling 52-53, which means even if DeSantis gets all of the current non-Trump vote, he has to figure out how to take something more from Trump. I just don't know how he does it.

First of all, the implosion aspect, that's part of the process, isn't it? You kind of implode a bunch of times. And then rebuild yourself. And rebuild them because the new cycle kind of forgets. It's possible. The problem is, the first debate is in August. So that's only a few months away. And the decision is going to have to be made pretty soon. And unless he can get a new momentum going, I just don't know how he gets what he needs in order to really have a shot. So would anyone else running against Donald Trump?

It's very tough right now. I mean, there are other people running. There's this guy, Vivek Ramaswamy, who's running. Nikki Haley is running. Her campaign basically dead on arrival. Trump actually does better in polls the more people run. When it's just him and DeSantis, that's the best scenario for DeSantis. It's not great for DeSantis, but it's certainly better. But I think the difficulty is, this is a question for Republicans to figure out.

The people who rightly recognized in 2016 that this guy is not good for their party still believe this guy is not good for their party. But many of them recognize that most of the voters are still behind him. You can always say it's early. His polling doesn't really mean anything. Anything could happen. Something major would have to happen for Trump to lose that lead.

If he got more, if he was arrested two more times and had more indictments, and it just became like, this guy can't even campaign because he's so busy going from court to court, maybe that would make a difference. It's really tough to imagine.

You said that there are three categories of people who vote Republican, and that Trump introduced the fourth one. Can you go through the four categories?

Sure. So you've got your pro-business low tax Republicans. These are mostly people like Mitt Romney. Mitt Romney has a bit of the social conservatism as well. He's Mormon, and that's

there. But Mitt Romney primarily, particularly as a Northeast sort of Republican, I mean, I know Utah, but Governor of Massachusetts, he is like a low tax pro-business type guy. You've got your libertarian type Republicans who are primarily about freedom and liberty. Often they are actually more socially liberal where they go, I don't care about gay marriage, I don't care so much about abortion. And that overlapped a little bit with the Tea Party movement in 2010, although Tea Party did have a religious component, but sort of like the libertarian freedom-minded folks, and then the religious conservatives, people that support candidates like Josh Hawley or Ted Cruz, et cetera, where their big thing are social issues. Often they actually want Christianity being civil government. They don't want separation of church and state. Those are traditionally the three Republican groups. The one that Trump introduced was people who just didn't really pay attention to politics, but either followed celebrity or had grievances that they didn't yet have a scapegoat for, and were sort of right leaning culturally, even though they didn't attribute that to Republicanism. And Trump was able to bring them into politics often for the first time as voters. They could be part of any of those three groups if they get more into politics or kind of be their own thing. But they're more kind of like cult of personality, I'm here for Trump types.

Did it have to do anything about the culture wars and the identity politics, all that kind of stuff? Yeah. I mean, so in 2016, when Trump mobilized them, those weren't really issues the way they are now. So I think at that time, it certainly was not a factor.

What was the mobilizing issue? It was just anti-Hillary in 2016?

He did a good job on anti-Hillary, but a lot of it was identifying real economic problems, wage depression, lack of jobs in parts of the country, Ohio and Indiana. Trump rightly identified. Like we have an issue here. We don't have enough entrepreneurship, et cetera.

But there was also a lot of scapegoating that was China and people coming through the US-Mexico border were popular scapegoats for a lot of those problems. This gets us kind of to populism.

Populism is a rhetoric and populism as a rhetoric doesn't necessarily come with particular policies. You can be a populist, a user of populist rhetoric and propose solutions that would be more aligned with Bernie or Tucker Carlson. Populists will often identify the plight of the middle class. The difference would be Bernie will say, we've got to put some restrictions on how much billionaires can make and we've got to reinvest in these social programs.

Tucker will say, BLM taking your house and a brown person from Mexico taking your job are what we need to deal with. The populist rhetoric can lend itself to very different

policy. Trump used that very effectively in 2016. Why do you think Hillary Clinton was

hated as intensely as she was by a certain percent of the population? It feels like that's the first election I witnessed where there's a lot of hate. Maybe I'm misremembering.

I don't remember Obama. I don't remember the degree of hate. There was a conspiracy theory that he wasn't born in this country, but I don't remember hate towards Obama.

Record death threats under Obama more than any previous president.

Towards him. Do you mean more hate between voters?

Between voters, between voters, but that's I guess what I was speaking to,

but that hate was directed towards the narrative, the thread that connected all of that in 2016

was Hillary Clinton. Few different things. I'm not ranking these. These are just all things

that come to mind. One is Hillary Clinton had been around in the political space for a long time,



from her time as First Lady, through a senator, secretary of state, etc. I think that there was enough time for different groups to develop an antipathy towards her for different reasons. Time. Secondly, Trump's branding of her as crooked was very effective, where there were so many people demanding that she be imprisoned. If you ask them what is the crime, they don't know, but she should definitely be locked up. That became a very big thing. The email story, as it were, and James Comey doing a second public event about that investigation, even though there wasn't any

actual news about it, just doing a second event about it at the last minute, I think hurt her and also generated some hate. I don't find Hillary Clinton to be particularly likable, although I voted for her. I thought she was the better candidate. I think that there are others who also didn't find her particularly likable. Those are a lot of impediments to becoming president. I was trying to understand why there's so many conspiracy theories about Clintons, in general, Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton. Maybe I'm not researched well enough.

Of the why of it? The why of it, actually, the extent of the conspiracy theories, the conspiracy theories that they've killed a lot of people, this kind of stuff.

It's hard for me to speak to them because I'm aware that they exist, but I'm not an expert in them because they seem so obviously baseless to the degree that I've researched them a little bit and then I move on. It's been years since I've looked at this stuff. I know there's the Seth Rich one and there's the Clinton body count one. I think there's one connected to Epstein, if I recall correctly. There's all sorts of these different ones. Without speaking to any of them specifically because I'm not the expert on Clinton conspiracies, it does seem as though this stuff for so long has generated an audience. I remember in the supermarket, when Bill Clinton was president, at the checkout, seeing the tabloids and there were stuff about Hillary birthing alien baby. It seems like it's been titillating to people for a very long time. Well, another question from Reddit speaking of aliens. I would be curious to hear David's views on conspiracies and conspiracy theories, the extent to which real conspiracies happen, and why conspiracies that have little evidence behind them managed to be so compelling to people regardless. Also, please bring up aliens and UAPs.

Where do we start? The conspiracy. What in general, as a person who thinks about politics, thinks about this world, where do conspiracy theories fit in for you?

I think there have been conspiracies and by conspiracies, I'm using a colloquial definition, which is basically individuals working together to, in a clandestine way, impact or affect some kind of event or phenomenon very, very broadly. Certainly, that those things have happened. To jump around to some of the things that were in there, I think the reason that conspiracy theories are so compelling is that it's really tough for a lot of people to accept there are random events, not predictable specifically, at a stochastic level, we might be able to predict them, but specifically unpredictable, bad events in many ways. I could be the victim of one or you could or my family could. That's really scary to a lot of people, understandably so. For some people, it's less scary and more soothing in a way to say there aren't really random events like this. Somebody planned it and if we had just known who planned it, it just could have been stopped because we would have known exactly when. That's just a psychological level easier to accept for people. I get that to some degree because, listen, it's not the most exciting thing that everything can just be going

fine and something absolutely horrible happens and kills who knows, some number of people. I think that's the biggest attractor to a lot of these conspiracy theories. It doesn't apply to all of them though. Yeah, but there's still a basic understanding of human nature where some people are greedy and want power and are corrupted by power. There's these compelling narratives that stick that, I don't know, the vaccine is an opportunity for a powerful billionaire to implant chips into you so you can control you further. Right. It doesn't seem, what do I want to say? It's like, for some reason, that doesn't seem as crazy as it should because you think maybe Hollywood contributes to that, but you think, yeah, you could imagine an evil person, a person that wants more control, more power and is also at the same time able to convince themselves, as history shows, that they're actually have the best interest of the populace in mind, that they're trying to do good for the world. They do evil while trying to do good. You can kind of imagine it. So it's like, why not? And you listen to people in power, authorities, they kind of look and sound shady. The transparency, especially the older ones, I think younger folks are better at being real and transparent and just revealing their flaws in the basic humanity. But people that are a little bit older in the positions of power, they're more polished. It feels like they're presenting a narrative where the truth is hidden in the shadows. I don't think there's anything wrong with suspecting. Maybe a public figure isn't giving me the full story, totally reasonable thing to question.

I don't think there's anything wrong with exploring a lot of these different things. I think the problem becomes, and I know you've talked about this in so many different ways with other guests, the problem becomes when we lose a shared understanding of how we would assess whether any of these things are true. And then both alleged evidence and an absence of evidence both become supportive of the conspiracy theory. Because if there's bad evidence, you manipulate it and say it's good evidence. If there's no evidence, you say the evidence was obviously hidden by the people who carried out the thing or whatever. So unless we can have a shared understanding of how we would determine what's true, these are common conversations often between atheists and religious folks. Is my faith in something or my desire for something to be true a good way to evaluate whether it is true? They're really similar questions.

