THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

RECONCILING AND HEALING AMERICA

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Opening Remarks:

JOHN ALLEN
President, The Brookings Institution

Keynote Session:

JOE STRAUS
Former Speaker, Texas House of Representatives

Panel 1: Policy Solutions for a Path Towards Healing:

MODERATOR: DARRELL M. WEST
Vice President and Director, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

CAMILLE BUSETTE
Senior Fellow and Director, Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative
The Brookings Institution

CAROL GRAHAM
Leo Pasvolsky Senior Fellow and Research Director, Global Economy and Development
The Brookings Institution

ELAINE KAMARCK
Senior Fellow and Founding Director, Center for Effective Public Management
The Brookings Institution

Panel 2: How Civil Society Can Help the Country Overcome Divisions:

MODERATOR: FIONA HILL
Robert Bosch Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, The Brookings Institution

LYNN HEADY
Co-Director of Field Operations, Braver Angels

KATY JOSEPH
Director of Policy and Advocacy, Interfaith Alliance

DANIEL ZIBLATT
Eaton Professor of Government, Harvard University

KELEBOGILE ZVOBGO
Incoming Assistant Professor of Government, College of William & Mary
Founder and Director, International Justice Lab

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is John Allen and I'm the president of the Brookings Institution. And we're so pleased that you could join us today for our event, "Reconciling and Healing America." You know, in our history certain events, inflection points, carry such a weight of significance that we'll always remember where we were when they occurred. For my parents, they could tell me exactly where they were when they learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. My own first inflection point was the assassination of President Kennedy, and later in horribly quick succession the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy. And for my daughters it was the attack on America on September 11, 2001.

These incidents are not just historically memorable, they're watershed moments as well. Everything that follows is different, everything that follows is changed in some manner. Thus it was on January 6, 2021 we experienced our most recent point of national inflection. A reckless call to action resulted in the invasion of the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to prevent the Congress from declaring the results of the 2020 presidential election. And in the immediate aftermath the president of the United States was impeached, the Capitol of the United States became a fortified armed camp not seen since the Civil War. And the inauguration of the 46th president of the United States occurred amidst some of the greatest domestic security challenges and threats in modern American history.

Now, while others will record and analyze the minute details of this dark moment, suffice it to say that every aspect of it pointed to a condition of national division, suspected by many, consciously leveraged by some, and intentionally weaponized by a few. For the briefest of moments the legislative branch of the American democracy was forcibly and violently unseated while engaging in fulfilling its constitutional duty to certify the winner of the recent presidential election.

How can we have come to this moment? What possible convergence of deep seated grievance and frustration and anger could produce this moment of blinding fury? Questions with complex answers to be sure, but what remains clear is that we indeed are at an inflection point in American history. We will all remember where we were on the 6th of January, 2021, because after that, frankly, everything will be different.

In truth the events of the last year have been accelerated by the frustrations of enormous segments of the electorate, long suffering from the effects of economic disenfranchisement and political irrelevance. Years in the making these frustrations have intensely polarized discussions around race and ethnicity and religion and immigration and many other sources of difference in a massively diverse society. As time progressed, the mainstream media, usually the source of unbiased reporting, was demonized and declared the enemy of the people. Meanwhile social media enabled sometimes bizarre conspiracy theories to dominate the attention of so many. And sensational breathless cable news cycles fanned the flames of dissatisfaction into red hot conflagrations. The sides became radicalized, a little at first, but becoming dangerously polarized over time. Mutual respect was replaced by mutual suspicion. With a loss of respect there then followed quickly the loss of civility and an alarming growth of a genuine sense of enmity, one for the other.

Facts too became unmoored from truth and the basis for constructive dialogue was lost. Political parties further ossified the differences as fewer and fewer politicians were elected or re-elected based on a willingness to participate in bipartisan legislation than they were to defend the identity politics of their particular side, seemingly as all costs. Interminable, seemingly irreconcilable, partisan politics produced extremists among the American people and they in turn birthed violent extremists.

The year 2020 was thus the year the match was thrown. This most recent breakdown began first with the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn fostered the near collapse of the U.S. and global economies. These twin disasters accelerated and exacerbated the misery of many Americans already badly beset by their socioeconomic conditions. The response to this pandemic was in turn politicized. And in so doing, it too further polarized and made infinitely more difficult the American pandemic response more broadly. What followed was the alienation of a major segment of Americans from actively participating in relief efforts and from trusting whatsoever in the word of their government. Tens of millions may still refuse to be vaccinated.

This resulted in an ongoing yet truly horrific and nearly unimaginable outcome. Hundreds of thousands dead, millions infected, and the economy on the edge and more unequal and unfair than ever, especially for front line workers, many of whom are persons of color, women, or lower wage individuals. And yet the stark reality is that tens of millions of Americans have a very different — dare I

say very different alternative view and perspective on the seemingly shared events and challenges when compared to their counterparts on the other side of the political spectrum.

Those years of pent up differences finally playing out during the campaign in the 2020 presidential election, conducted during the darkest moments of the global pandemic, was what ultimately was the fire that was lit by the match thrown in 2020. The elections saw more Americans vote than ever before and both candidates surpassed the previous record for the most votes ever received in the history of American elections. And yet soon after, on 6 January, Americans were starting into the abyss of a failed state. And while no one will ever forget where he or she might have been at that moment, of the near failure of the American experiment, most Americans are now deeply concerned with how we as a people and the United States as a nation can step back from the edge of this abyss and begin the national reconciliation and the healing vital to the future of America.

Here then is the true purpose of why we have gathered here today. Vitally, we as fellow Americans must begin to chart a path towards national reconciliation and reunification. And we must do so now. And it must be a conscious national decision. We have to arrest the downward spiral of the loss of respect and civility and the immobilizing polarization of American policies. Efforts will have to begin first with the intentional public embrace of true healing and reconciliation, not just by the new president, but by the Congress, to include an announcement of a national summit on reconciliation and then open and honest discussion about what reconciliation objectives can actually entail and ultimately achieve. Words like respect and civility need once again to find their way into our daily lexicon, just as bipartisanship must again become a political objective, not a sign of political capitulation or appeasement or shame. There's no hope for the American experience otherwise.

While it may well be the most patriotic thing that one can do to pressure your national government when it's going astray, it's a very different argument than actively undermining its success by confusing nationalism with patriotism. Thus the immense responsibility placed on our elected officials at all levels to take up the mantel of responsible leadership, to hold up our higher principles, not our worst impulses. This cannot be overstated.

Now, there will be some in society who will have no interest in reconciliation at all. Their wounds are too fresh, their hatreds are too deep, and the process for healing will take too long. But it has

to begin. Yet for so many reconciliation is an entirely logical and essential sequence and a sequel to the summation of their personal American experience.

With that in mind we must do what many nations and peoples have done around the world during moments like these, we have to listen. Listen first to the pains and the struggles of those on the other side, identify pathways for shared understanding and national reconciliation for those who are willing. Our national pain was long in the building and so it can't be remediated in a very short time. Just being openly and publicly committed to reconciliation and intentionally beginning the effort is itself a tonic, but it will be hard and it will be an emotional journey.

This will require first the combined efforts of national, state, municipal, and local leadership, committed first and foremost to the good will to see the imperative of national reconciliation, and able to lead their respective segments of the society in a genuine effort. And we must hold up leaders, men and women of principle, who are unifiers, those committed to our national healing.

Second, it will require patience and persistence and endurance and the vision to see that even with the seemingly insurmountable differences in American society today, there still remains far more that unites us than divides us. And that capitalizing on these common interests and these values is the best way to find a means of addressing the painful and divisive matters that we face every day in this country.

And, third, there must be a clear-eyed will for justice. Indeed, as evidenced from the 2019 House Judiciary Committee hearings, which for instance brought hundreds of Black Americans to gather in the halls of Congress to hear of slavery reparations, there is a keen necessity to address and answer historic wrongs. More, while the term "social justice" has often been politicized and sometimes diminished, its intentions to offer critical pathways for accountability by dismantling structural inequities and systemic racism cannot be over emphasized. We must not forget the importance of accountability on the road to reconciliation, for indeed peace and justice are inextricably linked.

In closing, on the matters of reconciliation, President Abraham Lincoln is frequently quoted these days, and well he should be, a thread runs throughout his writings and his speeches that clearly pointed to his intent to engage in an effort of national reconciliation after the Civil War that would both recover our fractured union, but also once and for all enfranchise Black Americans, enslaved in a

horrendous system, that as Lincoln said, piled high the wealth of the bondsmen at the end of the blood lash. Tragically, while shot and shell took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans during the Civil War, the cruelest single bullet of that conflict was the one that took the life of Abraham Lincoln. And in that moment the nation and its people for generations to come were robbed of what might have been a new era of true national reconciliation.

So in his all too brief second inaugural address, we not only gain a glimpse into the mind of this great healer, but we can also find the basis to live a resolute dedication reflected in his words, even as we embark on our own necessity and our own journey on national healing and reconciliation.

Let me quote from that inaugural address, for he said, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all of the wealth piled by the bondsman, 200 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk. And until every drop of blood with the lash shall be paid by another with a drawn sword. And as with 3,000 years ago, so still must it be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous all together, with malice towards none, with charity for all, with the firmness and the right as God gives us to see it. Let us strive to finish the work we are in, to bind up our nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his window and orphan. To do all which we may achieve and cherish, a just and lasting peace among ourselves and among all nations, among ourselves and with all nations."

So for the sake of those who have come before and for those fellow Americans searching for a better future today, national reconciliation is the only way we can truly safeguard this nation, both as an idea enshrined in the light of the Constitution and as a country, reflected in the eyes of our children, a country for all of us to enjoy as one people, dedicated to the sacred proposition that all individuals are created equally.

So let me close by offering a word of thanks to our donors for this effort, Care and Michael Saks and John Canning, but especially our lead donor, Brookings Trustee, David Weinberg, whom we have to thank for making this event and this new paper a reality. It was his leadership and his support which truly helped to catalyze our work in this area. Thank you, David.

So, with that, turning to today's events, I'm very pleased to welcome Speaker Joe Straus as our first guest. Speaker Straus served as the speaker of the Texas House of Representatives from

2009 to 2019. He was the first speaker of the House from San Antonio in a century and he's the longest serving Republican speaker in Texas history. He's also a member of the Brookings family as a member of the Board of Trustees. He'll speak for about 25 minutes or so and then we'll turn the floor over to Darrel West, our vice president for Governance Studies, who will begin the first panel.

And a final housekeeping note, we're live — very much live today and we're on the record. And viewers can submit their questions for us by emailing to events@Brookings.edu, or by tweeting @BrookingsInst.

So, with that, Speaker Straus, let me welcome you to today's event, sir.

MR. STRAUS: Thank you. Thank you. Good to be here. Thank you for the invitation to join today, and thanks for that most powerful introduction to today's event. My thanks to Brookings for convening on what is the most critical issue facing our country on a momentous day, a timely day with the U.S. Senate convening for the second impeachment trial of former President Trump.

GENERAL ALLEN: Indeed, as we meet, as we speak, you and I, this moment, that process is unfolding.

Sir, as you have watching the political environment unfold over the last several years, in your view, what are some of the principle causal factors for what has divided us as we have seen so vividly among Americans and that we can be alive to these challenges and ultimately be part of the solution. What have you seen that are the causal factors?

MR. STRAUS: Well, in the political world, where I come from, I think the first reason there's so much political partisan divide is because there's an incentive to be harshly partisan, to be 100% divided, one tribe or the other. I think most of the people who run for legislatures, most of the people who run for Congress, are running in districts that were drawn to elect a member of one party or another. Even in the United States Senate, which obviously are not drawn by district, most of those races, maybe changing some now, but most of those Senate races aren't all that competitive. And I think it's a product of this system that two of the most recognizable laws that were passed in the last 10 or 12 years, the Affordable Care Act in 2010, the major tax bill, the tax cuts that were passed in 2017, both of those monumental were passed without a single vote from either party. And I think that is a poisonous way to legislate and it's a way to — it's not a way to promote laws that will likely be long standing.

