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WEBINAR

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

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TUCKER: Hi. Welcome, everyone, to another Brookings Institution session today where we're going to be talking about what we learned from the RNC, the Republican National Convention. I first want to introduce all of our guests and panelists today that we have on the call, starting with A.B. Stoddard, a columnist at The Bulwark, E.J. Dionne Jr, who is the W. Averil Harriman chair and senior fellow at Governance Studies, Henry Olsen, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. And Bill Galston, the Ezra K Zilkha co-chair and senior fellow at Governance Studies. Thank you, everybody. So if you're joining us today, please send us your questions. We will be taking these at the end of the call. If you're following online. Also feel free to tag us and use the hashtag #RNCTakeaways. So I just want to open it up today, and talk a little bit about one the RNC following. And of course, a lot of news that came over the weekend with Biden choosing to exit the race. But starting from the beginning of the RNC, we know that party conventions can really be a forecast for the party's direction or, its vision, at least for the moment, right before we actually saw that the Project 2025 platform, and a couple other themes throughout the convention that were carried every single day and into the RNC, speakers that they chose, the content that was covered in a lot of the rhetoric that was deployed. And with Vance as well, elevated this convention. It painted a pretty clear picture of the direction of the RNC, and not just the RNC, but also the Republican Party. So I want to kind of kick it off and open up a little bit to, two days prior to the RNC starting. And what we saw was an assassination attempt on the former President, Donald Trump, as he survived that, that very narrow escape, but carrying into the convention not just on Monday, throughout every single day we saw a raised fist, we saw, fight, fight, fight, kind of chanting and going on with delegates throughout his speeches. As we went through, we also saw bandages on the ear, popularizing in moments of solidarity with the former president. But looking at it, how do we think, this event really colored the convention? And also, how deeply has it united the party around Trump? Henry or Bill, if you want to take that one.

OLSEN: Yeah. You know, I think that it added to the already deep affection for that party activist and the party base has for Trump. There's certainly an element of millenarianism about the Christian wing of the party. And you see that with people saying God saved him. I think the most important thing about the assassination attempt, though, isn't the convention. It's likely it's cut through effect for swing voters or for nonpartisan activists. There's a lot of people who will never tune into the RNC and don't follow politics every day, but they like Trump. And this is the sort of news that cuts through. This is sort of thing you can't avoid, and it draws you in. And it's a human interest story. I think it will solidify that marginal Trump voter, an affection for him and a desire to go out and vote. So while it definitely help unify and intensify the party around Trump as a person. I think the longer range effect is going to be on that marginal Trump voter who

may have ignored the entire convention but can't escape the news of the assassination. I think it's going to like them and make them like Trump just a little bit more, and make them just a little bit more likely to go out and vote. And that could be the difference in a very close race.

TUCKER: To point A.B. As well. To Henry's note, did you think that the the theme of some of the convention speakers in this kind of divine intervention, on on Trump surviving this attempt and walking through and the show of strength throughout the convention every day. Do you think that's going to carry with voters or become a central part of his election message? Got you on on mute there, thanks.

STODDARD: So sorry. I think we'll be hearing obviously more about this. Really horrible, event. The, the former president was so close to losing his life. It will be a part of this campaign. He said the other day at his first rally with, JD Vance, that he took a bullet for democracy. This isn't going anywhere. I think the fact that it happened right before the convention, obviously, overshadowed the convention. And, and was very moving for the people that Henry, you know, described who are already passionate supporters of Donald Trump, who were in that convention hall. So it's a very, galvanizing. But you can't become a more passionate, passionate voter. An Uber passionate vote is still the same vote as a passionate vote. So I think that idea outside the convention hall, that the actual attempted assassination moves, those marginal voters that Henry just described into becoming more energized, that that matters more than what they were talking about at the RNC, because you're really preaching to the faithful, right? So those people are not going to vote more than they were already going to. They're not going to raise more money, knock on more doors. They already we're going to do everything they could to elect former president. I don't think swing voters who are on the fence see this kind of talk about him being chosen and being spared. This providential language moves fence sitting voters. I don't believe that at all. So I think Henry's right that that this theme that that Trump was chosen, this is his election to win. He is the next president really only works with with the already converted. And and his she says get some people out to the polls who were very moved by this but already liked Trump. If you have your reservations about Donald Trump, the body was dangerous before two Saturdays ago. I don't think anything they were saying at the convention, about him being chosen is going to move. It's going to move you.

GALSTON: You know. Well. Donald Trump arose from the dead. Without that inconvenient intermediate step of actually having to die. And, but what we did see and, you know, continuing this theme of the swing voter. In those moments after the bullet. Narrowly missed his head. We saw the instincts of the man on full

display, and we saw a real presence of mind. Despite the experience, the near-death experience that he just had, he knew exactly what he wanted to convey. And those crucial five to ten seconds. And he did it. And I have I have to say, that that was a truly. Impressive performance. You know, I think it was Ernest Hemingway who defined courage. Is grace under pressure? And I speak now as, you know, as someone who has criticized Donald Trump on a number of grounds and will probably continue to, but you have to give the man his due, and he, you know, in those ten seconds earned the additional enthusiasm of the crowd. And as both Henry and A.B. have said, probably impressed some people who were not necessarily firmly in his camp before that event.