Well, let me ask you about Trump on that front. About the election, 2020 election, maybe the better question is about January 6th. Do you think January 6th was a big deal?

I do. How big of a deal? Compared to what?

Civil War. I think it was less of a big deal than the Civil War.

It's a very interesting thing, though, because we have not only the event, that's clever, actually. It's not only the event, but it's what led up to it and what has happened since, and did it change what is considered on the table that citizens can, should, or might do if they disagree with the results of an election? So I think that there are further reaching consequences than just the six-hour period on January 6th, a bigger or smaller deal than the Civil War, and there's so much wrapped up into it. Many conspiracy theories flowed from January 6th as well. 60 Minutes recently featured a guy named Ray Epps, who was targeted by some on the right, claiming that he was an instigator or an agent of the FBI or something along those lines. There were people claiming that no real, it was like a no true Scotsman sort of thing. Trump supporters wouldn't riot, so by definition, it must have been Antifa, police let him in or police, all these different things. I think it was a big deal in a lot of

ways because it completely made us have to go back to the top to say, okay, what are the parameters of valid discussion and activism in the United States? But what aspect of the January 6th was bad for you? Well, I mean... If you're thinking from a big philosophical political perspective, so presumably the number of people hurt and the number of people who died is not the only metric to consider here. Absolutely. I think the sum total of what it means about how the United States operates is what's most concerning, and I'll kind of just like flesh it out a little bit. So, summer of 2020, Trump's already saying they're going to cheat. Now, the polling is close, but it shows that Biden's in a good position. People aren't happy with Trump. Any reasonable person would look and say, it's going to be close, but Biden certainly wouldn't

be a crazy thing if Biden won. Trump's already saying they're going to cheat with mail-in ballots, or they're going to cheat with early voting, or they're going to cheat with machines, or we should do only in person, or whatever else the case may be. We have the election.

We knew in certain states how the vote count was going to go. Some states stopped counting at 10 p.m. Some states count all of the mail-in stuff up front, some don't. Everything was completely predictable. At 2 a.m., Trump comes out and says, I won. Okay, but where are you getting that, as he claims people always refer to him? Where are you getting that?

With that statement, immediately we see that there is a large portion of this country that either is unable or unwilling to say, wait a second, the polling all said this was a real possibility. The counting schedules are all being adhered to, but Trump won. That doesn't make any sense. That doesn't happen. It builds. People are donating millions to Trump for supposed audits which nobody can define, and lawsuits which go nowhere, and it builds and builds and builds, and we have a total separation from a factual reality. There's no reason to think, by December 1, right, give three weeks to look through some of this stuff. By December 1, there's no reasonable case to be made that Trump actually won, but it doesn't end there. It goes into, maybe we can send different electors, even though Biden won Arizona. Let's just send, I don't remember how many electors it is in Arizona. Let's just send Republican electors to say, we vote for Trump, but that's not democracy. That's not the way the system works. Let's make sure we're ready, ready for what exactly, and then it builds to maybe Mike Pence can just prevent Biden from being president, or maybe we can just interfere in this other way, and then it gets to let's break into the Capitol. It's the height of saying we no longer comport ourselves attached to what is a verifiable factual reality, and when we no longer do that, we're also willing to commit crimes, property crimes, violent crimes, okay, different degrees, in order to try to have something other than democracy. It wouldn't be democracy if any of those things had happened.

Yeah, I think it's not the height of it. I think there's still a case to be made that that did not leave the realm of protest versus a violation of the principles of democracy.

So to me, the height of what could happen on January 6th is if Donald Trump was much better executive, he could take control of the military. If it had succeeded. No, not even succeeded, the attempt would have been more empowered. I understand. So like the way not to bring up Hitler every other word, which is something your subreddit also told me not to do. Okay.

It's kind of an important figure. It's interesting to study that moment in history, because it reveals so much about human nature, and that all of us are capable of good and evil. But thank you to your subredditor or redditor for your contribution to the conversation.

I will keep bringing up Hitler and the Third Reich, and I'll keep bringing up Stalin. There's so much to learn from that. Anyway, an effective practice authoritarian could roll the tanks out into the city streets to establish order, and in so doing pause the process of democracy, as opposed to a few protesters breaking into a questionably protected building. I agree that what you're saying would be worse. I don't want to use it to minimize what the protesters were intent on doing. They failed, fortunately.

To you, the intention was there. Well, the intention was Trump should remain president. That's the intention. And to what lengths they would have been willing to go if by the early evening they were sort of forced out, I don't know. I agree with you that Trump trying to use the military would absolutely be worse. There's these reports that he tried to seize voting machines, which is kind of funny, because it's like, once you get the machine at Mar-a-Lago, what do you do with it exactly? I don't know. There's a comedic element to Trump sitting around with voting machines. But he did float trying to do some other things. I don't believe there's reporting that he actually tried to use the military.

I wanted to what degree this opened the door to further things like this with other candidates in the Democratic Party also. Do you think there would be more and more questioning of the election results? There has been already. It's very clearly the playbook. Kerry Lake lost. She ran for governor in Arizona, 2022. She lost. What I mean by that is her opponent received more votes. It's very clear what it means that she lost. She insists to this day that she won, to this day. She did the same grift Trump did about donate. We've got a case. We won in the case. You didn't win. They just set a court date. Lies upon grift upon lies. So they did it then. It's extraordinarily saddening, but it seems like this is now going to be part of the playbook. Do you think people on the left will start doing it?

I don't have a reason to believe that that is going to happen, but I'm not going to say it never could. It certainly could. People on the left could start using it as a tactic. Right now, there's not a sign that that's going to happen, but it's certainly good.

My expectation is, and I'm not a betting man, but I would bet money. If Joe Biden loses in November of 2024, he will say I lost. He will call the winner. He will concede and he will leave the White House in an orderly fashion. You don't think there will be claims of a hacked election? The ability to hack elections is becoming more and more effective with the developments on the artificial intelligence side. The difficulty is you're basically saying, will something happen without me knowing anything about the election? Imagine there really was evidence of a hacked election. Then I would want those claims to be made, but the way elections have gone in the past, I don't expect that that's a claim that would be made. No.

Speaking of evidence of things that were claimed, what do you think about the Hunter Biden laptop, or as you tweeted, the laptop from hell, the laptop from hell TM. Right.

To what degree was this laptop story important and to what degree was it not?

At this point, I have said many times, if there is any reason to believe that Hunter Biden, Joe Biden, Naomi Biden, Jill Biden, Hillary, Obama, Doug, and if there's any evidence any of them committed a crime, they should be investigated, they should be charged, and they should be tried.

Period. The Hunter Biden laptop thing has been floating around for so long, and we still have zero actual pieces of evidence of any crime, particularly involving Joe Biden.

There's the claim from some that references to the big guy are about Joe Biden getting 10% for some illicit. It's been years they've been saying this, they've not been able to bring forward any evidence on it. My assessment of the Hunter Biden laptop is it seems to mostly be a story about nude images released without someone's consent, which is illegal in most states and violates Twitter's own policies. That's the main story to me. Beyond that, I don't know how many people have a copy of this hard drive at this point. Rudy had it. Tucker, do you remember when Tucker, this is unbelievable, Tucker said that he mailed himself a copy, a USB stick, and it got lost in the mail. You have the mother load proving the criminality of Joe and Hunter Biden, and you just dropped it off with a stamp, and it got lost in the mail. You don't have a backup copy. I'm ready for the evidence to come forward. Hunter Biden has nothing to do with Joe Biden's administration, but as a person who, if he committed a crime, charge him, investigate him, whatever. It's almost getting satirical, the degree to which they're talking about the Hunter Biden laptop. What do you think about the social media aspect of this, that story got censored? What do you think about censorship in general on social media? That that story, during an important time in the electoral process, got censored?

As a matter of principle, I think we have to define what we mean by censorship, but I'm against censorship short of illegal content, I guess is the way I would put it. I do respect a company's right to have terms of service and to enforce them, as long as they're not illegal. If Twitter were to say, we don't publish content from Jewish people, okay, now we've got a problem on our hands. But what is dubious to me is the claim that had people been able to see Hunter Biden's genitals, they would have voted for Trump, which I know it's like, David, you're making light of. But at the end of the day, what exactly is the claim that if you had known more about Hunter Biden, I guess, allegedly hiring prostitutes and having a drug problem and seeing pictures, you wouldn't have voted for Joe Biden? I mean, I know me as a voter, I don't feel that way. I think it's less about the content of the story and about the actions of a social media company to control what you see and what you don't see. So you could imagine a social media company like Facebook and Twitter making the same kind of decision about a more impactful story than a few dick pics on a laptop. Well, I think if that happened, then my view might be different, right? But my general view, though, on the Hunter Biden story is, had the articles not contained those images that were illegal in many states and violated Twitter's policies, I would say publish it, absolutely. I don't think it would have had an impact, but I would be in favor of it being of the links being allowed 100%.

Okay. You mentioned Tucker. What do you think about Tucker getting fired from Fox? You're a media person that works independently. Yes.

Tucker was a media person who doesn't work independently. Right.