Our leaders clearly have struggled to find bipartisan agreement on the biggest issues facing our country and most of the people in our legislatures and most members of Congress have a lot more to fear in losing a primary election than they do facing someone from the other party in a general election. For instance, when I ran for re-election to the Texas legislature, every two years I most of the time was faced with well-funded primary opponents. And the major beef against me, time and time again, was that I wasn't sufficiently partisan, I wasn't conservative enough, I was too conciliatory to the minority party. Fortunately, those arguments weren't very effective here where I live, and in most cases I never even had a Democrat opponent in November.

But there's a cautionary tale to all of this. And just in the little micro example of where I live — the last time I ran for office was 2016, but since then this area has become more competitive between the parties. And while Republicans still hold the seat here, it is a lot more competitive. So I think the lesson more generally is that communities change and the voters change. And when office holders get into the habit of talking to only one segment of one party, they can sure be caught flat footed when that change occurs. An example of changes could be in Virginia, which was, in my time in office, reliably a red state. It's now pretty reliably a blue state I think. Iowa, for example, just the opposite. It was, you know, sometimes up for grabs, now it looks like it's pretty red.

And you touched on this in your introduction, I think a lot of this falls on the media as well and changes there. As more information becomes available, people gravitated toward media that just reinforces their world view. These media outlets have incentives to make us more partisan and to hold onto us. And they've made us more resentful of the other side. I think there's been research that shows that the more political media you consume the more misconceptions about the other side that you have. And that's a serious problem for all of us, even the nonpartisan — what we would refer to as the mainstream media. The outlets that cover the state governments that I was involved in, they tend to focus mainly on the conflict, giving the impression to casual observers that every single issue and every day is nothing more than a ten round boxing match. And we all know that that's not really the truth.

And to many people, I think it's easy to see that they argument and the conflict is much more important than the policy. The Washington Post just did a story about what the constituents of Marjorie Taylor Greene thought about the controversy that she's been in. And one of the people they

interviewed for the story, one of her constituents, said "She has a right to get up there and scream and holler. That's her job." Well, we know that's not her job. And, in fact, because of that she had some of her job taken away from her. But that's how you stand out these days, is to go on television and kind of make a spectacle of yourself. And we all know that elected officials like to stand out.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, you know, we talked about in my remarks, and you have addressed it to some extent here already, it almost doesn't make any difference, although it's important, that the issues of a commitment to reconciliation and healing be embraced at the national level. But as we know, the reach beyond the beltway often of Washington is quite limited, especially on philosophical or moral issues. So for us in many respects we think that this is going to end up being in many respects the issue for states and local government.

So from you long service at the state level, when you think about reconciliation and healing, what does that mean to you outside the Washington beltway? What does that mean at the local level? And how would you try to define that for us as we listen to this conversation today?

MR. STRAUS: Well, I think reconciliation locally, statewide, nationally, isn't going to mean that we'll agree on everything, because clearly we won't. Never have and we never will. But it does mean that when we have a national crisis that we still come together and, you know, rather than just retreating to our partisan corners and continuing on to bicker. I mean how in the world did wearing a mask become a partisan issue in the midst of this terrible pandemic? But it did. And I think our political system continues to amplify divisions and it gives us a distorted reality of how we really view each other.

I was pleased and impressed last week when Senator Sasse spoke so plainly and courageously to his own state Republican Party in Nebraska. He said that most people are not rage addicts. And he said they don't go around all day long looking for a fight. But we all know that he's right, but he had to say this to his party, which is about to censure him for the second time. By the way, I know how it feels to be censured by a state party. One of the proudest moments of my career. But I was proud of Senator Sasse for saying those things.

While the division is certainly real and it needs to be overcome, we all know there are a lot of things that we are not divided over. And I think the path to reconciliation begins with each of us as individuals — not just as politicians, but each of us as individuals as we decide how we're going to treat

each other, how we're going to view each other, and if we're going to consider alternate points of view that other people have. And are we consuming information that's credible, that's real. You know, facts need to matter in order to be objective.

And I think it's also on us as individuals to communicate with our elected representatives and let them know that we expect more of them than just doing what Marjorie Taylor Greene is doing, and that's go on TV and rant. So I think reconciliation is possible. I think reconciliation will happen, but I think it's really — while institutions have a role, I think it's up to individuals one by one to insist upon it.

GENERAL ALLEN: At the state level then, sir, if you were asked to begin to offer prescriptions on how — not how it will end up, because we don't know how it will end up. We hope we know how it will end up, but how do we start the process? How do we begin to grapple with this? Because just starting it is a huge step in the right direction, being committed to it. How do we get started?

MR. STRAUS: I think by insisting on a sense of fair play and making sure that we're reaching out to others, whether they have the voting strength or not, but reaching out and including people of different points of view, making sure the rules that should be built for fairness are enforced for fairness. And it goes beyond the political to the judicial system and just a sense of justice.

GENERAL ALLEN: Very importantly, beyond — and we often, as we begin the conversation about this, we look immediately to our elected representatives, who have an important role to set the example, and of course the advocates. There are so many other individuals — as you said, we have to do this one person at a time, but there's so many other really important and influential individuals in our societies. Could you talk about the role of civil society as we might go forward in this process.

MR. STRAUS: Yeah, and I think — well, I mentioned the importance and the fundamental importance of individuals addressing the divide and healing — institutions have a big role to play as well. And individuals obviously are parts of institutions, but as we identify and engage in religious organizations and other institutions that are powerful, Brookings being one, others that promote thought in the country, but if we want to change the core tenets of this poisoned atmosphere, I think it has to — I think we have to have a higher expectation and insistence that we drive toward positive change. Religious institutions, universities, civic groups, I think business organizations have stepped up in a big way, because they have to. All of these institutions I just mentioned, they face pressures of their own and

they're not exactly held in the highest esteem as they once were. So they have those challenges.

But it's more complex than the elected officials or the civic groups. And we want to think that 2020's presidential election was this moment in time when we confronted this issue, but, as you remember, President Clinton, President Bush, President Obama, each of them ran national campaigns on changing politics and trying to bring people together, bringing the nation together, and yet after each one of those presidencies our country was actually further apart. So it's really nothing new, it's just come into I think a much more critical focus.

Now, on the optimistic side, to be encouraging for a moment, we just had this election in November and the country was given a choice, one person who was running on a message of unity and another candidate who was running on a message of further division. And the American people spoke in large numbers and chose unity. So I think that's something that we can look to for encouragement. And it doesn't mean as a Republican that I'm going to agree with everything that Joe Biden does — I won't. But I do think that his election and his message was critically important, not just in his election but it was an important statement made by the American people that unity still is our goal.

You know, the answer isn't always in politics and our political system is clearly struggling. But as I've mentioned, the business sector has stepped up. And I've been impressed in the last few years watching the business round table in particular and CEOs that are taking really strong positions on social issues of the day. Some of it I think is driven by work forces that are demanding change, some of it probably by customer bases who are demanding change. But I think that's been an important and impactful change in the conversation in our country.

And just also, to salute Brookings again. And one of the reasons that I was attracted to the Brookings Institution and one of the reasons I'm so proud to be part of the family now is that you value a diversity of opinions. And, you know, you celebrate these diverse opinions among your experts. Doesn't mean I'm going to agree with every policy proposal that they put out there, but that doesn't matter because I know they've been thoughtfully debated and their points of view have certainly been evaluated in the process. And there's been — certainly in the Brookings world there is a real value on respect and open dialogue.

GENERAL ALLEN: One final —

MR. STRAUS: One thing I wanted to remember to say today while we have time together, I'm a proud graduate of Vanderbilt University. They have just started a unit project there that John Meacham, former Governor Bill Haslam, among others, are involved in. And I saw a little segment on television last week where former Governor Haslam was reflecting upon his early career as a young staffer I think for former Senator Howard Baker. And he talked about the Baker Rule, the rule that Howard Baker insisted that everyone who worked for him followed. And it actually became the title of a book about Senator Baker's career. And that Baker Rule was the other fellow might be right. The other fellow might be right. And that was just such a great reminder about the need for humility, to be conciliatory, to be pragmatic in leadership, and to learn to work with other people.

So I don't think we're going to get to reconciliation without a whole lot more of the Howard Baker Rule.

GENERAL ALLEN: I really like that. It's something I'm going to dig into as soon as we're done here today.

Let me just make one other quick comment and a final question and then we'll turn it over to Darrell for the next panel.

I spoke to a university president just several days ago and his comment to me they are starting a project called the 1/6 Project — 6th of January. And it is to take apart that moment to decompose the totality of the chaos, but to take that apart into its component elements, the elements of legality, the elements of the role of leadership, but very importantly to try to take apart the causal factors, to identify the causal factors that could have created that moment. And I would simply say that around the country, if we could all take a moment and embrace our own 1/6 Project, not necessarily about the Capitol, but about how we view each other and how we can take apart our differences, as you say, and be willing to acknowledge that the other person might in fact be right. A powerful moment that would be. And that doesn't cost you anything in the big scheme of things.

Let me just ask for any final thoughts that you might have, Speaker, on where you might have seen this be successful in your career, your long career in government and leadership. Where have we seen this be successful and how might we think about this going forward?

MR. STRAUS: I've seen it be successful when there's the commitment to make unity

successful.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yeah.

MR. STRAUS: It isn't imposed. There isn't a law you pass or some kind of fiat you put out there that people will suddenly work together. But it takes leadership to make it happen, it takes commitment to bring people together. It can be done. It will be done. I'm actually an optimist long-term. I do think it's going to be a rough patch that we go through for a consideration period of time, but I have a lot of confidence in the younger generation. I don't think that they like seeing what their elders have foisted upon them. And I've long been a proponent of enhanced and a commitment to civic education, proponent of Sandra Day O'Connor's program that she started. And I often think about her quote that — was made at that announcement, she said that practice of our democracy is not passed down in the gene pool. And so I think a foundation of better civics education so that our citizens better understand and value this great give that we've all been given as Americans I think in the long run is going to be more than anything that gets us out of this rut.

GENERAL ALLEN: And to your point, and to her point, citizenship is very much a responsibility. It truly is. It's not just what the government can do for you, as we've seen other presidents and great leaders talk about, it is inherently a responsibility.

Speaker Straus, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. Your perspectives are extraordinarily valuable to us and we're very grateful that you were able to talk to us about what the state perch would be like in the context of embracing a universal commitment to reconciliation and healing. And I can't thank you enough for your views this afternoon.

Thank you, sir.

MR. STRAUS: Thank you. Honored to be with you.

GENERAL ALLEN: It's our honor to have you.

And let me turn it over please now to Darrell, and we can begin the next panel.

MR. WEST: Thank you, John, and thank you, Speaker Straus. That was a terrific conversation with lots of tremendous insights.

And I think it's a great way to kick off our discussion of ways to reconcile and heal America. We live in a time of major challenges. Just in the last few months we've gone through an

election, an insurrection, and a new administration. And, as both John and Speaker Straus have pointed out, we have seen rather —- we have seen several rather unprecedented activities. A high level political polarization, a loss of trust and confidence in government, a tendency to treat opponents as enemies. Yet this period also could become a major learning moment for the United States. I think it provides a time to reflect on how we got to this point in time and what we can do to heal the nation. And I actually am optimistic about our ability to make progress on these important issues.

Yesterday John Allen and I wrote some thoughts on these crucial topics. You can read our ideas at Brookings.edu. We made several key points. One is America is at a crucial point in its political history. We've seen the rise of polarization and we need to determine how to deal with our divided views.

In 2019 I wrote a book entitled “Divided Politics,” which traced America's 40 year history from Reagan to Trump and noted the intensification of political sentiment and social divisions during the course of this time period. But the book also presented a personal memoir because I lived in a divided family where my two sisters are Trump supporters and my brother and I are not. So, for me, this is both a professional and a personal interest.