DIONNE: Yeah. Yeah. I'd just like to say having Bill having given him his due. I want to sort of talk a bit about, some of the problems he later caused himself at that convention, which Bill actually, and with Elaine wrote a very good piece about. First of all, listeners, viewers should know we are going to get to, the large fact that this whole conversation we're having was somewhat transformed yesterday by President Biden's withdrawal, from the race. And that really does change a lot of what we might have said about this. It's important for us to recognize that conventions tend to be watched by the faithful and not by swing voters and encouraged by something Henry said. Before we started, I looked up a good New York Times story. The convention was watched. The final night of the convention drew 25.4 million people. That's a lot of people. But it's not a huge percentage of the electorate. The, the audience peaked at the 15 minute mark of, Mr. Trump's speech at 28 million, which quite significant is that, according to Nielsen, 10.4 million, of those, so a very significant minority were watching it on Fox News. And that means that that was the faithful. So if you subtract that from 25 million, you're talking about maybe 15 million possible swing voters who were, watching it elsewhere. Not all of them are swing voters. So I think that's just an important context here. Secondly, I think it's I think Trump just blew an incredible opportunity that this event this shooting, which brought him sympathy from all kinds of people, even people no one wants, an act of violence, to alter, American politics. No one wants anyone to take a shot at anyone in our country. And I think there was real sympathy for Trump going into that. It clearly shaped, the convention. You had those fists moving all, the time and fight, fight, fight going all the time, during that convention and then, and his aides promise that this would be a speech where he tell the story of what happened to him and call for national unity. And he stuck with the program for maybe 15 or 20 minutes. And his recounting of the events, I suspect, moved some people. And then he went off the rails and gave the longest, convention speech in history. It was nothing more or less than the average Trump rally, except in some ways a lower energy effort at that. I'm sure the, the the, audience, according to Nielsen, peaked at about 15 minutes of his speech and dropped off. And so my view at the time I was alive chatting

for the post is at the end of that, 93 minutes. A whole lot of Democrats in the country were a lot happier than they were, at the beginning of that convention, because Trump it was a well orchestrated convention from Trump's point of view. It had been disciplined. I personally thought there were too many members of the Trump family called upon to talk, but we can discuss that. And then Trump threw away the opportunity he had. And then almost immediately, some of the effect of the convention was further dissipated because the entire national conversation switched again to what is Joe Biden going to do? Culminating in last night's, yesterday's decision, to leave the race. So, yeah, they probably gained a little bit at the beginning of that convention, but I think they lost the chance, to use the goodwill Trump got when he was because he was, of the failed assassination attempt. And I think they, they just lost that opportunity.

TUCKER: But good point on the speeches. And I actually want to pivot to that point because in in Trump speech and also just thinking about what his selection of JD vance as a running mate means, he said to him, I spoke directly to him in this and said, you're going to be doing this for a long time, right? Enjoy the ride, is what he said. And Vance there had been ruminations of him on the ticket. Stefanik at one point, Burgum at one point. But a larger question, and I think it was clear with some of the delegates, but also just some of the kind of everyday Americans that were at the RNC. You know, I spoke with people who who weren't familiar with Vance at all. But what the benefits are having a Vance on the ticket in this moment? Besides a candidate like a Rubio or a Scott or someone perhaps with broader appeal or name recognition. And and clearly him being a younger, you know, half his age of Trump, a second in line kind of command to him. For the VP nomination. Henry, can you speak to that a little bit?

OLSEN: Yeah. Yeah. I like JD, I've known him before "Hillbilly Elegy," so I understand this is coming from an admirer of his. He's extremely smart. He can think his way through difficult situations, which, frankly, a lot even people on the national stage can't always. They rely a lot on preparation. And that will come through in moments, that will help him. He is somebody who has a compelling story. He is somebody who definitely sees himself as and genuinely does represent the American working class person who is the key to the new Republican constituency. But I think he's a prospect, in political terms, which is safe. If we were talking about baseball, we were talking about football. You talk about the person who was highly recruited in high school, who performed well in college, and then they make it to the pros. He's been promoted to the professional leagues, after doing well in the lower leagues. And we'll see how we can handle the, wicked curveballs that the national media and his opponents throw at him. I suspect he'll struggle from time to time because everybody struggles when they get promoted to the big leagues. Vice President Harris struggled when she

ran her on her own in 2020. Totally different than running for Senate or attorney general, but I think he will do well. I think he will display a warmth and a understanding that people who are in the target audience will see. Most people don't vote for presidents because of the vice president. Even embarrassments like Sarah Palin don't really drag the ticket down that much on the margin. I think Vance will help a little bit. But the real key is what it shows about the future of the Republican Party. And this clearly puts the Trump economic populist wing in the driver's seat, much to the consternation of most of our friends in the think tank and media community who, if their Republicans are in the old guard camp. This clearly foreshadows a change in the Republican toward a more towards the populist element that, frankly, I've been championing for a long time.