Yeah. What do you think about that particular situation? Is it representative of some big shift that's happening in mainstream media? What would the shift be?

Basically, mainstream media freaking out because the funding is getting less and less and less and less and there's going to give more power to individual commentators. Basically, Tucker Carlson just starting a podcast in a YouTube channel. I think that's what he should do.

I think that's the most profitable path rather than maybe going to work for Newsmax or whatever the case may be. But the firing fundamentally was not a politically oriented firing that suggests Fox News is changing its tune politically in any way. There's no evidence of that whatsoever.

Tucker Carlson basically became a legal problem for Fox News. There's really four points to it. One is the \$787.5 million settlement with Dominion partially was because of the claims that went out on Tucker Carlson's program. To some degree, Tucker's program was a prominent

node of the problematic claims that became the subject of the lawsuit. That's number one. Number two, Smartmatic, which is another voting machine company, still has a similarly sized lawsuit against Fox News based on the exact same sorts of claims. It may cost Fox News again. So this is now two problems that Tucker's a big contributor to. Number three, former Tucker staffer has brought a lawsuit and I don't remember the exact claims, but I know that there are claims of different types of discrimination. It seems like it has legs and that may be a third payout related to Tucker Carlson. And based on the 60 minutes piece from a few weeks ago, Ray Epps saying Tucker ruined his life by fomenting conspiracies about him around

January 6th. That's ripe for another lawsuit. So to me, Tucker's firing was a risk mitigation strategy of many that will be employed as these lawsuits come forward. There's no evidence that it's because Fox didn't like. And what we mean by that, are we talking about Rupert Murdoch doesn't

like or the, I don't know, but I don't have any reason to believe it's because Tucker's ideas were no longer welcome on Fox. Certainly the audience liked them.

So interesting. It's not even about the ratings. It's about just the legal costs.

Fox is interesting. The ratings question is interesting because Fox, unlike most other or every other cable news channel, they negotiate a fee from every cable subscriber. If you have Fox News as a channel, even if you don't watch it, Fox gets a little bit of money. They are dramatically less dependent on ad revenue than CNN and MSNBC. So the ratings question is an interesting one, but Fox's position is different on that. Another question from Reddit.

Both sides are the same in quotes. Is a meme notion that has spread far and wide in American political discourse on the internet? To what extent do you agree or disagree with this notion? And why do you think it is so popular? Now, this Reddit comment also says that podcasts like Russell Brand and Joe Rogan or the legendary comic George Carlin are examples of big proponents of this notion, all of which I kind of disagree with. Russell Brand, Joe Rogan and George Carlin claim that both sides are the same and use that, you know, all politicians are crooked and they suck and this kind of thing. I don't know if they're, I don't know if that's true. Maybe George Carlin. Anyway, let's leave that aside. To what degree do you think I do agree with this notion that both sides are the same? Left and right, the crooked corrupt politicians, they do what politicians do. I don't agree that it's the same. I think there are different factions that like to say that for different reasons. There are some individuals who want to present themselves as kind of being above the fray of partisan politics. And so I call it enlightened centrism.

Do you mean that positively or negatively? No, I mean it negatively. Yeah, it's a bit of a pejorative.

The idea that I am not going to fall for being a Democrat or a Republican, I can see that these are just two sides of the same coin, equally bad, lying to every, okay, so that's one, it's popular at dinner parties in some circles to go, both all these politicians left and right.

So that's one side of it. The other side of it is that it's often used when your side has really stepped in it. It's a popular way to acknowledge that your side has done something wrong, but while

framing it as it's not uniquely wrong and it's not worse than what anybody else does. And I find that it's one of the lamest and most kind of cringe inducing things to hear because of what comes next. And usually what comes next is not a good, accurate criticism of something that took place and a discussion of how to solve a real problem that we have. I find it a conversation stifler. It also is used to kind of suppress voter turnout, not actively. It's not that the people who say that go around saying, don't vote. But the idea, of course, is the more people that believe that it doesn't really make a difference who you vote for, it's going to suppress voter turnout. And I want voter turnout to be as high as possible, not as low as possible, so I also dislike it for that reason. So is it possible to say that one side is worse than the other in modern current political climate? Listen, I'm a person on the left. I'm not pretending to come here as not knowing that my view is biased because I'm a person of the left. If you ask Ben Shapiro, he'll tell you something different. I think in 2023, some total, the influence of the American right wing, if the American right wing were to get everything it wants, it would be a horrifying reality. If the left were to get everything it wants, we'd have to figure out a few things, including exactly how we pay for certain programs. But they're mostly noble goals. And I believe that they are more supportive of an individual self-determining what they want to do in life and how they want to live and is more in line with the idea of freedom and liberty than what the right is currently proposing. That's my view. And of course, people will disagree with me all day. No, we get to freedom and liberty the way that the right wants to do it. Okay, well, we can have that conversation. So I think you've implied in your answer, it was focused on policy. It felt like it was focused on policy. There's other stuff that people worry about, particularly with the left, what maybe termed the woke mind virus. Where have I heard? Who's using that term a lot now? I'm trying to think. I'm not sure. I'm not sure where it comes up. But the cultural aspect of this, that if you give a lot of power to people on the left, as you gave us an example, there would be a lot of censorship and suppression of speech and a kind of dividing up of a society of who's allowed to basically get a reallocation of resources not based on merit, but based on some kind of high ethical notions of what is right. And only a very small percent of the population gets to decide what is what is fair, what is right, which is, you know, we already have a small portion of the population is deciding fair. Okay. But I don't know. I don't know how many different ways I can say kind of a negative characterization of folks on the left when we're now comparing it, just as to play devil's advocate. So is that something that you worry about? So setting policies aside, wokeism, how big of a problem is it? This is a great conversation. So two sides of it. Okay. We have new polling that seems to suggest so-called wokeism is kind of more popular in the United States than anti-wokeism. And I'll tell you what I mean by that. This is the less interesting part. We'll go to the more interesting part second. Sometimes what people mean by wokeism is an overreaction to a perceived injustice that goes beyond what would be fair and equitable. There was this really interesting poll and it asks questions like, for example, do you believe society has gone too far, not far enough, or just about the right amount in dealing with issues affecting the trans community? The woke position, which is society hasn't gone far enough, was far more popular than we've gone too far. Now, the right wing media narrative is we've gone way too far. This is out of control. And there are lots of other similar answers. It's not a huge margin. A lot of these are like 58 to 42, 60 to 40. It's not like 90 to 10. But by a small

margin, the so-called woke perspective of we actually haven't yet done enough to fix some of these issues is a little bit more popular. So if we went back to DeSantis, this is part of why I think DeSantis' anti-woke agenda may just be a political misstep. That's a really interesting result. I wonder how the questions are framed. But it's still interesting, nevertheless, no matter what, to hear that people are majority of people in America are woke, and not in the negative sense of the word. The poll didn't use the term woke, right? This is a critical thing. Let's use the term woke positively. The term has kind of been perverted.

Four years ago, when the term was started to be used, I would have said, oh yeah, woke just means like I have become aware of problems that are bigger than any one person can fix for themselves that relate to the system. And we might disagree on which problems fall into that category, but it was kind of benign. I think now it just means like outrageously left-wing, maybe even with socialist or Marxist undertones. It's becoming a pejorative at this. But also like bullies. Sure, censors. Yeah, but people that go around calling others racist, sometimes oftentimes without any proof of or justification. But that's a few folks on Twitter you're saying, like the polling is starting to show that like no, they're still, most Americans still care about these issues and want to improve, want to make progress.

I think that's the case and they want to do it in a genuine way that doesn't suppress or oppress anybody. But now let me get to like to what degree do I think that actual when it goes too far is a problem. It absolutely exists. We can find instances of where this exists on the left.

I've been told many times that as a Jewish, Argentinian immigrant to the United States, I actually don't qualify as oppressed enough because Jews are privileged now in the U.S. and my family had just enough money to leave Argentina. So there's this kind of like oppression Olympics thing where I've been told you don't get to comment, for example, like a topic in the Latino community now is, are you familiar with Latin X? Okay. In Spanish, there's an analogous movement where words by their nature sort of like have a gender. So like the word for friend is amigo. But if it's a woman, you would say amiga. So right from there, you can tell the gender that we're talking about. And if it's a mixed group, you say amigos, it's the male with an S, but it could include both. There's a movement now which wants to do away with that and put the letter E in. It's a new word. Okay. It's a gender neutral word. Amigos, totally new. I don't like that. And I don't know anyone. No one in my family uses it. And I think it's kind of like a strange imposition from someone kind of with a solution in search of a problem. I've been told you moved to the U.S. long ago and like your English is good and like you look wide and said like you don't get to weigh in on that. That, I think, is an example, if I understand correctly, of the type of thing you're talking about. I'm kind of being bullied. I'm fine. I'm surviving fine, but I'm being bullied over it and disqualified and saying you don't get to speak on this issue.