One of the conclusions I reached, both in that book as well as in the paper on reconciliation and healing that we just published, is the need to understand the root causes of polarization. And in my view this includes income inequality and the loss of economic opportunity, which is an issue for many people across the country, the geographic disparities that we are seeing where a lot of the economic activity and the job growth is taking place on the East Coast and the West Coast and a few metropolitan areas in between, but there are large parts of America that are being left behind, systemic racism and our need to confront our history and the current realities in that area, as John mentioned, the loss of respect for one another, and then the problems of social media and digital technology that allow fake news and misinformation to flourish and political divisions to rise dramatically.

And so in the paper that we published yesterday I argued we cannot deal with our divisions unless we go to those root causes. We need policies that promote economic opportunity, that address systemic racism. that reform the political system, and reduce the power of misinformation.

To help us understand these problems and possible remedies we're delighted to have

three distinguished experts with us. Elaine Kamarck is a senior fellow in Governance Studies and director of the Center for Effective Public Management. Camille Busette is senior fellow in Governance Studies and director of our Initiative on Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion. And Carol Graham is the Leo Pasvolsky senior fellow in Global Economy and Development. And if you have questions for our panelists you can email them to events@Brookings.edu or tweet @BrookingsInst.

So I want to start with Elaine. So in our work in Governance Studies we talk a lot about divided America. What do you see as the major sources of our current political divisions?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, thank you, Darrell. And it's a pleasure to be here with my colleagues today.

Let me pose —– there's a problem here understanding this. And I think the sources are twofold and unwrapping them is going to be difficult. Clearly there are two economies in America, there is a vibrant economy on the coasts and in some pieces in the middle of the country, and then there is not one. Our colleague, Mark Muro, studied this and found that Trump won 2,547 counties in America —– that's a lot. Those counties accounted for only 29% of GDP. Joe Biden won 509 counties, and those counties accounted for 71% of GDP. Now, that's a dramatic difference, right. That is a dramatic difference and I think that we need to look beyond economics, because I think there are cultural dimensions to that underlying division.

In addition, there is a structural problem, which is that these two economies exist in a political system where we are defined by the Electoral College and the United States Senate. And this political system underrepresents those very places that are the engines of the new American economy. So the Senate under represents the American people and, of course, the Electoral College does dramatically.

Over the course of the last century people have moved out of the middle of the country, they are concentrated on the coasts, and therefore California, Texas, Florida, and New York are all underrepresented in our current political system. This has never happened before. In the 20th century the population dispersion was more even than it is now.

Now we get to the really complicated piece of this, the Trump coalition. The Trump coalition definitely is composed of people who are really angry and frustrated with their own economic

situation. And I know Carol and Camille are going to talk more about that. However, it's just not that simple. Biden won people who made less than $30,000 a year, he won people who made less than $50,000 a year, he won people who made less than $100,000 a year. So Biden won among the middle of the middle class and working class. Trump won voters over $100,000 a year and over $200,000 a year, which means that economics isn't the whole picture. I think that there's something going on that is about culture and of course in American politics also about race.

And let's just look at what has happened to America in our lifetimes. In the 1996 election the electorate was 82% Caucasian, non-Latino white. In 2016 it was 73% Caucasian, and in 2020, according to exit polls, 67% Caucasian. I had an email not too long ago. It differed from the usual emails I get that are filled with expletives and exclamation marks. This one was from a person who said very frankly, “This is not my America. My America is white and Christian. And what's happening to America doesn't gel with what I think America should be.” And I think that there is something going on here about the changing demographics of the country.

My final point here is that there is a generational aspect to this. Joe Biden won —- let's see —- 64% of first-time voters. Now, some of those people were people drawn into the electorate, but let's face it, a lot of them were young people. And, of course, Trump has consistently done poorly among young people and better among older people.

So that says to me that there is something cultural in addition to the economic divides that are going on. And I'm sure we'll talk about what can be done about it, but I want to point out this difficulty, because it also makes it difficult to figure out what to do about this.

So, with that, I'll stop for a moment at least.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you, Elaine. Those are important points because I think it is correct that it is a complex situation with the combination of economic, cultural, and institutional factors that help to create the particular moment where we exist right now.

So, Camille, I know you've done a lot of work on barriers to social and economic mobility in American, which clearly are major problems. Could you describe the major barriers that you see?

MS. BUSETTE: Sure. And what I'll do is I will also just build upon Elaine's very interesting opening comment. I just want to welcome everybody who has joined us here on line. And it is

an absolute pleasure to be here with my distinguished colleagues.

I think a good place to start, Darrell, is just to acknowledge when we talk about reconciliation, just to acknowledge that we may all very have different experiences living in the U.S., but that our aspirations are remarkably similar. And I think we all want to do well and, more importantly, we all want our children to do well.

I think the U.S. democracy was, you know, originally conceived as a political system driven by white male land owners. We have departed from that, but maybe not as significantly as we think. The U.S. has been uneven I think in its successful political integration of anyone who is not, you know, a land owning white male. And we've had a lot of fits and starts there. And we have variously welcomed and then disparaged waves of immigrants who have arrived on our shores, we have been particularly I'd say unsuccessful in recognizing and upholding the human dignity of our Indigenous Americans and the enslaved Africans and later their descendants, who also arrived on our shores, rather unwillingly. So racism remains endemic in the country and it is, in my view, the greatest barrier to our success as a country and as a democracy.

And where this has left us is at a point where we have very significant gaps in our opportunity structures. As we all know, a yawning racial wealth gap that is mirrored by very low employment rates among Black and Native American men in particular, disproportionately high rates of police brutality experienced by these same groups of men, and similarly, disproportionately high maternal mortality rates for Black and Native American women. And now, as we know with COVID, disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 infection and mortality rate among Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans. And so I think we've done a very poor job of acknowledging and addressing racism. And I think that is an actual —– that's a fact that we're going to have to deal with when think about reconciliation.

And as Elaine has noted, you know, we are increasingly a diverse America. And with over 50% of kids under 10 now being children of color, if we're going to be focused not only on reconciliation in a political sense, but also on how we craft a democracy that comprehends and empowers a multiethnic, multilingual, and multiracial polity.

And I'm going to stop there for my introductory remarks, but happy to engage in a very vibrant conversation as we move forward.

MR. WEST: I like that phrase, gaps in opportunity structures. So certainly that is a major problem. And, if anything, COVID has accentuated those problems because we see problems in terms of digital access, we certainly already have seen the COVID numbers that African Americans are more likely to get COVID and to be hospitalized and then to die from COVID. And then the latest issue is in vaccination rates, where whites are being vaccinated at much higher rates than either African Americans or Latinos. So we do need to get a handle on those types of issues.

So, Carol, you've done considerable work on the geography of despair and the loss of hope among some parts of our society. So you can tell us a little bit about how you see this issue?

MS. GRAHAM: Thanks, Darrell, and also to my colleagues. It's a pleasure to participate on this with you. I was going to learn a lot from all three of you, so.

And back to Darrell's question, indeed we have a crisis of despair in this county. And it's a health crisis, but it goes beyond that. It's inhibiting our economic recovery and will continue to do so unless we address it. And it's also part of our politics.

So let me say a little more about it. So it's been around for a while, probably 20 years or so. I think the despair began particularly among less than college educated white men. And we only noticed it for the first time when Trump was elected, that there were these very frustrated whites, primarily but not only with less than college educations, that seemed to very angry, very frustrated. And over the course of the past four years we've learned more about this group than we ever expected to. But this group was very much there before. So even before COVID, when our stock markets were booming, we were boasting record lows in unemployment, 20% of our prime age male population had simply dropped out of the labor force all together. They've just given up. And they're not only whites, but the white prime age males are a particularly toxic group. And it isn't just the out of the labor force that's desperate, but they are the most desperate. But the places where they tend to live are also communities that are in decline and in despair. Prime age white males out the labor force, as I mentioned, are a particularly worrisome group. Many still live in their parents' home, they have terrible health markers, objective health and also mental health, and they have high levels of opioid addition. They're very much over represented in the deaths of despair. These are the deaths, the premature mortality due to suicide, opioid and other drug poisoning and alcohol poisoning. And it's interesting, but these deaths are much less prevalent

among low-income minorities than they are among low-income whites.

And, indeed, one of the — before we found out about the deaths of despair, a finding that initially puzzled me, but I've learned a lot about, and still holds very strong, even during COVID, is that low-income minorities are much more optimistic and resilient and report high levels of hope and lower levels of stress than do low-income whites. And the other very important part of this story is that minorities are also still very much strong in their beliefs about the value of getting a higher education — it's always been seen as a way to move up the ladder — versus low-income whites, who are very skeptical about higher education. In part it comes from a trajectory in the white working class where your father went to high school, he became a manufacturing worker, or one of the other good middle class — or working class jobs that whites had privileged access to, so there wasn't as sort of, oh, you need to go to college to get ahead. You could finish high school and do pretty well, about 20 years ago. That's obviously no longer the case. Versus minorities have continued to believe in education as their way to get good jobs and to move up the ladder.

So what we're seeing now when we think about this, because it's clear — and as Camille has given some examples of, minorities are much more objectively disadvantaged than this group and yet they're more optimistic.

So I think what we're seeing or what explains this is the ramifications of the decline of the white working class. As I mentioned, this group had privileged access to the good blue collar jobs. And along with the jobs came a stable and respected middle class existence. Maybe lower middle class existence, but it was — wasn't glamorous, but it was stable and respected. It was very male dominated, and I think that's something that shows up in the political ramifications now.

And the support systems for these communities were the stable jobs and the stable families. It was very much the Ozzie and Harriet home, you know, working dad, stay at home mom, couple of kids. And whatever sort of socialization unions came with the jobs, with the stable jobs.

And then the other thing that's important here is that the narrative for this group was very much the American dream narrative — you work hard, you get ahead. And if you're poor, it's because you didn't try hard and you're a loser. And implicitly was a racial story in this. The people that were falling behind, that were on welfare were either immigrants or minorities. And there was very much a stigma —

and it still exists in terms of even how our welfare policies work, about how people who need support.

But when the stable jobs and the stable families left and the communities fell apart, these people had no narrative, the white working class. They were all the sudden in a situation of needing help, of not having a means to work hard and get a head. And basically things fell apart. And one of the things that we're seeing is particularly the out of the labor force group. Their despair shows up in the fact that they've simply dropped out of their labor force, is — as I mentioned, no hope, high levels of opioid addition.

And what we're finding in our latest work on geographic mobility is that even when there are jobs, this group is not going to move to the jobs. They don't have the health to do so, they're overwhelmingly addicted — or they're over represented in opioid addiction, and they have no hope for the future, no vision for the future. People don't move to another place, even a nearby place, if they have no hope and no motivation. Interestingly, this very much likes to politics. So the counties that voted from Trump in 2016 had more respondents who had reported to have lost hope in the past five years than did respondents who didn't vote form Trump.

So this lost hope narrative shows up in lots of ways and obviously in despair. And one of the things that Elaine has raised in the sort of puzzles of describing the more extreme Trump supporters who have turned to extremism, is what they want. And from my perspective — I'm not a political person, but from what I understand of the well-being sentiments and the sort of despair among these groups, at least the out of labor force groups and also the communities they live in, is that they've lost their narrative. I don't think they know what they want. They know what they've lost, right. They want to make America the way it was again, which is obviously not possible.

But as a result — and I think also as result of — with declining communities went the decline of civic education and civic participation, and all sorts of things that are important to democracy from the bottom up — is that they're very vulnerable to extreme views and to racist and nativist sentiments. And we've all seen that. And, obviously, our former President was very good at winding that up.

So just a last point, as Darrell mentioned in his remarks just now, is that COVID has been as shock to this entire system, right. So we know it's hit minorities the most, both in terms of incidents

and death and because of the nature of their jobs, and yet minorities are still much more resilient and report better mental health than whites in the midst of COVID. And what we're seeing — I talked a lot about these deaths of despair — is we're seeing when we compare 2018 and 2019 averages to 2020, is a doubling of overdoses and related deaths, an increase in suicides, and a double of mental and behavioral health reports. And, again, these are not only among whites — that's a simplistic story — but they're predominantly among whites. So the same group has also been very much affected by COVID more in almost a psychological sense, while minorities have had the actual effects be worse.