DIONNE: Now that you know, what I would say about Vance is that, clearly he's intelligent. And clearly he signals the shift. Although I think there is a deep ambiguity about the current populism of the Republican Party that on the one hand, there is the language that Vance, used. And Sean O'Brien from the Teamsters sounded at times like he was speaking at a Bernie Sanders rally when he addressed that, convention. And they were, you know, trying to drive that point home. On the other hand, when you watch Trump's speech, one of the most enthusiastic things he talks about were his tax cuts, which are tax cuts for the wealthy. Another thing he has talked about all the time, including to, in a, in a well-publicized moment to a bunch of oil, company executives, deregulation, getting rid of the Biden era regulations and the like. So I think there is an ambiguity about this, populism in the Republican Party. But it's been widely said, and I think it's true that the Vance choice was also a sign of either confidence or we'll see overconfidence on the part of Trump, because Trump could have picked someone who reached out to parts of the Republican Party who are not entirely comfortable, with him, particularly on foreign policy. If anything, Vance is more, clear in kind of wanting to walk away from our commitment to Ukraine, than Trump is, although it's a close competition there, he could have gone to someone who would reassure that wing of the Republican Party, say, somebody like Marco Rubio, he didn't do that. And I think the other problem with Vance is that he does nothing in the other key swing group in this election. And I don't think Henry would disagree with this, which is suburban moderate voters, including some of those Nikki Haley voters. Yes, she did endorse Trump there, but some of them still have doubts. Suburban moderates who are pro-choice on abortion, and are very uneasy with the, the extreme social conservatism of the Republican Party and Vance quite openly is part of the very strongly socially conservative wing, of the Republican Party. And so, if this doesn't work, and we don't know yet, I think that will be one of the key reasons that Vance helps Democrats. And it looks like it's going to be Kamala Harris rally those suburban swing voters. But A.B. knows everything there is to know about this, so I'd love to ask her. What her, if I could intrude. I'd love to know what A.B. Thinks of that.

STODDARD: I agree with E.J. that this was a pick of confidence. This was not a man who thought that he needed to fight for every last vote. Trump has been ahead in the polls of Joe Biden for a year, not the last couple months. Not back in the winter, for a year since last summer and his lead has grown. And it was feeling so in the bag that he was able to pick a JD Vance. He didn't have to take a Doug Burgum to to to to make people feel that a north that a midwest governor was coming to be measured and calm and bring stability. He didn't have to, eat it and pick Nikki Haley, which would have, you know, been a move of a Trump, probably down in the polls or picked Marco Rubio. So Vance is a pick of confidence. It's, like he, he likes him. Vance is going to be completely loyal. Vance has basically said that Mike Pence, as VP, should not have certified the election on January 6th of 2021 and should have presented alternate electors in the Congress and created a constitutional crisis, the likes of which we really can't completely imagine. I think that Vance will excite back to Henry's point about that marginal voter doesn't go to the conventions, doesn't watch the conventions, and maybe now thinks that Trump is a little old. Those people who don't think, who think that Trump will pass the torch in 2028, I'm not one of them, will look at JD Vance and think, this is so exciting. This man is 40 years younger than Trump. He's half his age. He's so next generation. This is so awesome. So I think he does energize some people within the preexisting coalition. I don't as E.J. points out, think that he brings in swing voters because there's just too much stuff. He said in the past that it's extreme that the Democrats are going to use, to to, to march, you know, just isolate him from the voters who are literally on the fence about now, Kamala Harris versus Donald Trump. So those are my thoughts. I think he does energize the base. The people that, again, are not Trump addicted who just are sort of maybe with Trump. And now they think this is the next generation from day one, this guy is going to be groomed to be the next president. This is amazing. This is tomorrow. This is the future. I think that definitely helps. If you're on the fence about Trump, I don't think that JD Vance brings you in.

GALSTON: You know, I, I agree. Not by chance with just about everything that, my colleagues on the panel have said. Let me just back away from the details for a minute and give you my sort of structural or strategic analysis of the choice that Trump faced and then the choice that he made. You know, in my experience there four different reasons, why presidential candidates choose vice presidents. The first is to heal a breach in the party, you know, as Ronald Reagan did in 1980 when he reached out to George H.W. Bush, who had called the centerpiece of his domestic program voodoo economics. So Trump didn't do that. You know, second, you can look for a governing partner. You know, as many previous presidents have done. And that would have been Doug Burgum. Right. Who has actually run a state? As well as being a founder and chief

executive of rather impressive, impressive corporation. Trump didn't feel the need to do that. He could have tried to reach out to a constituency that might be within reach, and and intensified the outreach. As many people have pointed out, Hispanic voters are very much in play, right? They have been moving towards Republicans. They moved significantly toward Trump, interestingly enough, between 2016 and 2020. And there's been a lot of polling suggesting that that movement has continued in the ensuing four years. A pick of Marco Rubio, would, I think have signaled a real strategic determination to try to seal a new majority by attracting at least a strong minority, if not an outright majority of Hispanic voters, to the Republican cause? He didn't do that either. Instead, he doubled down the way Bill Clinton did in 1992. Now, Clinton obviously couldn't pick someone a generation younger than him because that would have been a grade schooler. But, but he did. He he did pick someone who simply intensified the message of generational change. Southern moderation, bipartisanship, etc. One other observation. I think it's always good for a presidential candidate to be able to point to his vice president and say, I have picked someone who, in the event that anything happens to me, you know, has what it takes to step into the job on day one and execute a seamless transfer. I honestly don't think that a man who has never run anything larger than a small venture capital firm qualifies. On those grounds, that may not make a difference in the end, but it would be very hard to say with a straight face, no matter how intelligent and supple he is. That JD Vance has, is the has the preparation to be the president of the United States.