All of those examples, all of that stuff, I am completely against and I tell people on the left, we're actually hurting our own movement with this stuff. I just don't think it's as big as some others believe. You don't think it's an existential threat to our civilization in the West? No, I don't. And I mean, look, we've got a Biden administration. I see Biden as center left. Those who see Biden as extreme far left, this stuff has played almost no role whatsoever in the first two plus years of his administration. Were there people that see him far left as far left? There's people on the right who, I mean, Trump says Biden's a Marxist socialist communist. I haven't heard that because I don't think that would stick very much. He says it at every rally.



Which I'm so jealous that you don't watch these things. I love how deeply researched you are in Trump. I can only imagine how good your Trump impression is at this point. It's not very, sadly, it's not good. It's not, all right. No, but, and I'll say one other thing on that. You know, take trans because just to talk about it a little bit, we haven't dealt with it much. The trans issue has become huge, I believe, because the right is obsessed with it. The right is very much not concerned with gay men anymore. It used to be that gay men is like, oh, we have to stop gay men from adopting and unnatural and pedophiles. Now it's trans. It's drag shows, et cetera. I do think that there is a fair question to say, how do we deal with trans women in a very small short list of sports? That's real. My view, though, is I go, okay, we have all issues. We have issues related to gender and sexual orientation. We have issues related to trans. Within that, we have specifically sports. You can eliminate from that trans men. Nobody's worried, right, about women, biological women who are trans men. And then when you say, it's only in certain sports that it matters. Hey, I'm right there. I think it's a complicated question. I don't know how we deal with it. I would ask leagues that have experienced with this already and whatever. The problem I have is pretending that the vanguard of left-wing politics right now is trying to force trans women into sports. It's just not the big issue that the right is reacting as if it were. But perhaps because of the right, it's forcing the left to continue discussing it. I mean, I feel like even in institutions, even at universities, it feels like these ideas of diversity, inclusion, and equity are taking some of the air out of the room of what a university should also care about, which is merit. And it feels like reprioritization is going a little too far the other way, meaning prioritizing this kind of amorphous concept of diversity is moving away, is giving power to people that don't care about merit, and it just want to bully people with a big stick that says racism or sexism or anti-diversity. And it kind of suffocates the people that care about merit, about meritocracy, about inspiring people from all kinds of backgrounds to succeed. And it's just you kind of observe that. I'm sure that happens in all kinds of institutions. And the concern I think the people that are concerned about wokeism are concerned about at scale what impact does that have on a society when there's so much conversation about racism and oppression, not to talk about merit, like who's the actual good person in the room, the best person in the room. Generically, that's a concern to me. The degree to which it's happening at different institutions, I think is worthy of exploration. I know people who work in academia that are getting out of academia because they don't like the environment on their campuses for exactly the reason you're saying. So it exists. There is no question about it. I also think that the idea of a perfect meritocracy is maybe not necessarily the goal in the sense that when you talk about perfect meritocracy, someone wrote a book about this who I interviewed about a year and a half ago, and whose name escapes me. There are problems with a perfect meritocracy. I think what we want to do is generate roughly equal opportunity for people, understanding that there is going to be an outcome on a gradient or a bell curve, allowing people, generally speaking, to determine the path that they want to take and giving them, if it's possible, the ability to pursue that without suppressing limit. I mean, this is like relatively uncontroversial stuff among,

I would argue 95% of the left with the caveats of what you're talking about, which I agree exist. It would be nice to know the actual data. Sometimes people blow stuff out of proportion.

It's hard to measure how much self-censorship happens at university campuses.

That's true. I think also it's sort of like the pit bull bite stories thing, where when a pit bull bites a person, it's more likely to be reported on because it fits a certain narrative. There are right-wing publications that are very interested in making this seem as if it is an epidemic.

I'm the first to say it is happening to a degree. I don't know the degree that it's happening to.

I know a lot of people in academia, only a couple of them say that it's an issue.

Would they say it though if they believed it?

I think they would say it to me. These are just personal contacts. It's not like I'm going to go blabbing. To push back, I kind of agree with you, but at the same time, most, I mean, I'm deeply connected in academia of a huge number of colleagues. Most people self-censor by not thinking about it at all. They're like, screw it. That's deeper. Whatever. I'm just going to focus on the thing I love doing, which is the work. They basically remove themselves from politics and social issues. They just say, I'm going to do my engineering. I'm going to do my mathematics. Sure. The problem with that is you can't go anywhere further to figure it out. It's sort of like there's this funny clip where Jordan Peterson says, even atheists are actually religious. They just don't know it. It's hard to test that. I don't know. Okay. I mean, I don't,

but it's a fair point. I mean, there may be some people, if it has become so toxic for some people, they may have repressed it way down into their subconscious, but I don't know how we would know that. But you know symptoms of it because when certain people speak up, kind of lightly, and then a 19-year-old or a 20-year-old responds and is outraged, the fact that the administration listens to that 19- and 20-year-old and then reprimands whoever spoke up a little bit, that's a really dangerous sign to me. And I don't really care about these. I'm more with you. I don't think it's a big issue, but then I notice it. I wonder, wait a minute. Would this kind of environment allow a young Noam Chowsky to be around? Would this environment allow, I don't know, what tenure

was designed for, which is to have controversial thinkers and not kind of weird, controversial things, but really people that challenge things that should be challenged. Yeah. I sympathize with that significantly. I always try to look at specific examples. And sometimes I'll look at people, I'll ask for them and people will send me five. And one of them is a legit bona fide example of what we're talking about. And four are kind of like, there was a complaint and it was investigated, but the teacher's tenure was never in jeopardy. And I don't know that I chalk this up to a big woke event. What do you think the kind of apparatus of the four-year degree in college is going to look like in 20 years? Oh, that's, I mean, day by day, that seems to be changing with GPT. I don't know if you've gotten a chance to interact with chat GPT. Absolutely. My entire show now is written by chat GPT. I mean, that's partially a joke. It is only because it stopped looking at the internet in 2021. If it was current, I could completely just tune it out.

No, I'm kidding, but it's a fascinating tool. And it's changing the nature of how we do homework assignments. It's changing the nature of how we learn, how we look up new information, how we explore information, how we care about things we're interested in. I think I don't think we'll have value for a university degree in 20 years the way we do now. I just think it changes everything. I think language models, I mean, Google search has already, Wikipedia has

already transformed, I would say, our civilization, but it's, there was still a value for basic education. I don't, I think that starts to dissipate with chat GPT. So I don't, I don't know. Yeah. I really don't think there's a university the way we think of a university in 20, 20, 30 years. I mean, I have a personal interest in it in that my daughter is 10 months old. And I'm doing the 529 account. I'm going through the motions as if, but I also recognize, if she went to the schools I went to, just with the rate of tuition increase, you're talking 200k a year by the time she's 18. And what happens with wages relative to that, this is like separate from the technological thing. And in my mind, I'm thinking, is this going to continue being the right path? What I would love to see is so many people that I interact with just by virtue of what I do have no foundation in critical thinking, epistemology, philosophy, or media literacy. And if there were some way to make that the core of some basic education that everybody's receiving, which goes beyond, you know, chat GPT can do so many things, but I've not yet seen good examples of how it can teach you to think. Maybe you have a different view on how chat GPT can teach a user to think. But those skills seem to be so lacking in so many of the people I interact with. If there's any positive change to come from a changing dynamic with higher education, I wish it would be to go in that direction. Well, no, chat GPT is actually much better at helping me think than any educator, even books that I've encountered, because it's very good at presenting the full picture, even better than a lot of Wikipedia articles, you know, on questions like, did the virus leak from a lab? Did the COVID leak from a lab? This just presents to you all the different hypotheses, the amount of evidence available to it. It's like, it's like a full, calm, objective picture of it. There's no partisanship. It's like a really nice list of things that's available. But I guess what I mean is, does it tell you how as a thinking human, you should evaluate the strength of each of the paragraphs it presents to you? You can literally ask. You can ask it to do it. Oh, fair. Okay. Yeah. And then it's actually a fun, it's fun to ask chat GPT that question, because you get good answers. And so you basically have a kind of Socratic, like a deep, intimate, like great podcast style conversation with an AI system every single day, for as many hours as you want, as a, especially as it improves as, and as the interfaces by which you communicate with a thing improves. So yeah, I think, I think it will do exactly that, which is teach you how to think, because you will offload the memory effects and equations and whatever else school teaches you, you'll offload that to AI. And instead, you'll be using your human mind, which is what it for now is uniquely good at, which is asking good questions, thinking through the complexities of issues when there's multiple perspectives on it, all of that. Well, then I stand corrected. Maybe then I don't know what college is going to be in 20 years. Well, but you were sort of commenting, I see, to the financial aspect of it, like, why does it even make sense at this point? Yeah. I'm thinking about the transformative effects of AI and what it starts to ask, what is the, what is even education? Right. What are you supposed, what is the purpose of education? So one is to give you kind of a background knowledge on a bunch of different topics, but the other is to discover the thing you're truly passionate about and the thing you're really good at, such that you can make money and you can contribute to society and have a fulfilling life. Yeah. And also learning to