But that's creating an additional problem and has made our crisis of despair worse. And hopefully I'll have time to suggest some potential solutions in the next round.

MR. WEST: So interesting contrast just in terms of the variations in levels of hope and how that plays out politically.

So, Elaine, I want to come back to a point you made in your opening remark about the cultural aspect of this. Because we have talked a lot about the economic dimension, the geographic disparities, but you mention, and our colleague Bel Sawhill also has written eloquently on this point, that there is a cultural aspect to this as well that actually goes beyond the raw economics itself.

Can you tell us about the cultural dimension and how you believe it has contributed to the political divisions and why it is a particular problem?

MS. KAMARCK: Well, the cultural dimension is really fascinating. And I'm going to also draw attention to research by a former colleague of mine at Harvard, Pippa Norris, who has looked globally at this and at the rise of far right movements. And she finds that, yes, there's a bit of an economic factor, but it doesn't hold up to the cultural dimension. And mostly what that cultural dimension is a fear of the other, okay, of strangers, of people of color, people who speak different languages, who come from different countries, other than western European countries.

Now, this isn't new in American history. I mean there was a period of time when if you were Italian you were strange and somebody to be feared, okay. So that's only 100 and some years ago. So this has always been with us. I think what's happened now is there's an added element now, people of color. And so there's a racist dimension to this that, you know, is more difficult to deal with.

The other thing I think that's happened is this surprised a lot of people. When we talk

about the demographics in the United States, people of color —- sort of all grouped together —- are younger than everybody else. There is a definite generational divide here. And so you have among younger people a lot greater acceptance of people of color. You have a lot greater acceptance of women in the workplace. You have a lot greater acceptance of different lifestyles, right, LBGTQ+ —- I can't even keep track of all the variations there. I mean you just have a lot of more acceptance among this younger generation than you do among older people. And this has borne itself out. Trump has consistently done better among older people than younger people, both in his elections, but also just in his approval ratings throughout his presidency. So there seems to be a fear factor here that I'm not sure is particularly new in American society, but definitely has generational aspects.

What Pippa Norris found when she used these mammoth world attitude studies is that that was actually replicated in other countries around the world who'd seen the rise of far right movements, that they were older, they were rural, and that what motivated them was not so much a policy agenda, but a generic fear of the other and a sense that Germany was no longer Germany, that France was no longer France, that Italy was no longer Italy, and of course that America is no longer America. And I think there's something to that. The problem of course, which we can get to, is it's a little bit hard to figure out what to do about that, right, other than try to engage people in a dialogue.

MR. WEST: We will certainly come back to that remedy question in a minute.

But, Camille, I want to follow up on a point you made in your opening remarks where you talk about the possible difficulties democracies have in this transition that America is going through now to a multiracial and multicultural society.

So what do you mean by that, how does that play into political divisions, and some of the hyper polarization that we're seeing this days.

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah, no, thanks very much for that, Darrell.

I think one of the things I would say about that is as both you and Elaine and several other folks have noted, our original system was really set up to make sure that popular voices were in some ways chaperoned —- I think is probably the best way to think about it, right. The Electoral College is kind of a chaperone of the popular vote. Having the Senate kind of set up the way it is sort of a chaperoning of, you know, the way the population is structured. And so constitutionally we haven't really

— with a small C — we don't have a structure that really embraces diversity and embraces kind of the messiness of having just, you know, popular voices empowering in the polity.

And show what happens when you have a situation like we have now, which is where you have so many different kinds of multicultural elements and you have the rise of the South, which really means the rise of Black Americans in a much more muscular and robust way politically, is that we just don't have a way — we don't have a narrative, we don't have the kind of processes and structures that allow us to be comfortable with a large amount of community engagement without those kind of guardrails, without those kind of chaperones.

And so what in fact, you know, has happened, is that there's been sort of a boomerang, which is to try to curtail that kind of empowerment. So trying to gut out the enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act, trying to suppress votes in other ways, whether there be just, you know, sort of legal ways or trying to encourage people not to vote.

So I think that's — you know, we just have a hard time — as a polity, we have a hard time accommodating that kind of messiness that comes with a multicultural society. But we need to figure out how to do that.

And one of the thing that I would say, kind of just moving over to the topic of white working class folks who have lost status and have lost a narrative, is that as we are in this process of really high degrees of polarization, we also have failed to create a narrative that tells us that actually it's kind of normal in a democracy to accommodate different voices, that there is a narrative that allows us to accommodate different kinds of experiences, and that allows us to figure out how best to deal with problems as they come up. So, for instance, if you are white working class and lost your position in Akron, Ohio — just to pick a place, right — we don't have a narrative for those people that it's actually okay to believe that government and government policies can be the way forward to help you and your economy — local economy flourish again or thrive again. And so I think that's the sort of — we have some gaps in our narratives in addition to just gaps in the processes and structures that help us accommodate diversity.

MR. WEST: That's a great point about the loss of a narrative.

And, Carol, maybe I can follow up with you on that particular point, because you were

talking earlier about the loss of hope, the loss of narrative. Camille has mentioned the need for new narratives. I'm just curious how you see that particular part of the argument. You know, what kind of narrative was lost and what kind of new narrative do we need in order to help address the concerns that are seen in many parts of society?

MS. GRAHAM: So that's a big question, right. How do you restore hope in populations where it has been lost. And I'm doing a — there are a couple of things and there are some lessons from some efforts around the world and some local efforts in the U.S. that we can learn from. But in addition to studying despair, I've been looking at the determinants of hope among young adults, basically old adolescents, in Latin America and Peru, where I'm from, but also a comparison of a low-income white community and a low-income African American community in St. Louis, among others, to see sort of what are the hopes and aspirations of these kids, because you think about the next generation, the last thing you want is, you know, the children of prime age workers out of the labor force to end up in the same place. And at the moment they don't have a lot of inspiration to do otherwise.

And at the same time labor markets have also become more difficult at the low-income end of the ladder. There are less jobs, they're changing in nature, you need skills. That doesn't mean it has to be college. Vocational education, medium tech skills. Mark Muro and Alan Berube in our Metro Center have written about this stuff. But I also think that particularly low-income kids need some sort of hoe and vision for the future to invest in it, right. So we find, for example, that — I'll stick with the U.S. — although the Peru findings are interesting about hope and resilience among very deprived populations — but even among these — at the level of adolescents and young adults that conditional on graduating high school — which is more difficult for the African American kids because of objective obstacles — if they graduate they're much more likely to pursue higher education than are the low-income white kids.

So, again, that reflects that belief in high education, which unfortunately I think for rural or kind of heartland whites in particular, it's become part of the political story, this skepticism of science. You know, college I an elite East Coast and West Coast conspiracy — or whatever it is. And so how do we restore that belief, what can we learn from the kind of support that seems to help objectively more deprived minority kids keep going, continue to believe in education, even though the disadvantages are greater. And one of the things that I think is a much more historical thing over time is communities of

empathy, whether it's Baptist churches or Hispanic extended families, these grew out of the need to fight discrimination and disadvantage and to have a sort of an informal safety net for those whole fell behind. And then I think that' resulted in at the — the importance mentors, whether it's at the family or community level, that seem to make a bid difference to kids maintaining their hopes and aspirations and sort of pursuing education to get ahead, to do better.

That's obviously missing in these white cohorts that we're talking about. You know, what — sort of how do you impart that is a big and difficult question, but I don't think it's impossible.

And then for older, the sort of — the people who are not going to go back to work, just being realistic, you know, over 50 are all prime age workers out of the labor force with opioid addiction are not going to go get a job now, right. But there are many things we learned from well-being initiatives, both abroad, in the U.K. in particular, in a place called What Works Well-Being that I work closely with, but also in the U.S. And the City of Santa Monica has been very innovative on this front. The School of Public Health at Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, working with the local government has a whole center for creative place healing, which involves the public sector, the private sector, the university. And what these efforts do is as a first step they get these isolated despair filled individuals out of their houses into the community, whether it's providing access to volunteer, access to the arts, the whole bunch of very simple interventions that don't cost much. But when you get people out of the basements of their homes and into the community, they at least — and into a purposeful activity, which can be anything from joint walks to volunteering to participating in some sort of arts project, it gives them some sense of purpose and productivity, which is one of the things they've lost. They've lost their respect and in part that has to do with they have no vision of what their future looks like, much less the future of their kids.

So I've probably gone on too long, but there are things we can learn from and there are also things that can be done at the macro or government level. But I'll save that for the next round.

MR. WEST: Yeah, those are all important points, and I'm glad you're starting to move to possible remedies. Because each of you have focused on different parts of the problem, given the issues that you've raised, how can we make progress on addressing these issues? What kinds of changes have the potential to generate the greatest benefits?

And, Elaine, I'll start with you.

MS. KAMARCK: Yeah, I mean I think there's structural changes. The biggest structural change is we have to get rid of the Electoral College. We have had two times in the 21st century where the winner of the popular vote lost the Electoral College. You can't run a democracy like this, okay. You can't run a democracy giving some people in some states more representation than other people. And fortunately there is a way to get rid of the Electoral College, which is something called the National Popular Vote Initiative. And that involves action on the part of individual states to agree to give their Electoral College votes to the national winner as opposed to state by state. And that's a possibility. It does not involve amending the Constitution, which is of course the problem with changing the Electoral College. So I'd say structurally we need to get rid of the Electoral College.

Now, what's going on as we speak, of course, as I'm sure everyone is aware, is the beginning of Trump's impeachment trial. And, you know, the second thing I would look to is how do we get rid of Donald Trump, okay, in our national dialogue. Let's face it, Donald Trump opened the Pandora's box. He brought out a lot of ugliness, a lot of racism, a lot of violent activities. He let it go, okay. I mean these things have always been there, there's no doubt, but when you have the President of the United States repeatedly throughout four years advocating things that no other president, even very conservative presidents, ever got close to saying, you're inflating the importance and you're letting people think that, yeah, this is the thing to do, right, attacking the Capitol is the thing to do, talking about hanging Mike Pence and assassinating Nancy Pelosi, that those are acceptable. It is absolutely clear that Donald Trump let this out and, you know, we'll see, but hopefully Donald Trump will be less of a factor in our national politics. To the extent that he is a less of a factor, we have a better chance of actually getting past this era.

And finally is sort of empowering young people, okay. There is a very different generation behind us. The millennial generation is different in their attitudes. And particularly their attitudes towards race. And I think that to the extent that we encourage them to be part of civic life, we encourage them to run for office, as many are beginning to do, we will see this change happening.

Finally, we still are left with the following difficulty. And Carol said it so well — they've lost their narrative. For the people who are really, you know, left behind, they don't have a policy agenda, okay. It's not like a civil war where you can sit down and you can say, okay, this group wants this, this

group wants that, all right. This isn't the case here. There's a sort of generic anger and violence out there that is frankly very, very hard to deal with. And certainly listening to each other, certainly some having national summits and local summits on this question. And I'm intrigued with Carol's idea — I'll let her pick it up — on, you know, empowering communities of empathy.

There are obviously things, but this is a different sort of political problem than we've been accustomed to dealing with because there is no agenda.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you.

Camille, your thoughts on possible remedies.

MS. BUSETTE: All right. In addition to Elaine's great point, I would add four different things. And the first is, you know, I agree that the element of politics, which is feeling very disenfranchised of the population, very disempowered, and very angry. That population isn't going to go away even if Trump somehow disappears from the political scene. So I do think we need to take that population seriously in the following way: when we're crafting policies, we need to think about kind of leveraging a national kind of narrative about no one being left behind, right. And so we're going to have to have a set of policies that's really focused on equity, and racial equity in particular, and that really needs to be at the forefront of almost everything we do, because that has been a long standing — that would address long standing problems. But we just have to have — you know, at the local, state, and federal level we have to have a kind of no one left behind sort of mindset. And that will help us be creative around in re-engaging folks who feel left behind who are not in communities of color. So I think that's going to be very, very important.