DIONNE: Brianna could I just jump in for a second. First of all, I always say my friend Bill Galston is one of the only people I know who speaks constantly in complete and lucid paragraphs. And I think he laid this out really, really well. And I think what's interesting is the question that Henry raised at the beginning, do VP's make a difference? In one sense, there is a lot of, polling and academic evidence that specifically the VP choice does not seem to move a lot of voters, although, correct me if I'm wrong, Henry, but I think the, data suggests that the Sarah Palin choice by John McCain may have cost him as much as at least two points, which at close range, two points is a lot of points. But to go to Bill's point, I think it does send a larger message. Ronald Reagan, and Jimmy Carter, with their choices, really were reaching out to parts of the party. Liberals were not entirely easy with, Jimmy Carter, the the moderately conservative wing or the old conservative wing of, the Republican Party was not fully easy with Ronald Reagan or people like or George H.W. Bush really pulled that party, together. I think when Clinton doubled down with Al Gore, he was reinforcing what was already a reach for the center of the electorate. What Trump has done is reinforce a reach to the right end of the electorate. And I think that's a, as Al Gore might have put it, that's a bit of a risky scheme. On, on his part. We'll see how it works.

TUCKER: Well, I mean, to that point of risk as well, I think it was present at the RNC, but also thinking about some of the more moderate Republicans and even never Trump kind of programming that was happening there. You didn't see a Paul Ryan or and you didn't see a Paul Ryan. You didn't see a John Boehner. You know, you've had Michael Steele, the former RNC chair, coming out. And I think he, don't quote me verbatim on this, but I think he said something to the effect of he would vote for Biden if he was it still drooling over Trump. And it raises the question of whether people who are Republicans or who have conservative values feel like there is, a space for them in this party where they can, you know, push for these values. But again, the future of that, that movement, when you have the DeSantis and you have, Haley voters specifically who felt like this was, you know, the a viable alternative or someone still standing towards that more moderate spectrum, of the party where, where, where they go, or do they just fall, under Trump? Do they still vote with the party down the ticket?

OLSEN: I'll take that. Yeah. I think. There are very few anti or never Trumpers in the Republican electorate that, most of the people who felt really strongly about Trump have already left the party. They didn't participate in the primary. They didn't really back Nikki Haley. All the polls that I saw before the primary suggested maybe 10% of the party was in the anti Trump mode. The rest of the people were people who were okay with Trump, but, you know, would have preferred a more traditional Republican. But they're perfectly fine with Trump. They may prefer a different interpretation, but Trump has demonstrated through things like those tax cuts and deregulation that there is room for in the party for them on some of their issues. And they'll deal with Vance in eight years when they have to deal with Vance. But I think the primary showed that the majority of the Republicans, and not just this primary, most contested primaries for the last four years, have shown the combination of hard core conservatives, social conservatives and populist is about 60% of the Republican primary electorate. The more traditional brand is simply representing a minority that no longer is in the driver's seat, and they remain uncomfortable with it. But that's just the facts on the ground, and they'll have to deal with that throughout the Trump presidency if it happens. But they have to deal with that more generally, as Congress and the state legislatures and governors start to move in the direction of their voters, which is a conservative populist alliance rather than old guard. Three stool movement conservatism.

DIONNE: Henry, you said it in eight years for JD vance. Does that mean you think that Trump will seek a third term? I'm just curious.

OLSEN: Yeah, no, I just, I blanked there. Four years. Do not think Trump will seek. I'm not sure Trup will seek a fourth term or eighth term.

DIONNE: I'm not sure.

OLSEN: Yeah. Four years, not eight. Sorry.