interact with other people with that relationships are built, socializing and so many other things as well. But is that, you know, that is the big value of university. Yeah. And maybe you should be called something else. Can you get that for less than 200K a year somewhere else? Yeah, no, it's a fair question. Kind of a social club. And you know, one of the things I think about also is people who are well connected, I mean, this has always been, this isn't new, right? But if you're well connected and you have a sort of drive towards entrepreneurship and doing your own thing and you're not pursuing a field that is very licensing dependent like medicine or law, getting started four years earlier with some internships can be a privilege in some cases. But again, that path is available to the people that would likely do well regardless of whether they went to college. And so it's a very privileged self-selected group anyway. Another question from Reddit. Ask David to explain why American-style libertarianism is an unserious philosophy. I don't know what they mean by American-style libertarianism. I've talked before about these kind of utopian libertarians where, you know, we have, we don't have police, you just kind of like hire a for-profit company if you want protection. And if there's a conflict between two of these private security companies, then I don't know, you figure it out somehow. So it's almost like anarchism. So take it to that. If by, I don't know what the question means by that American-style libertarianism, but in general, my problems with libertarianism as it is often presented come from the work of sociology as well as human psychology, which is the reality that once you get a group that's bigger than 150 people, you really have to start centralizing some decisions unless you're going to subdivide the 150 endlessly into 275s that now no longer have contact, but then that's not really one society. Now it's two. I've not seen good evidence, and I've read a fair bit about this, that once you get beyond 150, you can keep all decisions decentralized. And once you say some things need to be centralized, then it's a matter of how you do it. And it's going to be some version of government that conflicts with aspects of libertarianism. Well, it could be companies, right? It could be more market-driven, which is the idea of anarchism, that you don't give any centralized entity a monopoly over violence. And then if you think that the markets are efficient at delivering, especially in this 21st century and beyond, where a market could have perfect information about people. So one of the issues is that you can manipulate markets because there's not perfect information, but now in the digital age, we can be higher bandwidth participants in the market. So if you're choosing between different security companies, or you're choosing between different providers of different services, you could do so more efficiently and more effectively in the digital space. So you could kind of imagine it, but we haven't successfully done it without governments. Yeah. And I think there's a practical once you get beyond 150, you also start specializing. It just is a matter of fact. You don't have everybody isn't growing their own food. Some people grow the food and other people do other things. And you come across a lot of the problems that started at the agricultural revolution. And whether you say that it's a company that's solving it or a government, the problems are going to be very similar. And I've not read anything that to my satisfaction explains how you deal with that. Well, there's underlying principles of libertarianism, which is putting priority at the freedom of the individual, right? And that's a compelling notion. Yeah. Whenever I do these various political compass things that put you on two axes,

on the authoritarian libertarian axis, I am way down on the libertarian side as a left libertarian. So my tendencies are always anti-authoritarian and towards that option when it makes sense. So I sympathize with that a lot.

Another question from Reddit asks David what issues he disagrees with you on.

Is there something? I have no idea.

Okay, that's great. There you go. There's no issues. Perfect agreement.

What's your view on Tesla? That's a good opportunity to ask. What do you think is strengths and weaknesses of Elon Musk? You mentioned Twitter. Have you paid your \$8?

I have not paid my \$8. I don't see the point in paying for it. I have no problem paying for services. I use a ton of services. I'll try the free. I'll go to the paid. Right now, so the way I used to use the verified feed was I would post a tweet and then the next day when I review what's going on on my social media, I would look at the replies to the tweet, which would give me a mix of replies from verified and unverified people. But then I would also look at the verified and see who that are verified public folks have responded to me or maybe I want to engage with whatever the case may be. I don't even understand why I would look at the verified feed anymore, so I never do because it's random folks who I don't know. It sort of lost its utility to me.

Yeah, sorry to interrupt, but the idea is if everybody who's human pays the \$8, it shows to you that it's not bots. It's at least humans.

From the reports about the number of people that have bought the blue check mark, I think we may be a thousand years from enough signups in order to make that sort of like a reality. That was the idea. That was the idea. It's an interesting idea. Honestly, from my experience, obviously, I was seeing all sorts of attack comments, some of which were, I'm sure, from bots. But I'm ignoring all of those comments anyway, so it really didn't affect my experience that much. I mean, here's the thing about Elon. And I say this, people sometimes are like, David, you obviously hate Elon or you obviously love Elon. I was an investor in Tesla starting in 2015. I've since sold all my shares. Great run. I'm on my second Tesla right now. I probably won't get a third one because I think that electric vehicle technology is now maturing such that when my lease is up, I'm going to have many more options with the range and charging network that's important to me. But I could be wrong. Maybe, I don't know. I have no, the cults of personality around people, they mean nothing to me. So for me, it's just like people are people. Nobody has only good ideas. Fine. I think that what Elon Musk did accelerating and pushing forward the battery and electric vehicle technology is unbelievable. It's a one person wrecking ball in the best sense of saying, we're not going to slow play this and do, okay, now Toyota hasn't actually entered, but now whoever, we've got a 90 mile range car. And next year, it'll be 110. And it's just like, we're doing this right now. You can compete or you can opt out and look at what's happened. Fantastic. On the Twitter side of things, I don't really get the whole plan. I don't know if it started maybe as kind of a goof of some kind. And it developed into, I guess I have to buy it. And I think something about it ended up with, there was a clause invoked where I think he did try to get out of buying it, but then was forced to to some degree. Yeah, he was forced. The way Twitter used to work was you followed people. And when you looked at your feed, you either saw the posts from the people you were following in reverse chronological order or posts from the people you followed algorithmically tailored to what you're most likely to want to see. And if you didn't follow someone, you generally wouldn't

see their posts unless it was like a sponsored tweet or someone you follow quoted or retweeted them. Fine. The for you feed, TikTok, I believe first had a so-called for you feed. The idea is this is stuff you might like based on, I don't know what, either demographic data about you, your other habits, whatever. And so it's useless to me. It's just, it's just basically mostly right wing content that is not interesting. Why do you think that is? I mean, so the signals that are used to generate the for you page is looking at all your likes, all your comments, all your blocks and mutes and all that. I mean, I don't know what it's looking at. Okay.

So it's supposed to be very pleasant for you. I'm sure other people go, wow, this for you thing is awesome. And like if you had insert some right wing or sitting here, they would go, Twitter used to suppress right wing voices. And now finally, they're getting the fair shake that they deserve in the for you feed. Okay. I mean, I wonder if there's left wing folks setting their feelings of Elon aside that are enjoying the for you page. That's a really important question because it's supposed to be people on the left and people on the right should be enjoying the for you page. Sure. Yeah. I mean, so for me, my thought on Elon is some incredible successes. I don't know about Twitter. I do think that I don't believe Elon is a right winger. And when you see interviews with him, certainly at least socially and in many ways culturally, seems very moderate or even somewhat on the left in my experience. So I don't think it's Elon's a right winger. I don't think that's not an interesting critique. It does seem though that throughout the Twitter escapade, he certainly ended up closer to some voices that may be influencing him in a particular way. That's giving some people that impression, you know, but as far as like the Elon hate or the Elon love, it's just it's just a person who's done some interesting things, some of which I like and some of which I could kind of leave leave aside. I have seen folks drift towards the right more in response to just the viciousness of attacks from the left. So you do think he's drifted towards the right?

So I don't think at the core, but I think on the surface. I think Joe Rogan has as well on the surface because maybe you can correct me, but it feels like people on the left attack more viciously. That has not been my experience.

Let me know because my sense was that they attack people on the left viciously as well. Left attacks its own because you're not progressive enough. It's just this kind of bullying that happens very intensely. No, you're 100% right that when the left has attacked me, it's almost as vicious as when the right attacks me. The difference in my experience is it's a smaller contingent on the left that's willing to levy those attacks against me, but I'm on the left. So to some degree, you could say, well, that's to be expected. There is toxicity on the left. But it's intense, isn't it? And that's what I mean, like the attacks on people who are on the left, just you're not left enough.

Yeah, that's no. And it is a small number of people.

I can't deny that that is absolutely a real phenomenon. And depending on what sort of topics you take on publicly, you are going to suffer the wrath of that to a greater or lesser degree. But with all of these things, what I always go back to is, I probably would have more disagreements with Rogan today than the last time I was on his show, which was at the beginning of the pandemic. And I've done clips critical of things that he has said, substantive, of course. To me, it's sort of like, oh, yeah, I could sit down with him and do a podcast. And it would be zero big deal. And I would tell him, I stand by everything I said about what you said,

and I would say it to you right now. There are people who write to me and go, oh, man, things must be really, really tense now. If you were to, Rogan would never have you on because you disagreed. I'm sure he's just not thinking of me. I'm not the most important thing to Joe Rogan. I think both of us would be able to sit down and talk about every one of my criticisms. It would not be taken personally. And then we would move on and it would be the next day. You get attacked a lot. How do you not let that break you mentally?