I think another area where I feel we can have some solutions — we have a history, a narrative about success in the U.S., which is that you do it by yourself, you pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, you're not pulled up by anybody else, but it's an individual effort. And that particularly for white working class folks, that they shouldn't really have to do more than get a high school education. We need to move beyond that. That was true for some people for some time. It's the 21st century, it has been true for a long time. People need to realize they have to do more. So if you are white working class and you had a high school education 40 years ago, you now have — that has to be upgraded and you just have to recognize that that is a reality. And we have to create, you know, a narrative with a pathway

that allows people to feel like that is a legitimate way forward and that whatever happened before was — you know, they benefitted from a set of policies that were not equitable and now they need to just do more in order to be competitive in the marketplace.

And then the final thing that I would say is that when we think about reconciliation, reconciliation is political, but it also is about how we re-craft our narrative around the American culture and cultural experiences. And to the degree that we still are in a place that allows extreme police brutality, allows people to die deaths of despair, we have a lot of work to do. And the fact that we haven't been able to create new realities, new cultural realities and new narratives around those new realities means we have a lot of work to do at that level before we can construct a more unified polity in general.

MR. WEST: Interesting. So we need both to create new realities, but then also new narratives about those realities so people have hope.

Carol, coming back to you, your thoughts on possible remedies. And I do like your idea about building what you call communities of empathy. So give us your thoughts on how we can address some of the problems that you identify.

MS. GRAHAM: Okay. Well, first of all, just to follow up on Camille's point about the individual work ethic, which I also mentioned. And that does very much relate to communities of empathy. One thing that everybody forgets —

— you know, we always talk about Horatio Alger, this guy that just worked so hard and he became a great entrepreneur and that's a model for the American dream. Horatio Alger had a benefactor. He had a lot of luck, right, compared to other kids around him. And we forget that a lot, that — you know, in these big sort of success stories, that often people do have luck. That luck could be a mentor, it could be a family member, it could be all sorts of things. But people typically don't just do it on their own. It doesn't mean that individual effort isn't incredibly important, but as I mentioned, when I look at the aspirations of young adults in deprived circumstances, those who have high aspirations, who are pursuing higher education, they all had some sort of mentor. It could have been somebody in their community, it could have been — and there's also this general sort of community belief in the value of education that very much affects young adult choices about whether to keep getting educated, invest in their futures, or not.

And then I also mentioned there are a lot of local level efforts that are now starting to

focus on well-being. But as a country we're way behind other countries where these local efforts are supported by central government efforts. The U.K. has been the world's champion in this where the — you know, the most important cabinet minister for three administrations, Gus O'Donnell, made well-being a priority and got the metrics into their official statistics so that they are measuring things like stress and anxiety and hope for the future and all sorts of things in very inexpensive ways as part of their official statistics to they can track their society's hope and despair. And that translates into these local level efforts to try and help people in despair get out of it. We have some of those local level efforts and they're remarkable and the people are very dedicated, but they have no logistical support. They often don't know about each other, right, because they're in the weeds trying to get this work done. There's not even a federal level information clearing house that would provide information to other communities that may be trying to do something along these lines. You know, what's been done, how do we do this, how do we deal with these desperate people in our community.

And then also a lot of our efforts for everything from economic recovery to drug addiction to drug interdiction, tend to be siloed, right. We under invest in mental health, it's very hard to get mental health care in this country. We over invest in drug interdiction. And we don't really deal with the root causes of it. And even our — I think there are some very good new efforts to revive declining communities, but they focus on the economy, right, which of course you have to. I'm an economist, of course you have to focus on the economy, but if you have a significant part of the population that's not going to take up jobs even if they're there because they're in despair and addicted to opioids, you know, we're not going to have a full recovery. And we're not talking about a small amount of the population, we're talking about 20% of the prime age population is out of the labor force. So it's hard to get reconciliation or, you know, get a full economic recovery and also address the political consequences of the despair and frustration of this group if we don't deal with these things together.

And, again, I don't think you need 100 different agencies, but we do need some sort of coordinator of who's doing what, you know, what efforts could be combined, and then get — or at least getting the different actors to be more aware and talking to each other so that we don't address these problems as siloes, because they're not, they're very connected.

MR. WEST: Yeah, and I know in your other work, Carol, you've mentioned the

importance of new metrics of well, well-being metrics. You know, we track GDP and all these economic indicators, you point out we need happiness indicators, well-being indicators. And I think those are great points as well.

And I too engage the audience in our conversations. We're starting to get a number of good questions. And, again, any of you who have questions, you could email events@Brookings.edu.

I want to combine two questions, one from Casey: how do you speak to someone who refuses to acknowledge facts? So you can think about that for a minute. And then Steve has a question about the role of the mainstream media and in terms of kind of how the mainstream media contributes to polarization, how we can use the media to counter misinformation and disinformation. I think each of these questions kind of relate to the broader informational ecosystem in which we operate now, which I think everybody understands is part of the problem. Are there ways we can make progress and help to turn things around.

Anybody who wants to address either one of those issues?

MS. GRAHAM: I could just say one thing. Is that all right? I'll be brief and then obviously — so obviously the same people who are living in sort of hollowed out communities typically have not great access to broadband, as I mentioned, declining civic engagement, are the most vulnerable to manipulation by kind of extremist groups in the media, or even just very politically ideologically biased media. And one of the things we know counters that is local news, right. If people have a newspaper in their community that — people may not know the facts in mainstream media, but they know the facts in their local hometown. And if the paper is flat out lying, they know it, right. And it's also an issue of civic engagement and everything else. And we've seen a huge decline in local news and local papers for funding reasons. And so I think that's one very simple thing that could certainly use public support that would at the least counter the kind of messages that are coming from these essentially very distant unknown sources to places where there's no reality check in other things they read or hear.

So that's just my two cents.

MS. KAMARCK: You know, I want to add to Carol's comment about reality checks. And she's absolutely right about local media and the absence of it.

Let me give you an example about that. So on January 6 we had this insurrection at the

Capitol. Shortly thereafter, right, two weeks plus after, we had an inauguration. Nothing happened. No one came. No one demonstrated, tried to disrupt. Now, obviously 25,000 National Guard troops went a long way towards discouraging people. But I think that one of the things that happened is that in that interim you had almost 200 people who were arrested and all of the sudden they had to — they were forced out of their bubble. Their bubble told them that Donald Trump was the president, he had told them to do this, he had told them that this would be successful, and they could go ahead and do this. And then it didn't work, right, they went ahead and the Electoral College elected Joe Biden, as was anticipated, even though they had to do it in the middle of the night under heavy guard. And the next day Joe Biden was president, there was plans for an inauguration and people started getting arrested. In other words, reality came to them and knocked them out of an internet bubble that I think was created in large part by media and social media and, as Carol said, the absence of any local media.

I think that the next thing to think about is what's happened to Fox News just in the last week. You know, nothing seemed to work getting Fox News away from repeating Donald Trump's lies about the election. One thing did work, a $1 billion suit brought by the makers of voting machines. And all of the sudden Fox News fires Lou Dobbs, one of their most highly rated people, because all of the sudden there's money on the line and there is a cost to lying. There is accountability.

And so I think any way we can increase accountability and have real world consequences to people lying and inciting others to violence, etc., I think that's a really important thing to do.

MS. BUSETTE: I will just jump in here. I know we are short for time, but one thing I will say to bring it down to the level of individuals is that there's a lot of research, my own included, that has been recently conducted that shows that people tend to congregate with people who are exactly like themselves. So the degree of political homogeneity, particularly among white people in the U.S., is now highly documented. And that's true for a number of other kinds of social networks relative to jobs and opportunities as well, which my own research shows.

But so that means that if we want to counteract the kinds of narratives we're talking about that are very misleading, that we also have to have policies that allow people to interact who are very, very different. That means having different kinds of residential patterns, it means having schools that are much more racially integrated, it means that kind of free flow of information among communities, which

means different kinds of urban planning and transportation and a whole range of other kinds of policies that help different people find each other.

And I would just leave it at that.

MR. WEST: Okay. I think we have time for one more question.

Maria asks a very interesting question that I think combines the pandemic, globalization, and Trumpism. So the specific question is she says the pandemic has been tough on people. The previous decades of globalization have created a critical mass of people who have not been doing well. So her question is do you think that this polarization will weaken once we get into a semi normal post pandemic period, or do we see it leaving a lasting impact on U.S. politics?

And I would just add a footnote to her question, which is due to globalization, trade issues, and geographic disparities in economics, does that mean Trumpism is going to outlast Trump himself?

MS. KAMARCK: I'll take a crack at it. I do think returning to more normal post COVID will help a little bit. I think the absence of Donald Trump will help a little bit, but I think mostly generational change is going to make the difference. And that is a slow process. You know I often like to say the demography is destiny, it's just that it takes a lot longer than any of us would like.

So I think that that's really the look into the future. I'm sure we'll have other problems and other things to worry about, but I do see this not going away completely, but I do see this declining with generational change.

MR. WEST: Camille and/or Carol?

MS. BUSETTE: I would just add that little bit more — a few more enlightened policies at the local level will also accelerate that, particularly policies that are focused on those who are the most disenfranchised.

MR. WEST: Okay. And, Carol, we'll give you the final word.

MS. GRAHAM: Oh. Well, I —

MR. WEST: Which means it has to be really, really good. (Laughter)

MS. GRAHAM: That's a lot of pressure in 30 seconds or less, but I'll do my best.

I agree with what both Elaine and Camille have said, and very much about the role of the

next generation. I have three kids between ages 21 and 26 and their attitudes are so different about what is acceptable in the sense of racial discussions, discrimination against LGBTQ, but it's a general thing. This isn't just my kids. I mean of course I think they're special, but it is this generational change and what they expect of society. And I think the experience for them of seeing — often for the — you know, having voted for the first time and seeing our democracy almost fail. That's going to make a difference to I think how passionate they are and about not being passive about politics.

MR. WEST: Well, okay, thank you very much.

So we're out of time on this session, but I do want to thank Elaine, Camille, and Carol for their thoughtful comments and important insights. Each of them writes regularly on the Brookings website and you can read their ideas at Brookings.edu.

Now, I would like to turn things over to my colleague, Fiona Hill. She's going to focus on how civil society and community leaders can help the country overcome its divisions. Fiona is the Robert Bosch senior Ffllow in Foreign Policy at Brookings and a scholar in the Center on the United States and Europe.

So, Fiona, over to you.

MS. HILL: Thank you so much, Darrell. It's been a really great conversation. I know I've taken a lot of notes from it all. And it's great to be able to welcome on board four other speakers for a conversation for the remainder of our sessions here.

We have Daniel Ziblatt, who is a professor at Harvard University and also a senior fellow at the Center for European Studies at Harvard. And Daniel is most recently, among many of his accomplishments, the author of what has become, you know, quite the renowned book, "How Democracies Die," which has a lot to say about our current moment as well as some of the larger trends in Europe, which has been his focus for quite some time.

We also have with us Kele Zvobgo, Kelebogile Zvobgo. I'm very pleased to have her here today, as well. Kele is I think just in the process of wrapping up at the University of Southern California and moving a little closer to us -- you may already be there, Kele; it's hard to tell in a virtual world -- to the University of William & Mary. But Kele heads the International Justice Lab, which is an organization looking at many of these topics that we've talked about today, about truth and reconciliation

in an international context. Actually has a lot of things to say from experience in other countries, most notably South Africa, but many others that have kind grappled with how do you restore truth and, in fact, democracy to a society that's gone through a very difficult period?

We also have with us Katy Joseph from Interfaith, who is the director of advocacy and outreach. And Interfaith focuses most directly on the interface between religion and democracy and also, you know, takes a very broad view about the relations between many different faiths and the way that people's beliefs and democracy fit together and (inaudible) on both the national federal level and local and states.