GALSTON: Well, let me, you know, let me in strongly endorse what Henry just said, you know, but then tease out some of the consequences. Okay. As Joe Biden might well have said, this transformation of the Republican Party is a big bleeping deal. Right. This is, you know. Major political parties are not transformed this way very often. Donald Trump, you know, a political entrepreneur. Intuited an opportunity and he seized it. And he was an insurgent eight years ago. He is now not only the leader of the Republican Party, but he in some sense represents the new establishment of the Republican Party. And the question is, what this new establishment, if it achieves victory in November, is going to do with its power. And as you know, as someone who identifies very strongly as an internationalist and who has a lot more in common with Mitch McConnell on this, on this score than I do Mr. Trump or Mr.. Mr. Vance, what does this mean for America in the world? Right. We already know that the future of Ukraine is balanced on a knife's edge in this war. This will certainly, you know, alter the fate of that country and the war in which it's now embroiled through no choice of its own. Mr. Trump, rattled markets just a few days ago when he indicated some wavering about the defense of Ukraine, a defense of Taiwan. Right. Which, of course, provides 9,090% of the advanced chips that so many industries now, now, now depend on. What does this mean for the future of NATO and for the alliance structure in general? The you know, during the previous administration, Trump rattled our very important relationship with South Korea by indicating that from his standpoint, it was transactional. And of the South Koreans didn't pay more for American military bases and American armed forces, you know, a few miles south of the demilitarized zone. Well, he might cut back or pull the plug on that as well. So this is a this is a game for very high stakes. And the transformation of the Republican Party under Donald Trump's leadership has put things in play that previously were taken for granted. Now, maybe that's a good thing for democracy, that there's a fundamental debate about the role of America in the world. And I would add, the role of the American government at home, which I could go on, go on about at some length, but won't. You'll be happy to hear Brianna. But, you know, but the fact that such a vast majority of the Republican Party has so quickly abandoned the internationalism that I would have thought, after Ronald Reagan had been baked

into the advocacy of international democracy, that I would have thought had been baked in Reagan. After all, being the person who articulated this global mission of democracy in his Westminster speech, which led to the foundation of the National Endowment for Democracy, and a lot of other very good things, in my opinion. All of this is in danger of being discarded. And I think that, you know, as we analyze the changes in the Republican Party, we should look not only to the politics, but also to the substance of what's going on before our eyes. Because because it is critical for the future of the country.

TUCKER: On that point, I wanted to tick through. I know we were about halfway through here, but wanted to talk about some of the the rhetoric that we started to notice throughout the convention from day one, moving all the way to day two, day three, day four. Again. The theme here was unity. And that was one of the day, one kind of kicking it off, this urging of the party, you had Lara Trump actually making notion of bringing in Democrats and Independents. You had, several other people on the very first night, probably the most diverse, actually, the most diverse lineup of the night, where you had, you know, three of the four black House Republicans speaking. And again, these peaking spots are their prime. Right? These are the moments that the people are tuning in at this particular point in time. This lot that you have is a chance to not only have some recognition in national on a national stage, but also speak to hundreds of thousands of people who are tuning in for this. And I thought it was interesting on just a day, one a day to kind of contrast from, you know, Kari Lake and Ted Cruz and Speaker Johnson specifically even claiming, you know, that the Republic would end. Right. This is three days after the assassination attempt at this point. But how quickly that kind of reverted back to, you know, this, this dire kind of end of democracy where the where the party will go if Biden is elected? And whether or not that that seems to last, if we really believe that this we need to toning down the rhetoric at least if that is going to last or if this is kind of a short term thing and, you know, Trump and Harris maybe or will be on the campaign trail shortly and we'll see this again. And if not, this is where the base wants to be. If this is the message that they prefer to hear, if this is what sells. Oh, E.J., I think you're on mute. If you're you're chatting to us.

DIONNE: Well, I was saying I want to hear A.B. first. I have a thought, but I'm curious where he is on your question. I'm biased toward a fellow initials person here.

STODDARD: Thank you. I'm so sorry it took so long to unmute. So, you know, I think that the fact that the Republican Party, that we're having a racial realignment in our politics and the fact that the Republican Party is growing more diverse, diverse is a wonderful thing. That does not mean that the Republican Party wants

to unite the country and that their leader wants to unite the country. The Republican Party, as Henry just noted, is becoming more homogenous in its views, its magnification. If you're an old school Republican, get out. And everything that bill just described, which to me is incredibly frightening, is is is is the consequence of the of the Trumpification of this party and, and the pick of Vance. The idea of saying post shooting, post an assassination attempt. We want to unify the country was very smart and very shrewd. Trump has excellent campaign leaders who remind him every day that he wants to stay out of jail by winning this race, and that he needs to talk to the middle in ways he didn't in '16 and '20. So he has been more disciplined, and they wanted to have a professional convention. And the shooting happened. They wanted more unity, more somber tones, more humility. I believe that Trump feels humbled by a near-death experience. But if you have watched what he has tweeted since last two Saturdays ago, you know that the real Trump is still here to stay. We saw it in his speech. There's not a new Trump. So he is going to be the Trump. He's always has been. They have told him not to bring up the J6 hostages being pardoned at the rally. There's some tactics he might stick with, but in general he is going to be nasty and divisive the way he always has been. And he's not looking to unite the country. He says that in Truth Social post with all caps in on his words. Any any pro makes these sort of declarations of he's here to unite America and bring us all together under God's great love and all this stuff, and it's awesome. But watch for two posts later and you'll see, that he doesn't intend to make a shift.