I don't know. So let's see. I try to, I mean, I'm in a toxic space. The news and politics, partisan news and politics, partisan news and politics on the internet with a social media component, just completely and totally toxic. From a personal perspective, when I'm done producing my last show of the week until Monday, I try to completely tune out from news and politics altogether and also make an effort to just not look at feedback and what's going on. I also really limit my visibility. I don't need to read every comment. I don't need to look at every email or every tweet. I have 15 minutes each day where I go through my social media platforms, look at generally what has the reaction been, maybe include that in my assessment of how I want to tackle a certain issue if I missed a good point or something like that and basically try to move on. When something like we talked about at the beginning happens, it becomes obsessive. I mean, it's unhealthy, right? Where I'm going, oh my god, who's attacking me now and scrolling? I'm sweating. It's horrible. But I think just limiting exposure to that and remembering that it is impossible to please everybody. I'd really rather have fresh, genuine views each day rather than views that are restricted and flattened by what I perceive to be people's preferences. Can you speak a little more to the full process of creating the David Pakman show? Do you wake up because you're doing five shows a week? I have the Letterman schedule, which means I do five shows in four days. I shoot Monday to Thursday, but we're doing five episodes. Basically, our guests we schedule in advance. I'm picking six to eight stories each day that are like I said, a blend of stuff I think will be interesting, things I want to talk about, and things where it's being discussed at one layer and I want to go deeper on it. And I feel like I'm able to do that. I choose those stories in the morning, record in the early afternoon, and we put the show out by that afternoon. What's the preparation? What's the, how do you take notes? Are you on a sheet of paper? No sheets of paper anymore. I used to do sheets of paper. I found something about it, like it worked, the tactile nature of it. It became inconvenient for sharing the notes with my team. But basically, we use a wiki type system. It's called Media Wiki, which is basically like a Wikipedia clone. Old school. Yeah, old school. So we can have pages for every guest, every topic. Oh, that's interesting. I haven't heard that. Yeah, I don't know anyone else who's using it. It works really well. It's so fast and it takes up almost no space. So it just is a really good tool. When my team, you know, when we book a guest and they have notes from the publicist, they'll put it in there and then I can access it. So I'm basically working off of notes rather than a script. I'll pull any audio, visual stuff that I want so that that's available. And it's, I mean, it's really a very seamless, you know, we're doing this every day, four days a week. And so we have it down to a well-oiled machine. Where do you get ideas from? Everywhere. I have a bunch of subreddits that I follow that I think are talking about interesting things. I have a curated list for which I still use Twitter. And it is very good for this. It's a curated private list of journalists that I think are doing interesting work. So I'll see what's there. Look at the sort of standard news reporting

wire services, AP and Reuters, glance at what everything from Drudge to CNN to whoever is covering that day. Look at Google News. How do you try to fact check stuff on your show? So like is there sources or is there a process? I always try to get to a primary source first and foremost for the facts of the story. And then I'll use other tools for background research. Oftentimes Wikipedia's footnotes, I find to be useful tools. Chat GPT is a good one. You really have to fact check it. But it'll give you ideas of where to do the fact checking, which I think is fantastic. Sometimes it gives me information that's flat out wrong. And when you ask for the source, it's like, oh, yeah, that actually is not real. Which is, hey, it's part of the process. And then when there's like an expertise type of thing, if it's a breaking legal matter, I'll just call like a friend who's a lawyer or call a friend who's a doctor or something like that. If it lends itself to that. Let me ask you about the nature of truth. Do you think it's becoming more and more difficult to know what is true and will become continuously continue to get more difficult, especially with GPT? I think the big difficulty is in getting people to agree as to what is a statement of fact and what is a statement of opinion. I think once we can do that, reasonable people can more or less agree on how to get to the truth. Or if we can't get to it, at least figure out how we would if the information were available. But the bigger challenge I'm having is someone will call in with an opinion, but say they want to talk about fact. And I have to explain to them, you're talking about an opinion and not a fact. And this goes back to the lack of critical thinking and lack of media literacy. But that's the bigger challenge for me right now. But I mean, I think the big statements are always going to be somewhat opinions. Like was the 2020 election fair? I think any answer to that is an opinion. I disagree. If we define fair. Well, yes. So then I don't think it's possible to define fair in a way that's not several paragraphs where each sentence now has facts, right? So what do you mean by fair? Is it who can show up to vote? What was the process of how easy it is to vote? Was there actual cheating going on? And different like what is the evidence of that cheating? You have to actually get to the actual like details of a thing. High level, you know, everything is just going to be an opinion, it feels like. And you can approximate that to be like, it's a well-founded opinion. Well, most of science is an opinion, even physics is an opinion. So like, I think there's a threshold beyond which an opinion becomes like, uh, this is a pretty reliable thing to assume for now that this is true. Okay. So let me revise. So I think maybe better said, I think that the difficulty I mean, the process you described is probably the right process and it's exhausting for mundane things. And that causes major problems. If we were to say, is it better for the economy to have a tax rate on people making over a million dollars? That's 20% or 50%. Okay. What do we mean by better for the economy? It's not an overwhelming task to decide on that. We could say, well, we'll say it's better for the economy by looking at what was the unemployment rate based on the tax rate on million, you know, people earning a million a year and what was GDP and whatever. Okay. We've, we've agreed. This is a statement. We are now in the realm of just determining what is given the parameters that we've established. I think that that's, that's relatively doable. The issue is with the bigger ones like you're talking about where what do we mean by a fair election and fair in whose eyes and but I am with you that it often devolves into a conversation about opinions about what is fair rather than an ascertainment of the facts. Yeah. And it feels like maybe avoiding some of these big, maybe there's some trigger words too,



maybe avoiding them allows you to actually talk about the facts and through that educate yourself and learn about like whether the virus leaked from a lab or not. To me, it was always a super interesting question. I don't know why everybody got super touchy about it. Mostly people I know colleagues, biologists thought it's pretty good likelihood that it leaked from a lab, given everything. The evidence is not there for either one. And so like you should be able to just openly talk about it unless you're in a high political office where there could be geopolitical consequences to your statements. But in general, it's an interesting question. You should be able to talk about it. But there's no, first of all, there's not many facts around there, unfortunately. And a lot of very conclusive statements about especially in the early days were just opinions. And so you have to the idea of what is true and not becomes a little even mentioning the word truth in that context. It feels divisive. Yeah, I completely agree with you, which is strange. You think it shouldn't. One of the really good opening questions that I've had work to my advantage when talking with people who I know disagree with me about a contentious topic is how do you think we would figure out X? And it often gets people thinking first collaboratively. And obviously, we might have very different opinions. But with something like the COVID lab leak, I think it's an interesting one. Because if you say, okay, maybe it leaked, maybe it didn't. How would we figure that out? Who would we trust to weigh in on that? What evidence would count? Now we're kind of on the same team. And then if we can establish that, then we're on a search for capital T truth together or whatever. It's kind of pie in the sky. But in some conversations, I've actually had success with that. And then you can kind of realize if there's no amount of evidence that's going to prove a show to you that you're wrong in your current opinion, that that's probably a really bad sign for you. It's a waste. It may be a waste to pursue the conversation further at that point. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Oh, so okay, you think Trump was a good president. How do you determine that?

And what evidence might exist that would change your mind? There is no evidence. Trump was the best president ever. I think the conversation is probably done. Except Abraham Lincoln. You mentioned Israel and Palestine. Well, what do you think about the situation in Israel and Palestine? Something you've thought about, spoken about for quite a time. Do you think we'll ever see peace in this part of the world? I don't know. I mean, I could say yes. It's another answer. I could say yes. You know, one of the problems is, and I'll give, you may not know that there are people on the left of my audience who call me a Netanyahu shill, even though I've never been a supporter of Netanyahu and I'm on the left. I just don't think that some of the kind of black and white characterizations about Israel are even remotely accurate. And I think most people, it's become a sort of litmus test. Are you criticizing Israel enough? Are you showing us that you're actually left-wing? I don't do any of that stuff. I should really look at the situation for what it is. That's become a litmus test in American politics, in the spectrum of American politics. Yes. My view, big picture, is that I don't think we're going to really get anywhere until some pre-negotiated terms are set and the parties to do the negotiating are all good faith parties. For example, I don't think Israel's right-wing party, Likud, is a particularly good faith arbiter of peace because I think Likud benefits from there not being peace and the threat of violence. And there is violence. It's not just the threat

of violence. I don't think Hamas is going to be an arbiter of peace for the Palestinian people either. I think the Palestinian Authority is a question mark. I'm not sure. So I think that there need to be some preconditions that would need to be set with regard to everything from settlements to a lot of this minutia. Big picture, though, if I imagine what the most likely solution looks like, it doesn't mean it's a perfect solution. And obviously, it's a solution many people will say it's not going to happen. I think it's a solution where the borders are similar to what was being discussed in the Clinton era to some degree. As many of the settlements as possible have to go, understanding that some of the bigger ones are just not going to go and there's going to have to be meaningful land swaps with which Yasser Arafat seemed to be amenable to when he weighed in on it. I believe it was in the 90s. The topic of the Temple Mount and Jerusalem, etc., is a complicated one. But I think that almost certainly East Jerusalem is going to have to be part of an eventual Palestinian state. We can go as far as we want to with a lot of this stuff. What role does U.S. have to play in this coming to the table with good faith parties?