And finally but not least we have Lynn Heady from Braver Angels, a group that really works at the grassroots level to try to deal directly with these issues of partisanship and polarization that have been the themes of some of the discussion on the last panel.

I'm going to start in that order because there's sort of a method to our madness here of looking at the whole state of democracy. It's appropriate that Daniel's a doctor, an academic doctor, to be able to kind of give us a bit of diagnosis of the patient, which is the United States at this very difficult moment in our history.

And then to move on to Kele to give us a bit of a sense of the international perspective on this, about how do you deal with a moment in which we have to have accountability? Because some of the reactions that have been perpetrated against this backdrop of policies we've set the second impeachment trial of President Trump, which is, in many respects, an effort at accountability.

And then how do you bring different groups into the discussion? And this is what Carol and Camille and Elaine were talking about, about the different roles for all of us, the agency that we all have as Americans, and that's what Katy and Lynn both do in their daily lives in terms of the organizations they work with.

First of all, to you Daniel, and I'll weave questions in as we go along. Just a reminder to anybody who wants to ask a question, you can send us questions at events@brookings.edu, also through Twitter, @BrookingsInst. And those will be sent to me in the Q&A function here and I'll have to put my glasses to read them as we go along, but I will try to make sure everyone's questions come through.

But, Daniel, we've just heard in the last session about really an analysis of the underlying

factors that have brought us this very difficult moment in American history, one of many, of course. And we've heard a great deal about generational and demographic change, social change, economic change, informational change, as well, the way that the whole media landscape has gone from having the three big network news, ABC, CBS, and NBC, to now just a proliferation of news and information that's out there.

The loss of local newspapers, I was reading recently that 2,000 local newspapers have disappeared just in the last 10 years, for example. So, we're all in a very different and very fractured informational space, which means that, you know, our baseline of information that often democracies rely upon has disappeared.

And, of course, we've got cultural change, identity change, and geographic change. Not so much the geography of America's changed itself, but the geography of opportunity and the geography of economic prosperity and the geography of employment. All kinds of things have changed. And some demographic factors have played into that, as well.

And obviously, that's just sort of a quick overview of some of the issues that were discussed. And you've looked, obviously, at this phenomenon of challenges to democracy in so many settings. What do you see at this particular moment about where we are in the United States?

MR. ZIBLATT: Yeah. Thank you. Well, thank you, Fiona, first of all, and it's great to be with all of my co-panelists today.

Well, you know, I think that American democracy in a very funny way is facing a deeply paradoxical situation. I mean, it's really actually symbolized, I think, perfectly in the 24 hours of January 5 and January 6. Because on the one hand, on January 5, bolstered by high voter turnout, overseen by a Republican governor, a Republican secretary of state, two Democrats -- an African American and a Jewish American -- won Senate seats in a very conservative, historically conservative state. So, that's a real display, on the one hand, of kind of bipartisan commitment to the rule of law and the promise of a multiracial democracy. So, this kind of gets to some of the demographic trends you're talking about.

But within 24 hours in Washington, D.C., we saw a violent assault on the Capitol, you know, culminating this two-month effort to overturn the results of the election, really facilitated by large segments of the Republican Party. So, you know, you really have here a kind of tale of two cities or a tale

of the kind of two faces of democracy.

And I think actually the two events are actually very related because America's movement towards a multiracial democracy, which is incredibly promising, has also radicalized elements of the Republican Party, transforming it and certain parts of it I would say as a classic anti-system party, the way that political scientists describe parties in the 20th century that don't accept the results of elections, condone violence, use violence to kind of cling onto power.

So, you know, usually a democracy, a functioning democracy, should be able to deal with a political party that goes off the rails. Because, you know, like we have sort of assumed that our elections, you know, when you go too far to the extremes, especially in a two-party system, you should moderate and move back to the center.

But I think what we see in the United States increasingly, Elaine mentioned this in the last panel a bit, that in a way we have this radical minority, really only a third of the electorate I would say, but it's protected in a sense by our 18th century counter-majoritarian institutions: the Senate, the Electoral College, the filibuster.

And so what this means, you know, rural areas have always been overrepresented in American politics, but really for the first time because of this growing correlation of population density and party, these institutions have become a crutch for the GOP, really discouraging it from changing course. I mean, you can gain office now without winning majorities. So, it dulls the incentive in a sense to compete.

So, you know, ultimately, at the end of the day, I think we need to all democratize our democracy. I mean, this means expanding voting rights, make it easier to vote, getting rid of the filibuster, giving statehood to D.C. and Puerto Rico, even, and I know the steep hill to climb, I would argue getting rid of the Electoral College. I mean, anything that empowers majorities. Amanda Gorman actually at the Inauguration put it so beautifully when she said, you know, America's not broken, it's just unfinished. And I really agree with this.

I mean, our democracy is unfinished and most democracies around the world, advanced democracies after 1945, got -- Argentina got rid of its Electoral College. Sweden got rid of its upper chamber. Britain weakened the House of Lords. And we still are operating with our institutions that we've

inherited from the 18th century. And so I think that the kind of way forward is to democratize our democracy. And so this is obviously a steep hill to climb, but the good news is I think there is a way out.

MS. HILL: Well, that's good to hear actually. I thought we were going to start off in a real downer of a note there, particularly, you know, with the title of the book, "How Democracies Die," which, of course, also looks at some of the dire circumstances that emerged in Europe over a long period.

Kele, I mean, you've actually looked up some of the efforts of change in other settings as well, particularly when it comes to sort of accountability for some of the events that really threaten democracy or prevent democracy from improving itself and from evolving. And obviously, there is a huge focus today of all days on the idea of the truth and can we get at the truth of what happened in certain sets of events. And how can we all move forward from an accounting or a reckoning, you know, particularly today with the events of January 6th, and where we go from here and what we need?

And given the work that you've been doing for so many years, perhaps you could just give us a few observations to get started here.

MS. ZVOBGO: Sure. Thank you so much for having me and for organizing this important set of conversations.

I guess to begin I would say that it's really important when countries have a contested or violent political transitions, like the one we've had here in the U.S., that there is a comprehensive and authoritative narrative on the past that is delivered typically by governments. And so in my line of work, transitional justice, I look at how different countries have implemented judicial and nonjudicial accountability processes.

I've looked at trials, for example, and criminal investigations and prosecutions, which we are seeing ongoing in the aftermath of the Capitol insurrection, but also truth commissions, which are broader in scope and in ambition in terms of helping a society to establish a comprehensive and authoritative truth. And not only just to address the Trump administration, which has recently been replaced by the Biden administration, but also really our -- a longer history, a history of years, decades, and centuries where we've had a system predicated on the subjugation of non-White people such that you can have in 2021 a president of the United States calling to action people whose country has been taken from them and how must, therefore, seize their country.

And so some things that I've seen in other countries, in particular truth commissions, have proved very helpful in establishing key facts, whether that is names and locations, the types of abuses experienced by different people, the acts of political violence themselves, and certainly those who were responsible. And so truth commissions can actually work with trials, can be used as compliments really, where you have one body, the truth commission, that is establishing broad systems and patterns of abuse over a period of time, and then trials dealing with more singular events and particular people at particular places engaging in specific acts.

And so we see this in countries like South Africa, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked in parallel with criminal trials. Likewise in Argentina, actually the trials succeeded the truth-seeking exercises there. The same thing in countries like Timor-Leste, Guatemala, and others.

And so I would really encourage the Biden administration and policymakers at different levels of government, at the federal level, but also the state and the city level, to devise different truth-seeking mechanisms that can help them establish an authoritative truth on the past such that we can move on. Right? In America there's always this instinct to move on, always forward, forward, forward, without a lot of introspection, without a lot of pausing to look back so that one can advance forward.

And so that is something that I would seriously recommend here and it's something that I have written about extensively. There are different truth commissions that are actually ongoing right now where that had been proposed at the city level in Iowa City, in Boston, San Francisco, and many other places.

And there are currently two proposals actually in Congress, one to address true racial healing and transformation more generally in the U.S. with a focus on Black and Indigenous Americans. That's been sponsored by Congresswoman Barbara Lee of San Francisco and a sister bill has been proposed by Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey and a parallel commission focusing on Native Americans that's been proposed by Deb Haaland, who will now likely be our next Secretary of the Interior, and Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts in the Senate.

So, it'll be interesting to see the traction that these proposals gain at the federal level. But they're absolutely essential to grounding us in a history.

And I'll just close this part of my remarks by saying that truth commissions and

transitional justice more generally have states reckon with past violence, human rights violations, and abuse. They're really about limiting the number of lies that can go unchallenged in the public square. And this is a quote I will paraphrase of Ignatius. Right? And I think at this particular point in our history we need to limit the number of lies that can go unchallenged in the public discourse, not only through truth commissions, but through judicial means, as well.

And something that I've proposed is for, you know, I'm getting a Congressional commission that has testimony by those who participated in the Big Lie, elected officials, and to have them, you know, testify under oath at risk of perjury what they understand to be the truth of the 2020 election. And to hear from them, from their constituents -- or for them -- for their constituents to hear directly from them what is the truth I think would be really powerful.

MS. HILL: That's a very important power, Kele. And having been a witness myself in a Congressional setting, it really is something that -- weighs very heavily on you to make sure that you can provide the best truth, you know put that out there as clearly as you possibly can in that moment. Those are very powerful moments.

And I think we can get back to how other countries -- I mean, Daniel will probably have some thoughts on this, and Europe, as well. I mean, obviously, Germany, West Germany in particular, went through a whole era of soul-searching as well as educational also judicial efforts to address the Holocaust. There are many countries where, you know, kind of you can't just lie in the name of freedom of speech; that Holocaust denial is against the law, for example, in Germany, there have been landmark cases in the United Kingdom on issues like this, as well. And I think, as you were saying, we have to kind of grapple there and lawsuits shouldn't just be the way of doing this, about freedom of speech not meaning the freedom to lie.

And I think, Katy, your work here with Interfaith obviously comes into this. Because at the essence of most faith-based communities, most churches and synagogues and mosques around the country, is a moral obligation to tell the truth to your congregations, you know, to the people who rely on those of who are the faith leaders, and within the community themselves to have a truthful set of interactions with their other members.

So, I mean, this is obviously something that your group grappled with, as well, and it's a

very important part of the United States democracy in a country where religion means a lot to many people, to be able to have that aspect pay out in a democratic setting. I mean, I think it'd be very interesting for everyone to hear about what you're trying to do with Interfaith to really bolster democracy at this particularly difficult juncture.

MS. JOSEPH: Sure. Thanks, Fiona, and it's great to be with everyone.

I think that it's not a surprise to anyone in this conversation that the role of religion and faith conviction is really central to the lives of a lot of Americans. We are known for being a very religious country. About three out of every four Americans identifies with a particular faith tradition. One in four doesn't identify with any faith tradition or is agnostic, atheist, or secular.

For younger folks that share is even higher. So, as we're thinking about how our country I changing and shifting and how we orient ourselves around questions of the truth and moral conviction and how we interact with each other. I think that's an important component for us to think about, as well.

Bearing in mind that incredible diversity of belief and philosophy in the United States, what we do at Interfaith Alliance is work to advance a vision of religious freedom that is inclusive, that is affirming, and to combat the misuse of religion in the public square to cause harm.

So, as we're thinking about and reflecting on the events that we saw on January 6, we saw one example of what faith can mean in the public square in a really dangerous way on the 6 and then days leading up to it. There were rallies on the Mall. There was a large cross that was erected outside the Capitol. There were flags that were flown invoking in Jesus's name we perpetuate this action. I'm kind of bridging both religious identity and national identity in a way to justify the actions that were taking place in a very anti-democratic type of action.

At the same time, another example of what we see faith looking like in public life, taking place in exactly the same place, just a few months before that I had the honor of participating in a march with the Poor People's Campaign, which is a fusion movement that brings together faith leaders and civil leaders to overcome poverty and to move us forward in an inclusive way across race and economic and religious minds, so to recenter us around questions of moral guidance and affirming the human worth and dignity of all people.