DIONNE: Yeah. I just want to underscore the JD Vance. We, right after, right after Trump was assassinated, because it, you know, the the unity talk was nice, but it really sounded like unity means uniting behind Donald Trump. This is what JD Vance, before he was selected, tweeted after the assassination attempt. "Today is not just some isolated incident. The central premise of the Biden campaign is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian fascist who must be stopped at all costs. And and this is the key sentence that rhetoric led directly to President Trump's assassination attempt." That is not the language of, national unity saying that the other side, you know, somehow Biden's rhetoric led to this assassination attempt. And so I thought and clearly, if Trump had a problem with that, he might not have selected JD Vance, as his choice. In fact, JD Vance knew he was under consideration then and obviously didn't think a tweet like that would endanger, his selection. And so, and then I think whatever they could have done with unity, I really think Trump had an opportunity in that speech to use a very different approach that would have really, I think, solidified some of the gains he made post assassination and post debate, given President Biden's problem. He just, he just lost that. And, you know, the other interesting thing about this convention is that so much of the rhetoric was addressed against President Biden, who is now no longer the opponent. And I think one of

the interesting questions going forward is because Vice President Harris is part of the Biden-Harris administration, does that, will they just repurpose the same rhetoric against her, plus some new, some new rhetoric? But it is intriguing that, you know, the convention ends on Thursday. By Sunday, the opponent they spent all their time attacking is out of the race. We have never seen that before in American history.

TUCKER: That's a great point. You do, and I would love to actually kick to that next subject as well. And we saw that halfway through the convention, right where the attention and the focus, especially in the coverage that was on the RNC suddenly shifting to Biden after his Covid diagnosis and then raising even more questions about what the Trump world, how they were responding to a potential nominee in waiting if Harris. But it raised a lot of questions about at the time if Biden would still be able to lead his ticket. But even some of the attacks, Harris was still a focus in this convention, more so than previous Republican or even Democratic conventions. Is focus on the vice president. And they've been kind of, you know, training more of their attacks on her in the past couple of weeks as they started to see, you know, not just Biden's debate departments, but a lot of his interviews that have come after that. What what do we think that this could possibly change? Thinking about the news of Sunday, now that Biden has actually exited the race and the preparation that Trump world and his allies were preparing to take on Biden. And what we saw at the convention, how do we think that this changes, in the event that Harris does become the nominee?

GALSTON: Henry.

OLSEN: Yeah. No, I just moving to unmute. A couple of things. First of all, they'll run against the Biden-Harris administration, as Biden was saying throughout his presidency, this is the Biden-Harris administration. And they will basically take the advice of General Colin Powell during the Iraq War, who allegedly said if you break it, you own it. And I think they'll say they broke the country together. You're already seeing that. Secondly, the fact that she was appointed to head up something, dealing with the immigration problem in 2021 means that they will run against her as what they call the border czar. This is something that is unavoidable for Harris. You know, she did get that appointment, even if it's being overstated by Republicans. But this allows them to continue the single number one issue that matters to their base fighting to control the border. Then I think the question is drawing out the ways in which Biden has been to the center of Harris, that Harris ran to Biden's left to some extent during the primary. She comes from California. She comes from San Francisco. And so all of the things that they would have loved to have done against Gavin Newsom, they will bring up with Harris, not to the point that she has any sort of the same responsibility that allegedly

Newsom would have for San Francisco's current condition, but that she represents that value set. So I would expect that that trifecta will be their angle of attack. And we also have to see how Harris presents herself. She is going to be burdened by her role in the administration. She is in the role of Richard Nixon with 1960 or Hubert Humphrey in 1968. She is the vice president of an administration that has done some unpopular things, that it is in their political interests to distance themselves from, and are unable to do it because of the person sitting in the office. Harris should, as any Democrat, should be making clear breaks with Biden on a number of issues. She can't. And that's going to burden her. And to the extent she's jujitsu into that, I would expect, Republicans to be saying, if you want real change, you have to represent and vote for the people who aren't burdened by the set of policies that you so strongly dislike. People of America, and that's us.

TUCKER: Thank you. Go ahead.

DIONNE: Yeah, I think that what happened yesterday, injected new energy into the Democratic Party. That the last the previous three weeks, were a party so torn, about whether President Biden should continue in the race. And I think even some of the people who supported President Biden publicly had their doubts. This is what I was picking up, too, about whether this was going to work. And suddenly, with all the money that she raised in small donations, yesterday, I think it's a real sign of that energy. And I think there will definitely be some new energy among younger voters who, really did from the beginning, feel that President Biden was too old to seek, a second term. Clearly, Black voters will have a strong feeling about the possibility of electing, the first Black woman president of the United States. I think one of the questions we got to put on the table and we don't know the answer to yet, is, is there some backlash in parts of the electorate against a Black woman candidate? And there are. We saw we've seen backlash on race and we've seen backlash on gender in the past among some pieces of the electorate. We're going to find out about that. On the other hand, I think that does put the Republican Party in a complicated position, because if they are seen as fostering that kind of backlash, I think that hits them hard among middle, middle of the road swing voters, particularly women, who do not like that kind of, like that kind of politics. And I think, you know, Henry's right. In one sense, it is the Biden-Harris administration, and there is a lot that she will want to defend in the Biden administration. On the other hand, she is still her own person. And I think it's going to be very interesting to see how she plays, the fact that she is of a new generation with her own experience, with her own background, to create a sense that we don't want to break. She will tell the electorate with the Biden record. But I can also move in some new directions. And I think there were ways she can do that without being

unfaithful. To the guy who put her on the ticket, four years ago. It's not easy. It will take some. But I think it will be very interesting to see how she does that.