I don't know whether I go back and forth between believing that the U.S. should play a big role to the U.S. should play essentially no role whatsoever. Because, of course, of the funding of Israel that the U.S. provides, it's not that I have a personal problem with American involvement and somebody like Bill Clinton was arguably relatively well positioned to try to make something happen. It's more just, will it be seen as credible on the global stage? And that's, I think, the most important thing. Because at the end of whatever negotiation takes place, both sides need to agree that this is where we are renouncing all past claims. And in the future, if there's a disagreement, we can't go back to that thing from the 80s or the 90s. That's just like a critical piece of this. Yeah. It has to be stable and materialized into something stable over years. Yes. Another difficult conflict going on in the world is the war in Ukraine.

What do you think about the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022?

I don't pretend to be an expert on this issue. I think you probably know more about this than I do just from the brief conversation we had before we started filming. My view as a general observer of geopolitics and the way that this area, this part of the world is related to American presidents over the last several cycles is I don't think it's controversial to say that this was a war of aggression, an invasion of aggression and active aggression by Vladimir Putin. I do believe that if Trump had been reelected, Putin may have seen himself as having other tools with which to try to expand influence that may have been different than geographic pursuits, geographic pursuits. But we don't know that for sure. I also have a really hard time imagining what the end of this looks like. That's very scary because sometimes the most benign end seems to be that Putin ends

up out of power either through no longer being alive or deposed in some way. It doesn't feel like that latter is super likely. The former, there's reports about his health. I don't know accurate they are. It's just hard to imagine a face-saving exit that is going to be even remotely, what's the word? It's not even a question of acceptable. It's not satisfying either, just not tragic, I guess is what I'm looking for. In terms of Putin speaking to the Russian people and being able to figure out what to say, what kind of narrative to say why this war made sense. The same with the Ukrainian side to figure out how to exit this war.

To some degree, it requires Russian troops leaving Ukraine and that is somewhat under the control. Of course, it's not up to Ukraine whether the initiative continues, but what I am

not thrilled with are some of the reflexive. If Trump had been in power instead of Joe Biden, a lot of the reflexive comments about, oh, if you say Ukraine is just acting defensively, you're supporting neo-Nazis or some of these things that have come out of the American Republican Party seem both wacky and they would be saying completely different things if Trump happened to be in the Oval Office. They're really proxy attacks on Joe Biden. Well, that, in some sense, Ukraine is also kind of political litmus test of how you speak about it, I think, because of the huge amount of funding that's going from US to Ukraine. Maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that this topic has become politicized already. 100%. There are people like Marjorie Taylor-Green and others saying we should be doing nothing for Ukraine, Zelensky is a comedian, and we're supporting neo-Nazis. That's it, full stop. You either subscribe to that or you don't, and it very quickly becomes as partisan as so many other issues. The most disappointing thing is that some of these issues become incredibly divisive, but they're simple, like, for example, a conspiracy theory that we know isn't true. It shouldn't be divisive because it's so simple. Other issues become divisive, and they are simplified, but in reality, they're extraordinarily complex, and you lose the ability to talk about the complexity because they're becoming partisan. Do you think there will always be war in the world? As a bunch of folks on the subreddit that were interested in your different complex perspectives on foreign policy. So let's talk about war. When you look at the war in Ukraine, you look at what's going on in Israel in Palestine, you look at the wars across the world. Do you think there will always be war? As the redditor put it, is it a necessary evil in the game of geopolitics? I used to have what I now believe is an extremely naive perspective, which is that if we somehow, if intelligent aliens arrived here, it would be so momentous for homo sapiens that all of our differences would immediately be exposed to so insignificant, we would never fight again, and we would realize that intelligent life. Then I spoke to people who deal in space exploration and other scientists, and they all said, David, that's extraordinarily naive. There would be a period during which this was as momentous as you're imagining, and then it would become normal, and then we would go back to many of the same conflicts that we have now, sectarian, et cetera. I think that in all likelihood, there will always be conflict between factions, whether it's what we currently think of as war, probably not. I mean, it seems as though the tactics will evolve and it will be less about missiles and I don't know where it's going to go. I don't know whether it's going to become more biological or cyber or certainly something we haven't even considered yet, but I think there will always be conflicts we would refer to in that way. Do you agree with Chomsky on his general harsh criticism of US foreign policy in war, that many actions, military actions in the United States are criminal in nature, almost terrorist in nature? I am not, it's been a decade or more since I've read any Chomsky, and I don't keep up with everything that he has recently said, so I don't want to mischaracterize any of it. In general, Americans are sold the view that we're the good guys spreading freedom across the world, and Chomsky takes a perspective that, yeah, but if you look at the number of civilians you kill while doing it, it's incomparable to any other military actions across the world. So I very much disagree with those who take the view that the US is this wonderful global police force that's spreading democracy and fixing problems very, very much wrong. I think where I've had disagreements with Chomsky in the past is more he seems to frame

the

US as a uniquely bad actor in some of these cases, and I think it's more an outcropping of the size and wealth of the US and less about uniquely negative intentions, and so I think that would be my general disagreement with Chomsky based on stuff I read a decade ago. Well, he says that he lives in the United States, he's an American, and so he feels his focus of criticism should be in America, and I think that's one of the great things about being an American and being in America is the freedom to criticize harshly, while being a university professor, by the way. He's basically the embodiment of why 10 years are a really valuable thing. I agree. Whether you agree with him or not. Question from Reddit. Ask David what he plans for his garden this year. Is this a joke or is this a nothing? It's not a joke. I got into gardening a few years ago. Honestly, I'm with the baby, I can't do a garden this year, and I have a lot of travel coming up, so everything would die, but I did start to try to figure out gardening. If you're stressed by the toxicity of the social media world, gardening is a great hobby. It really is, but it is extraordinarily time consuming, so I have no garden planned this year. Other books or maybe movies in your life that had a big impact on you, that you're thinking about that diet. Has there been stuff you read? Forget about even just books, like blogs or writers or just sources of information that molded you into the intellectual, into the political thing that you are. It's so hard. This is sort of like you win an Oscar and you want to make sure you thank all the right people. I read so much and have been reading for so long that it's really hard to say, but I think certainly, for me, narrative nonfiction has been a fantastic genre to learn not only about history, but also about people and psychology. Very often when people say, I don't really read, what can you recommend to me that might be interesting? Depending on knowing them to some degree, I'll give recommendations there. In terms of just things I picked up recently that I think are interesting, I've been reading a bunch of Neil Postman. I read a Jenny O'Dell has a new book on time and the concept of saving time, spending time, et cetera. She just published it. Super interesting. I just read Lansing's book about the Shackleton voyage in Antarctica in 1914, 15 and 16. Super interesting. I'm really all over the map. I have that one on audiobook. I've been meaning to listen to it. It's very interesting and it seems inconceivable how these guys survived. It's completely inconceivable and yet they did. It kind of inspires you to think of space exploration and taking on similar kinds of risky and dangerous journeys. In narrative nonfiction, I grew with you very much. I've been reading a lot of 20th century history about Stalin and about Hitler. Risenfall, the third Reich, I've read twice now and I recommend. What did you get out of reading at the second time? So, the second time I listened to the audiobook as I ran, I get the same thing from it as I get maybe reading Man's Search for Meaning, which is all the troubles of day to day in the modern world kind of fade away and dissipate when I'm thinking about the, you know, basically the embodiment of evil at scale at that recent time in human history. So, it makes me sort of appreciate all the, it fills me with gratitude to have all the freedoms, all the just simple joys of life that we have today. And I think the second time I was, as I was reading it, because William Shire was there, he's the author, he was there through the whole thing, you start to pick up little details as opposed to like big things, you start to pick up the little quirks of how history turns and just like these little events, you notice of the dynamics between people in a room during a meeting with Hitler, you just notice these little things that are mentioned, because he

was either there directly or hurtled the next day. So, you get, that's why to me, Risenfall, the third Reich is interesting, is because it's by a guy who was there, who's reporting on it, versus a sort of a more distant, displaced retelling. And I also like biographies, I've been a big fan of biographies. And Walter Isaacson has written some incredible ones, that's Steve Jobs and Einstein, all that kind of stuff.

Victor Frankel's book is one I've read a bunch of times. And it's so short. And you know, reading in general, I know a lot of people who read way more than I do. And I also know a lot of people who don't read at all. I mean, they haven't read a book since college, essentially. To me, it's almost like the amount I get from it, it's almost like a secret weapon, where when I think, you know, in two or three or 400 pages, which I can read in whatever, 10 days or however long it takes reading 30 pages a day, the amount of information, insights into so many aspects of the human psyche that I can get, it's sort of like, it's not like I'm in a competition for anything in particular with anybody, I just do my show. But it's sort of like, if I'm reading dozens of books a year, and you're reading zero, I'm exposed to so many different things and ideas that are not even in your universe. It just seems like the power of reading just seems overwhelming. I had speaking or getting attacked, I had a fun time getting attacked a few months ago for publishing a reading list. So I'm reading at least a book a week, read 18 or 19 books from the beginning of the year. You got attacked for the books you chose or for this? I don't know for what, but it became quite viral. Attacked for reading, that's something. So basically what happened is that people, I actually don't, it's not worth folks who know, know, fair, folks who don't, don't even worry about it. It's the, what I really loved about being attacked for it is it shows that you can get attacked for anything, apparently. So it's not like I did something wrong. It was kind of a beautiful thing. And it was just the most intensely beautiful display of absurdity of Twitter and the internet, that there would be, there were articles written about me with the book list.