We came together to call on the Senate to pass comprehensive COVID relief. This was

before the election and before our political conversation took a different turn in the aftermath of the election. But this is another example of what faith can look like in public life.

These are two examples that brought together different perspectives to very different ends. Our challenge, in many ways, going forward does what is our democratic project look like when we have these very different understandings of the role of religion and belief kind of under the same umbrella of democracy?

I love this phrase that you used, Daniel, about further democratizing our democracy. And for us as we think about and talk about what true religious freedom looks like and inclusive understanding of religious freedom, we always go back to the promise of the First Amendment. It's this personal right to believe as we choose, which is not without limits and we can talk about that a little bit later.

But there's also an expectation from government often kind of summarized as the separation of church and state, that the government will not favor religion over nonreligion or one religious tradition over another. So, how do we begin to think through what federal policies, laws, administrative rules look like that affirm this right, again, to believe as we choose, to hold these very different understandings of what the truth may be, of what it means to live a moral and inspired life for many people, a faithful life for many people, while recognizing the right of our neighbor on this side of us and on that side of us to do the same in a very different way?

MS. HILL: Thank you very much, Katy. I mean, that's a very important point. And I think that that was obviously something that was coming out in the last panel, as well, is that as Elaine was describing, you know, that sort of seeming fusion of religion or a particular strand of religion with one political party, which is obviously something that has not really been the case in the past in the United States. Although it has obviously in other parts of Europe, where you have a number of Christian democratic parties or the party might be associated in a particular strand of religious faith. And that certainly seems to have been a shift in time here in the United States.

And, Lynn, you know, a number of the questions that we had in advance were really very much focused on what can people do at the grassroots level in their communities to address this polarization? I mean, is it possible for people themselves to continue, you know, as Daniel said and as Katy picked up on, that democratization of our democracy? And it seems that has to be by we the people

with our own agency taking part in this.

But when you're confronted with people who not just believe differently, but think differently about what the policy and political outcome should be, you know, how is it that you can address this to reach some at least common basis of understanding? And at least some semblance of having an agreement on what the truth is and how you would get to that point. I mean, this is obviously the work that Braver Angels does all the time and I think it'd be great to hear a little bit more about what you're tackling right now and how you're thinking about this.

MS. HEADY: Great. Thank you, Fiona. And I'd like to thank Brookings Institution for offering a place at the table for Braver Angels. We appreciate this.

For me I'd like to start by giving a small task that we're about the business of doing at Braver Angels and that's our mission: We strive to depolarize America. Now, not only is that a small task, it also requires an awful lot of patience, honesty, inclusiveness. But most of all it really requires a great deal of bravery. And I think in Representative Straus' words we heard a lot of this. Actually I've been sitting here cheerleading everything that I have heard as it fits with what we do.

So, within Braver Angels, as members and leaders in that organization, we all come to an agreement that one of our founders, Bill Doherty, shared with us the other day, which is that effect of political polarization, which is not only disagreement on issues, but personal contempt and the distrust that grows from those has been growing between us for at least 25 years. In other words, this was a problem long before the 2016 election.

Today there's evidence, as we've heard today, to suggest that we're now as polarized as we were since the Civil War. And we call this a cold civil war. And we face the compounding challenges that we've also heard today: the spreading pandemic, the economic troubles, one that wasn't mentioned concerns around the environment, and then other national and global challenges.

So, when you layer all this together, we are now called upon to support each other like we never have before and yet to so many of us out there this seems like an impossible task. We don't seem prepared at this point in time to meet these challenges. This is the critical issue that directs the work at Braver Angels. Our work is really about how do we build this house united? How do we make this work?

And we do this by tapping on the most valuable resource we have, which is our membership, we the people. So, we have organized our members into state groups and local alliances, which are our definition of chapters, because we believe that unless we are working together this is not going to happen. We also believe that these alliances, which are grassroots, are the only and best outreach arm that we have for Braver Angels.

By organizing in this way we are able to make personal connections between citizens who have different views. We're able to promote some good will. We're able to promote social trust and political empathy, which we seem to have lost. But more importantly, we're giving our members the opportunity to explore differing facts to reach some sort of understanding.

Now, I'm going to be a realist. We do not have the same facts nor do we trust the same experts. If our fact divisions stem from distrust, then we have to rebuilt trust first as opposed to saying that we can't reason together unless we first agree on a set of facts. We believe we have to first agree -- or first come together and build trust so that we can either agree on or make an arrangement between us on those facts.

In Braver Angels we've learned that people can differ in these facts and yet still come together to understand and respect each other by sharing values, aspirations, and experience. The only position we take is that maintaining communication and openness to one another is the only way we're going to restore our civic relationships and move forward together as a country.

As many of our members have said, we can't wait for Washington to do this. We need to step up. We never ask anyone, be they red, blue, or other, in our organization to change their mind. We ask that they listen with respect and try to understand each other and then seek common ground.

What's really unique about Braver Angels and what basically attracted me, I could have gone to a number of organizations in 2016 when I felt dismayed and really down about the results of what was happening in my country, what makes us different is that we believe in the role of balance in everything we do. For every leadership position in Braver Angels and in every level of the organization we strive to achieve a red, blue, and other balance.

This is why most people who come to Braver Angels join us. They don't want to continue preaching to the choir. They acknowledge that this yields few, if any, results other than more agreement

and quite honestly more rancor because the conversation becomes a feeding mechanism. They want real conversations that reflect our real civic reality.

At the organizational level we offer a lot of national events, like debates á la Braver Angels where there is no winner or loser, but it's a place for people to express their feelings and thoughts and ideas in an atmosphere in which they are respected, they are listened to. They may be questioned, but in a respectful way. We have a couple of policy workshops. We offer one-to-one conversations with two individuals with very different either races, where they live, or what they believe to come together in a structured conversation that begins to build relationships and trusts. We have book and film reviews, all kinds of events.

Once somebody has come to an event we immediately channel them to a local community-based alliance. These alliances are centered in all 50 states in either cities or rural areas. These people coming together, these individuals, these citizens coming together are coming together to learn together, to talk together, and to reach some kind of understanding.

We do this through a series of workshops where, you know, there are a lot of organizations doing depolarization work, our niche is that we have these really high-quality, safe workshops that provide an environment for blues and reds and others to come together in an environment where they're not afraid to share their issues. It doesn't mean that we agree with everything. What it does mean is that we give them that kind of a venue to begin those conversations.

Also, our local alliances have meetings where they discuss issues and, more importantly, come together to craft community action. In other words, what can we do as a community to enhance our community?

And some examples of things that they've done have been ideas and solutions around media, surprise medical billing, transportation, racism, and other topics that are at the forefront within their communities. We also try to involve legislators, both local and national, from bipartisan points of view for these discussions.

Our strength is our membership across the country. And as our numbers grow we're encouraged by the honest, open sharing of ideas. This is not always successful at first, but we persist.

So, after many of our workshops I often hear if we could be the ones making decisions

for our country, we'd be in a much stronger place. I agree with them and I also agree with the words of Adam Grant in a recent article, "I no longer believe it's my place to change anybody's mind. All I can do is try to understand their thinking and ask that they're open to some rethinking along with me. The rest is up to them."

Thank you for this opportunity.

MS. HILL: Well, thanks very much, Lynn. You know, I think that obviously you're giving a lot of great ideas for people who are listening to this who might want to get involved and doing something, particularly at the grassroots and community level. So, you know, after listening to you I now really would like to encourage people who want to get involved in some way, obviously to take a look at what you're doing as well as Katy and Interfaith are doing, too, you know, depending on things that they're most interested in.

I'd like to bring Daniel and Kele back in on the national level, the federal level here. Because obviously, there's an awful lot that can be done at the community level. And as Lynn just said, many of the participants in their groups are saying, well, if it was left to us, we'd have it all sorted out. And I think there's a lot to be said for that because I'm sure that Katy and Lynn when you've looked at polling, we can see that people are much less polarized in the actual polling than they appear to be at the political level, particularly within the political parties here.

You know, as, Lynn, you were pointing out, there are people who are not Democrats or Republicans. I happen to be one of those. I'm registered as an Independent. And at least a third of the country and actually I would say more are becoming Independent as they've kind of become turned off by the partisan politics. I felt after my last experience in government completely anti-partisan. I want pox on everyone's house is how I sort of felt when I came away from that. And I'm sure an awful lot of people who show up at your grassroots meetings feel exactly the same.

And that's certainly a feeling that is widespread in parts of Europe and in other countries, Kele, that I know that you have studied after a particularly wrenching period of personal turmoil. People often don't want to be engaged with political parties, but they do want to be engaged in their own communities and they want to find a way of playing at the national level.

So, Kele, you know, you've looked at other settings here. And as you listen to what

people can do at the grassroots level and the role that Katy talked about that faith-based institutions and faith leaders can play, I mean, obviously in the case of South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu played an extraordinarily important role coming from the U.K. He was somebody I saw on television as a kid almost every day because he was such an important moral leader as well as a politically active figure, even if he wasn't a partisan political figure, in bringing people together.

And you said that there's obviously a lot of traction that you can get out of truth and reconciliation commissions if they're set up correctly out of judicial action. Elaine Kamarck talked about the lawsuit that's being pressed against Fox News and mentioned billions of dollars that is actually getting people to now rethink just the freedom that they've given people to lie on the air and in public settings. And obviously, again, there's a moral component to all of this.

How would you, from the work that you do and the international experience that you've had, square what Lynn and Katy have talked about with the national level? And then I'd like to ask Daniel to talk about some of the very important experience of Europe after World War II in that regard, as well.

MS. ZVOBGO: All right. We're having an alarm, so if there's a way to pass the baton to Daniel and we can come back to me.

MS. HILL: I'll do that. Well, I hope that doesn't mean that you're on fire, so, you know, please --

MS. ZVOBGO: No, we're not. (Laughter)

MS. HILL: Okay. So, I'll go to Daniel first and then we'll come back to you, Kele. Thank you.

MR. ZIBLATT: So, yeah, about the post-World War II experience, I mean, there's certainly -- there are sort of two models of dealing with this sort of thing actually. And luckily, we're not the first generation or the first country to have to deal with these kinds of challenges and so we can learn from other experiences.

You know, coming out of World War II, the way West Germans dealt with this is they saw that what had happened during the 1930s was the opponents of democracy used the institutions of democracy to get into power. And so as a result of that, essentially thinkers, liberal thinkers, democratic thinkers thought, well, maybe we need to put some limits on this. And so as kind of nasty as this maybe

sounds to American ears, you know, in the German constitution it both allows for political parties, which is something actually our Constitution doesn't do -- you know, our Constitution doesn't even mention the word "political party" -- but it also specifies the conditions under which certain political parties can actually be banned and limited if they attack the democratic order.

Similarly, free speech is allowed, certainly, and a protected right, but that there are limits to it, if it's abused in ways that attack the democratic order. And so this has provided a constitutional framework that this is a model of democracy called militant democracy, which is something -- you know, in different countries it looks differently and then Germany's taking a quite more developed form in the sense that, you know, the "Mein Kampf" couldn't be published in Germany for many years. You can't carry a swastika around Germany. And all of this is done to protect democracy. And in a sense the notion is that democracy needs to be protected and it needs to defend itself.

And so Germany's a liberal democracy. There's freedom of expression, privacy rights, and all of these kinds of things that any liberal Democrat would embrace, but that there are limits to it.

Now, I'm not sure how that operates in the U.S. setting. I mean, I think when we confront groups that attack the democratic order, that assault our Capitol, one of the responses has to be, and I think probably will be, a Justice Department that goes after violent extremism and violence that breaks the law. The question, though, becomes when we reach a point where people are lying -- you know, I think we do actually already have the limits. You know, if you think about it, you can't advertise cigarettes on television, but you can lie on television and threaten and members of Congress can threaten each other and so on.

So, we do have a kind of uneven application of this notion of freedom of speech. And my sense is, I mean, I'm not a constitutional lawyer, but my sense is that this is something that over the next several years people are going to begin to think about how do we reconcile our basic freedoms and liberties that are guaranteed in the Constitution with this other dilemma that other democracies have faced?