STODDARD: I would just like to quickly, piggyback on that and say that she has, she she will absolutely be burdened on immigration. There's no question as huge liability for the Biden administration, he owns it. It's a failure. It's a very energizing issue, not only for the right, but it's seeped into the rest of the electorate. And now Democrats are mounted right? Administration. Independents are out of the Biden administration. So that's going to be huge liability. But she is gifted with this kind of because of her age and because she's she's new. And this is a big break. She she's she can go out there and say, this election is about the future. Donald Trump is about the past. And I do think that is going to be problematic for for Republicans.

DIONNE: Yeah. Just underscore the age issue suddenly switch sides. And that is a really big deal because of what happened yesterday.

STODDARD: Because the previous frame was weak, strong. Trump strong. Biden weak. The new frame is is for Democrats is going to be future, past.

DIONNE: Yep.

TUCKER: Right. We're seeing that a lot right now, even in just the way that Democrats have been kind of taking those tweets and kind of trying to cast, Trump now, as, as the same weaknesses that Biden once had and looking through his tweets, social and, and other things is more erratic. And, you know, Kamala Harris has a steady hand. So it has completely, changed our our election process. And I'm sure the DNC will be another, conversation and webinar to have. So that's all the for the portion of the panelists, questions that I wanted to ask today. I didn't want to get to some of the audience questions that came through while we were all discussing, one of them came through again, on the topic of Trump, last Saturday and the assassination attempt going forward, do they feel, they asked, do you feel that the constant character, race, characterization, excuse me, of Trump's assassination attempt as a resurrection will wear thin with the undecided voters?

DIONNE: Bill. I've been wanting to ask you this myself, so I'll take the opportunity. Your view on this?

GALSTON: Well. I'm tempted to answer with a shrug. Who knows? I don't want to pretend to knowledge. I don't have my senses that the people. Who could be moved by it probably already has been. You know, I'm not sure that it's a theme that wears particularly well over time. You know, it will lose novelty and, I think, lose credibility over time as well, except with the people for whom it resonates. But how much larger a share, you know, of the conservative evangelical vote Donald Trump possibly get, right? So, you know, I think that, you know, I think that that is more a matter of the moment than it is a matter of moment, in the long run. But I can't prove that.

DIONNE: When I was hearing that rhetoric. And I wish I could find who said it originally. But a very religious person once said, we should not say God is on our side. We should ask if we are on God's side. And that just kept rolling through my head watching this language about God and invoking God here. But nonetheless, I mean, I, Bill is right. It's very hard to see Trump getting a higher percentage of the, white evangelical vote than he is, already getting, although he's getting a, you know, I think some of his inroads among Latinos are quite clearly among evangelical Latino voters. So maybe there's a little bit of, potential there if this is seen as a providential, event. But I think there are a lot of other voters, not just secular voters, obviously, who are uneasy with rhetoric linking a political leader in this way to claims, of having God's blessing. And I you know, I think that that, you know, saying that resonated with some people. I think it's done it to work. I'm not sure it has a long life going forward in the future. This, this kind of, language about, God and his protection here.

TUCKER: And speaking of language, another question that came through, which is more about some of the policy. On this particular side was the language, one of abortion, which was scarcely mentioned at the RNC. And whether or not that change in language on abortion, if that is, in their words, a ruse, or are Republicans going to go full speed ahead on a federal abortion ban if some limit?

OLSEN: Yeah, there are obviously people within the Republican Party who want a federal abortion ban, but Donald Trump has unmistakably signaled and now said he's not going to sign on. He's going to make clear if he is president, that he does not want this coming to his desk and it won't get to his desk. That will make people in the pro-life movement unhappy. But they also have to recognize it is not politically feasible to pass a federal ban on abortion when two thirds of Americans believe that abortion in the first trimester should be broadly legal. There's this little disconnect between public opinion and what the pro-life movement wants. So I think what Trump did was understand where public opinion is put Republican rhetoric as much in service of

that as is possible within the contours of the party coalition. And if Democrats are going to make abortion, abortion, abortion, they're mantra which they have been. It just gives Trump more of an opportunity to say not me, not me, not me. And at some point we'll have to see who people believe. But I do not think there will be any significant move in a Trump administration to have a national ban, in part because the man in the Oval Office will be telling the leadership he doesn't want it, and will look with disfavor among people who try and ignore that big time.

GALSTON: Well two footnotes to Henry. Number one. I do think this is consequential because the now all but certain nominee of the Democratic Party really found her voice on this issue, and I don't think that she will be shy about featuring this issue. And then we'll get to see, you know, in real time what difference the Trump shift has made. Footnote number two, as I read the Republican platform. But I'll yield to Henry or anyone else for a better analysis. It seems to me, filled with losses on substance for social conservatives. You know, the you know, this the silence on issues like same sex marriage, for example, was pretty thunderous. And it underscores the fact that economic populism and social conservatism are not the same thing at all. And there's a Venn diagram where they overlap to some extent. But the differences are at least as significant as the overlaps. You know, and I would, you know, I would say that social conservatives now may begin to understand. What it really means for the party to prefer Donald Trump to Mike Pence. And, there, there are costs there. Watch from their standpoint.