There's no bad books on it. The thing I was being mocked for is reading Dostoevsky, reading stuff that sounds like a high school reading list. Oh, I see. Or all these kinds of aspects of the reading list, which doesn't stand up to any sort of legitimate kind of criticism. But the fact that people are just looking for single words or single aspects of a tweet and so on to criticize, it actually forced me to, because I released a video about, you know, summarizing my takeaway from one of the books and I've been meaning to do more and more, but every time I start to like, want to record it, I have this negative feeling.

They kind of ruin the fun of sharing with others. I know exactly what you're talking about. My advice on that is don't do it. Just don't record it. Yeah. Because, and, and is that what you basically, yeah. But I, I think time cures it, but for now I decided not to. Yes. It's just until, until I feel joy when I do it. Yeah. We are in such a privileged position to even be able to do this sort of thing, right? I have taken on projects and then it sort of sounds good or I end up doing it because there's some third party that brings the idea and I feel like I can't really say no or whatever. And then when I get in front of the camera or I have to write something for a while, I did a newspaper column that I hated doing. I realized that I'm ruining the exact thing that I have worked to build, which is that I can just do whatever I want. Why am I doing this? And sometimes it takes me a week to realize it. Sometimes it takes me a year, but just don't do it. That's the, in this case, in particular, it's also the, there's a private thing I enjoy,

which is reading. Right. And if sharing that private thing you enjoy is not fun, then just don't share it. That that's, um, yeah, there's certain things, there's certain private things that should remain private. That's like, which is one of the first things ever. I'm the same person privately as I am publicly, but the books, it's like, man, I don't get to share, I guess through these conversations

I can share some of the stuff I'm reading and enjoying it because it sucks. It sucks to get attacked for stuff and it sucks to get attacked for stuff you love. Yeah, especially reading. I mean, it's, you know, that's the bottom of the barrel. I have these ideas where I'll go, you know, maybe for my next thing, I'll go from politics, which is so toxic. I'll go to travel blogging because I, there's so many travel bloggers I follow and there's so many interesting places. And then I go, wait a second, I like traveling and just hanging out. Now traveling is going to be my job and now I've got to bring two cameras with me and I've got to get shots and I've got to film my food and I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to do what I'm doing, but then I'll travel when I want to take a vacation. And of course, some of it could be fun. I mean, I have to say when I did the one video on a book in 1984, I really enjoyed it. The whole process was fun. It was, um, I don't think I've ever thought as hard about a book when I had to make a video about it because I had to like, you know, I read 1984, I don't know how many times, probably five, 10 times. I don't remember. I read Animal Farm way more. But I don't think I was like, what do I think about? Like what are the key takeaways for me? I didn't really know. Like if you asked me what I think about, even Animal Farm, because I haven't done that one. And I've read that one, I don't know, over 50 times. It's probably my favorite book. It's like, I would have to struggle and making a video about it, basically a little mini lecture forced me to actually have an opinion about the details of it and to do enough research to think like, okay, what is the historical context of this book? I mean, it allowed me to say interesting and to think interesting stuff about the book. I found it to be really rewarding to basically, the old Feynman thing, one of the best ways to learn is to teach. Yeah. I can't think of one thing I would say about Animal Farm. And I read it again, not that long ago, but I don't know what comments there are. You kind of have a generic comment. Yeah. Like authoritarianism and so on, whatever. But there could be interesting quirks of the book and the characters and how corruption happens. You could say all kinds of stuff that it may be contrasting it. Like even when 1984 allowed me to contrast with Brave New World and how 1984 was politicized and how it's used by the Republican Party of today. You could say a lot of interesting stuff if you like to think about it and write it down or sheet of paper. Maybe you don't need to make a video about it. So I found it to be really rewarding in general. So I probably will do more of it, but not always. That doesn't mean professionally, just like with the travel blogging. I agree with that. I mean, you get threatened a lot. You get attacked a lot online. Do you think about your mortality? Well, the other day I went to the doctor and he said, you know, next physical, we're going to be talking about a lot of new things. And so I was thinking about it a lot that day. No, I mean, it's funny. I recently did a bunch of estate stuff. And when you have intellectual property, there's a question of like, okay, I have my assets, but also if I died tomorrow, especially in a particularly fiery death, my YouTube channel would probably, for a while, generate more money because it would be like, oh my goodness, this person died in a terrible... What happens with a future revenue stream and all these different things? And it got

me thinking about legacy and about the fact that people who do this sort of thing, it's kind of a new thing in a sense. And so, you know, if you work at ABC News, at some point you just retire and someone else fills in for you. How does my career wind down given like, I don't actually know the answer. I'm not sure. What is it? I just one day stopped posting videos, but all my content stays up, getting fewer and fewer views. Or do I delete everything? Do I? I don't know. What is the legacy? If you die, I mean, so my trip to Ukraine, because I knew I was going to the front, is the first time I did, I recorded a video if I die. And I posted it and I give instructions to folks what to do. So like, there's a closure. But it's an interesting process what happens to your... At which point does GPT take over and continue tweeting for David Parfait? Well, the tweeting I care less about right now, unless blue becomes something unbelievable, I'm less worried about Twitter. But some of my audience members have been saying, you know, some of these tools, David, are getting good enough that we could clone your voice and also make it match video. And with scripts, you could just keep pumping out content even if you were gone. And I said, now that I'm interested in, that I want to learn more about. Boy, it's going to be a weird future. What advice do you have to young folks that are facing this future? Almost always, it's some version of start right away. And that applies in so many different ways. So if you're thinking about, oftentimes the context is people want to do what I do. And I always say, do not sit around for a year thinking about lighting. This is how you never do anything. And I dozens of people who I felt obligated to talk to on the phone because of a personal connection, I go through all the advice and I can tell they're not going to do it. It's already sounding too complicated. And so instead, they'll sort of say, well, I got to get the right lighting and the right room and blah, blah, blah. The best thing you can do no matter what you're doing is just start right away. And that applies in this business. And in whatever else you're doing, if you want to learn a new thing, find a new hobby, the ability to get data right away about what's working, what's not working and whether you even like this approach that you're taking is so valuable and it will allow you to iterate. And the sooner you do it, the cost to a change of direction will also be lower. If there's any, I don't do like self-help or generic advice type stuff, but the one thing that applies in so many situations is just try it right away and iterate from there. Yeah, start today and then do it every day. Or decide, hey, you know what, I figured out I don't actually want to do it. Yeah, hence iterate. Yeah. Well, usually you'll discover you do. Do you think we'll make it out of the century? Humanity? Human civilization? Out of the select to 2100? Yeah, how much we got, 80 years? Yeah, 77. I think we're gonna make it. You think so? Yeah. What are the biggest threats facing our civilization? If not wokeism? If it's not wokeism, it's hard to say. I actually think that if you believe that we are on an inflection point of sorts in changes to society and acceleration of technology, et cetera, I think it's really tough to know in 2090 what will actually be the biggest threat. So I don't know. It's so cliché to say nuclear and climate change and another pandemic. Technologically, our world might look so different that it's almost unimaginable. What it means to be human is unimaginable. And also, the degree that we make progress out into space is also unimaginable. I think space is super interesting. And there's people on both the left and right who for different reasons are kind of not into the whole space exploration thing. The people I hear from the ones on the right think it's just kind of dumb. The ones on the left think it's an excuse not to fix problems here.

**[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #375 - David Pakman: Politics of Trump, Biden, Bernie, AOC, Socialism & Wokeism**

And also, they say it's the plaything of billionaires, which is another funny kind of concept. Yeah. I mean, someone's got to pay for it. Why not be people who have a lot of money to? It could either be billionaires or governments that are trillionaires. Somebody has to pay for big ambitious moonshot projects. To me, the most interesting thing is that in getting closer to the next step of space exploration, we may well learn things that can then be used to improve circumstances here. For me, it's not one or the other. And I recently read a long piece about why not Mars? Because it's terrible in every way for supporting life. Okay. So that's one perspective. But still, in so exploring, who knows what we might end up learning?

So I'm big on it. I don't share the view of some on the left about it.

So I guess to add to your advice, young people, if a thing seems terrible, you still might want to consider doing it. I would say so. Yeah.

How many things have seen? I mean, listen, there are so many trips where the day before I say, why am I doing this? The jet lag? I've got to do this and that. And now who, if my guest host falls through, I should just stay and work. And I go, hold on.

You do this every time. Just go. You never regret it. You learn something. You try something. I never regret the trip.

This hopefully applies to the conversation we had today. David, I'm a big fan of yours.

Thank you so much for talking today. Thank you for being patient with me. We tried to talk earlier. Please continue doing what you're doing. Please continue being objective and thoughtful and fearless on the internet. Thank you. Big fan of yours as well. I appreciate it.

Thanks for listening to this conversation with David Pakman. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Mahatma Gandhi. What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty or democracy? Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.