It's when you have -- at the end of the day, it's a basic dilemma that this unwritten rule, and this is something we wrote about in our book, is this notion of mutual toleration. And this is, you know, we heard earlier of Howard Baker's line that the other guy might have some good ideas. Our

democracy's premised on tolerating democratic opposition. But the dilemma is what happens when those opponents don't accept the rules of the game, when you have this asymmetry? And this is a dilemma for which there's no easy answers. And so this is something I think that we're going to have to work through over the next few years.

MS. HILL: Maybe if I can ask a quick follow-up question. I think Kele's still under the alarm conditions there. So sorry to hear about that. If you feel like you can talk over it, give us a signal, and we'll try to bring you back in.

What about some of the restrictions of freedom of speech? I mean, that's obviously a pretty hard sell, of course. And we've now got a broadening of the definition of free speech, as well, with money after the Citizens United case against the Supreme Court for the creation of political action committees, which doesn't exist in other countries, for example.

But if we were to have basically very harsh penalties written in in some way for lying, you know, Kele talked about a way around this, about bringing more to Congressional hearings and the importance of telling truth under oath, but is there somewhere that we could institutionalize this? There would obviously be some -- there might be some complete downsides to this, as well. But, I mean, some of the questions that we had in were really about how can you get to this point of being able to enshrine the truth in some way?

MR. ZIBLATT: Yeah. Well, I do think that -- I mean, there is a history of this. I mean, we do have to remember the First Amendment was initially it's about -- you know, had to do with the federal government. It had nothing to do with the states. The states could limit speech as much as they wanted as long as the state constitution allowed. So, this is actually a relatively -- you know, it's a 20th century innovation, the current regime in which we're existing in.

And I don't want to be misunderstood. I'm not kind of arguing that we embrace a militant democracy model. But it's just important to recognize that this model is out there. And the reason it's out there, it's a sensible model, it's out there facing -- as the country tried to deal with the challenges we face.

So, if we are not going to pursue that model, you know, what are we going to do? And there was this incredible quote, Hans Kelsen, a constitutional -- Weimar era constitutional thinker, leading law professor of the late 1920s and 1930s, in 1932 said we can't fight democracy -- this is the year before

Hitler came to power. We can't fight democracy with dictatorship. If you really believe in democracy, you have to be willing to go down with the ship. And so the next year he fled the country, went to Berkeley, and so that didn't work out so well.

So, you know, there needs to be a kind of method for dealing with this. And so to my mind, a second method is through competition. I mean, the American method of dealing with this is moderation through competition. And so the electoral -- you have two parties. When you lose, when a political party loses, they suffer consequences. And I think our current institutions are not set up in a way where there's enough accountability for losing elections because we have all of these institutions that I was talking about that essentially bolster up parties through gerrymandering, through the Electoral College, etc. And so parties, you know, even if they lie, even if they condone violence, they're not punished at the ballot box when a majority of Americans continue to be quite liberal and inclusive.

So, I think we need to -- so, if we're not going to ban it, we need to allow competition to solve these problems.

MS. HILL: Well, Kele has found a way, as democracy we hope also will, to continue the conversation by going outside. Very glad you won't be burned alive, so thank you. (Laughter) Because that would seem to be a real alarm. So, Kele is now outdoors on her phone.

MS. ZVOBGO: Hello.

MS. HILL: I'd like to get back to you again, if we could.

MS. ZVOBGO: Yes. So sorry.

MS. HILL: If you'd be able to sort of pick up on that question. I mean, Daniel really left us with the kind of an idea of, again, we have a much more liberal and tolerant -- liberal with a very small L, by the way, not the (inaudible) term -- and tolerant populace who want to find ways of getting along, as people have said in all of Lynn's grassroots interactions and also probably in the work that Katy does.

But there is a big dilemma of trying to establish a kind of level for truth and accountability at the top. And Daniel, the whole (inaudible) if you caught the end of it of how we might grapple with this. But you grapple with this all the time in your work on transitional justice.

MS. ZVOBGO: Yeah.

MS. HILL: I mean, giving us a bit of advice, how would you, again, go about trying to

tackle this?

MS. ZVOBGO: Sure. I think a good place to start actually, and I should have started at the beginning, is with a discussion of the central tenets of transitional justice, where they're truth, justice, reparations, and institutional reforms. And these are complimentary pillars of transitional justice and they can be delivered through various mechanisms.

So, truth, of course, truth commissions, but also things like memorialization, commemoration. Justice, pretty clear there, trials, prosecutions, judicial reforms. Reparations, both economic and symbolic. And then institutional reforms, like reforms to the Constitution, reforms to various laws, et cetera.

And so in countries exiting particularly difficult political periods, and I'd like to think that that's us, as well, as we are exiting a difficult political period, it's going to be very important at every level to implement some different measures that seek to address these complimentary, mutually (inaudible), and I would even say mutually reinforcing transitional justice tools. And that's going to affect people at the local level and also at the federal level.

And I think you had asked about what the government at a national level can do. Now, I think there was an earlier comment that we shouldn't wait for the federal government to act, and that's absolutely right. There should be things that are done at the grassroots level. And actually I'm working on a book right now that looks at the role of civil society in helping to deliver different conditional justice tools by mobilizing an appetite for accountability within their local communities.

And so I think of transitional justice like any other political project. It requires a campaign and so you have to campaign for your ideas and communicate to the public why they are needed. Why do we need a truth commission? Well, we don't have a shared understanding of certain facts. And if we're able to implement such a body, we can better understand each other. And this body can then give us suggestions for doing even more. Because truth commissions will make recommendations based on their findings, for example about reparations.

And so civil society is really key in making this happen, but, of course, there is also -- so there's the bottom up and also there's the top down because sometimes ordinary citizens may not be ready to contend with the truth of the past. And so it's also incumbent on our elected officials, right, those

to whom we delegate authority and responsibility and, to a degree, decision-making powers, right, for them to kind of like bring us -- for them to bring us along in partnership with different civic and social leaders.

And just to tie it back to the point of connecting with faith, which you had mentioned earlier with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, that it's really important that any transitional justice effort is not perceived as partisan or one-sided. Right? There's this idea of being somewhere between vengeance and forgiveness, right, if we can find that sweet spot. And I think nonpolitical or many political, but nonpartisan actors and groups can be very important in this.

So, in South Africa, the two people who led the truth commission were Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his deputy was Pastor Alex Boraine. And together they were able to create an environment where perpetrators testified to what they had done. And they use this language: Testify as you would confess to God. And that was a very powerful framing I that particular context. And turning to the victim saying are you prepared to forgive as God has forgiven you?

Now, as Katy mentioned already, three in four Americans express a faith and really all faiths have this forgiveness and -- confession and forgiveness dialogue or framework. And so that could be something that's really valuable. I'm thinking of the new cardinal of D.C., who's an African-American man himself. To have a leader like him and other leaders from different faith communities, a really ecumenical effort to come in and to really apply pressure on the members of their congregation in their churches and on policymakers who worship under them that to recenter and realign and to repursue the truth I think is really foundational.

And so you kind of have this normative approach to truth and justice. But, of course, you know, I am a realist, too, just like Lynn and so sometimes need a little rough justice. And so I've written in *Foreign Policy* about having Congressional hearings where people have testified under oath to the truth of the 2020 election such that that can be established, set aside, and we can move on. Because really, if a third of the electorate does not think that the results of the 2020 election were legitimate and fair, that puts into contest all future elections and really to get to agree.

To turn back to the point about effective polarization establishes a level of mistrust that really makes it hard for us to move on. So, truth is going to be foundational, as we've seen in South

Africa, as we've seen in Timor-Leste at the grassroots level where perpetrators testified. And after they apologized, they were reintegrated into their communities.

And so the object isn't punishment, but it's just healing and reintegration and being able to move forward together. But to do that, there has to be a shared foundation, a shared truth, and really a shared interest in a shared future. And to echo the previous panel, that really communicating that some people have gotten ahead because there was inequity. And some people have fallen behind, also because there was inequity. And so as we try and put people onto the same playing field, then we can all move ahead together in an equitable way. And that really reflects the values of this nation, at least those that we purport to believe in.

MS. HILL: That's great, Kele. Thank you very much. I mean, I'm sorry that we actually don't have quite so much time left in the discussion. I want to actually just to come back to Katy. Because I think Lynn really laid out very eloquently exactly what Braver Angels is doing, which really picks up on many of the things that you're talking about here, Kele. And that's just a very powerful affirmation of the grassroots' role. And Lynn, as you said, it's quite accurate that if people could get together, they could solve an awful lot of problems if they're then given the ability to translate up their conclusions and their ideas up to a higher level, which Daniel has talked about, as well.

But there's been a lot here about the role of faith leaders and thinking about what Desmond Tutu and the pastor did in South Africa. But I'm also thinking about that idea of commemoration, which is also built into many religious faiths. And also the idea of recompense, you know, kind of basically making amends in some way as part of your religious faith.

And perhaps you might be able to just give us, you know, final thoughts as we wrap up here. That's been a very strong part of the America that we know, even for people who are not members of a faith-based community, it's built in, in many respects, in a universal way and a kind of a sense of common humanity in the United States, our universal values.

So, if you could just give us a little thought about, you know, as we think, as we wrap this up, about the role of some of our faith leaders, the suggestion about the cardinal of Washington, D.C., for example. Over to you, Katy.

MS. JOSEPH: Sure. I mean, I've had many conversations in the past week and even

earlier about these questions about what are the limits of free speech and other First Amendment rights? And kind of the point that I think it's important for us to come back to is our system is designed such that we have free speech, but we're not free from consequence. And right now, the question is what does that consequence look like?

And the work that I do is, under normal times, very focused on Capitol Hill and what's going on in D.C. But I'll share them within my own faith tradition where in Jewish tradition there's this concept of Teshuvah. When you've harmed someone it's not enough to just recognize that you've harmed someone. You have an obligation to go to them and engage with them and then it's up to them to decide whether you're forgiven. It's not an automatic I named my wrong and then we move forward. It's a two-party conversation. But the sense of ownership and what that looks like belongs to the person who has suffered the harm.

And so as we're thinking about kind of what comes next, as Kele laid out, the various components of what justice might look like under these circumstances, we need to be honest about the fact that our democracy has suffered a wrong. We have been harmed. Our institution, our Capitol building, was attacked. We still have leaders within that body who are preaching division. And we need to find a way to justify that harm, to reinforce what those consequences look like. And that might include commemoration, that might include reparations. It can include many different things. But we have a lot of work to do.

On a grassroots community level, as well as on a state and federal government level to figure out what it looks like to actually build a narrative where no one is left behind. And those who have suffered and who have been on one side of that inequality for a very, very long time are not left in that same position as we move forward toward a just future together.

MS. HILL: Well, thank you, Katy. That was very powerful. And I would encourage everyone who's listening today to check out Katy's work and Lynn's work with Interfaith and Braver Angels, as well as to follow Kele and Daniel's writings on all of these topics.

And obviously, Brookings is working very actively in this space, as we saw from the last panel. And we'll continue to have events related to this. We've got a lot of work that we have to do, a lot of hard work. But I think we're all understanding now, you know, what it's going to take.

And I do think that that point that you made, Katy, about we're not free from consequence is a very important one, especially against the backdrop of today and events on Capitol Hill now that are a direct consequence of what happened on January 6th.

So, I'd just like to thank all of you for taking part in the discussion. I'm going to have to hand it back over to our technicians to wrap everything up.

Kele, that was marvelous. You dealt with a fire alarm in really a very creative way, which means that we ourselves can deal with this, too. As you've showed us, just be very creative, get our phones, and get outside. This is why you're probably in California still and not outside of Washington, D.C., in rather colder weather. But really great that you were able to continue this.

And thanks to everybody else that's listening, to Darrell West and all of our previous panelists, to John Allen, and to Speaker Straus for really getting us started, and to everyone else who has made this possible, and all the Brookings trustees. Thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you.

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