OLSEN: I think I recognize that and I agree with that. And, but the thing that social conservatives and I number myself as somewhat a social conservative, you know, I'm pro-life. I'm not. I am pro same sex marriage. But, you know, the fact is, you lost those opinions is that it is suicidal for party to support the losing side of 2 to 1 issues. Right. And, as a pro-lifer, it saddens me. And I talk to pro-lifers about how we can, over time, make up public opinion. But as a political strategist, of course, you're going to take it off the table. It's a no brainer. When Kansas votes 19 points against a pro-life initiative, when every red state basically endorses the idea of abortion in the first trimester. Of course, you're going to run away from that issue. What do you expect? And if they really wanted to make that point, they should have backed Ron DeSantis or Mike Pence. The fact that they chose not to get their weight behind a challenge to Donald Trump when it could have matter, meant that he's depending on his goodwill or their depending on his goodwill. And, you know, we know who Donald Trump is. He's transactional. And they're on the losing side of these transaction. I think they have wins, though. Then on things they care about, like religious liberty, like transgender issues. Donald Trump is 100% in their category, and I think they'll focus on that rather than cry over their losses.

DIONNE: I just think if I could say quickly, I think that abortion will not be the only issue Democrats talk about. But I think that ever since Dobbs, abortion had been a voting issue for Republicans, conservatives, right to lifers. Post Dobbs, it's become an important voting issue for the pro-choice side. For the Democrats, the fact that Harris is the Democratic nominee, the fact that JD Vance is the running mate on the Republican side, means that this is an inescapable issue for the Republicans. And what Trump says, since we never quite know what he's going to do tomorrow morning, is not dispositive for significant parts of the electorate.

TUCKER: Thank you. Those are all fantastic points. I know we're going to close it out here in the last three minutes, but if there's any other closing point or or things that you would like to mention you'll be looking towards in the next couple of weeks, I know that can feel like a couple of months at this rate. So, would love any closing thoughts from everyone on the grid here?

OLSEN: Yeah, I'll just jump in with Harris. But for Joe Biden and Donald Trump, Kamala Harris would be the most unpopular nominee ever advanced by a major party. She is upside down by 14 to 18 points in every favourability poll. She's most of the time shown as statistically insignificant from Joe Biden. She needs a really good month. She needs to change people's opinions about her that have already been pretty well set. Donald Trump did that in 2015. He entered the race upside down among Republicans, 30 to 60. By the end of the summer, he was up 60 to 30. He changed 30% of Republicans minds in three months. That's the challenge before Kamala Harris. And if she doesn't understand it, we'll be talking a lot more about the Democrats inevitable defeat on October 1st. Then we might be now, where she still has an opportunity to make a second impression.

DIONNE: I think sometimes you do have a second chance to make a first impression, despite the cliché, and I think Harris has an enormous opportunity in the next two weeks to a month. And that initial excitement that you see out there is part of that opportunity. I just want to go back to our original subject. This convention showed the absolute control Donald Trump has on the Republican Party right now. It struck me again and again how members of the Trump family were given more time on that podium than people like Ron DeSantis, then people like Nikki Haley, then people like Marco Rubio. This party has gone all the way over to the Trump side. And I think in the long run, if Trump should lose this election, how well, what will the struggle inside the Republican Party, look like? Because, we would not I certainly would not have thought in 2016 or even in 2020 that he would own the Republican Party to the degree that he seems to own it now.

TUCKER: A.B., Bill. Any thoughts?

STODDARD: Trump is if Trump loses this election, he's going to be the nominee in 2028. Everyone can laugh, but that's, just the truth. He's going to say the election was stolen, and his party will have to affirm that. That's reality. I think I agree with Henry. Kamala Harris cannot blow this. She has to be humble. This, was an accident of fate. And she is looking at an election where Donald Trump is ahead. The one thing I'll add is in our publisher, Sarahwell Long, while with The Bulwark, does these focus groups that are very telling the the talk of Kamala Harris is always we don't like her. And then they sort of say, what? I don't really know much about her. So there's a little bit of room for her to grow. It's really not a ceiling. Doesn't mean she won't blow it. I'm just saying that she has some room.

GALSTON: I would just add that in 2012. The Obama campaign defined Mitt Romney before he had a chance to define himself, and he never recovered from that. And I guarantee you that from now until the Democratic convention, there's going to be a full court press by Republicans to define Kamala Harris before she has a chance to define herself. And if if the Harris people are not ready for that, and if they don't have a plan to counter that, you know, with a presentation of Harris, that is more broadly attractive than anything she's presented so far, then, what Henry said could turn out to be, the fate of the Democratic Party.

TUCKER: All amazingly smart points. Thank you all for joining us today. Henry. A.B., Bill. E.J., and we will see you all next time. Thanks so much.hey say.