

You're listening to TechTank, a bi weekly podcast from the Brookings Institution exploring the most consequential technology issues of our time from racial bias in algorithms to the future work TechTank takes big ideas and makes them accessible as the twenty twenty four election draws near pressing issues like immigration reproductive rights and inflation are dominating the headlines meanwhile recent natural disasters which have devastated communities across the country highlight the growing urgency of the climate crisis yes environmental policy seems to be taking a backseat in voters minds according to pew research center data climate initiatives like lower than any other major balance issues with a sharp by partisan divide and how the two political parties view environmental protection experts like Gregory Dalton Daniel Stennett argued that the climate change becoming politicized it's a key reason for the lack of urgency in addressing the crisis what is widespread awareness of climate concerns they are not driving voting decisions but with extreme weather becoming a regular occurrence whether or not you believe in climate change the impact on daily life is undeniable without bipartisan efforts we risk letting climate action become a casualty of political polarization to dive deeper into whether the twenty twenty four election will bring more attention to climate change we're joined by Barry Rabe nonresident senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution and professor at the university of Michigan.

So to start the conversation I would like to ask how would you explain the role of climate change in this upcoming election? Xavier twenty twenty four is feeling a lot different than twenty twenty on that score. Just four years ago we were hearing in the campaigns initially through the democratic nomination process but then even in the general election all want more specific reference to climate change and even policy questions and this time around climate change has been there it is emerged in some ways comments by former president Trump on electric vehicles and the like questions about whether climate change is real vice president harasses his address to but again not with the frequency or intensity what we saw just four years ago so that really is a position and shift and change it meant hard reflect the fact that other issues have moved high on the agenda it also may reflect the fact that a lot of new policy climate policy has been adopted last couple of years in the biting Harris administration and that may bring down some of its saliency for the vice president yeah and that makes me wanna ask like what do you think climate change policy has been overshadowed by like these other major issues in this election cycle like immigration or reproductive rights things of that nature climate change is always had a challenging climb up the American political agenda that's reflected not only in the frequency with which it is discussed in a presidential election but even survey work polling that's been not done for for many many decades comparing concern about climate change to other sorts of issues and it's one that historically has been times continues to be easier to clips over current issues in foreign policy or current issues in the economy as we all known as off

discuss that this is an election with a major domestic policy focus particularly issues of the implementation of the economy going forward border security immigration some other issues international issues perhaps the kind of dropping down and that's actually reflected to some extent in public opinion work that's done in the United States when Americans are asked to rank issues climate change has been low and is certainly in that lower tier of of a prominent issues right now so I think all of those factors can contribute I think perhaps more significantly at this moment is why when there was this ascendancy just four years ago how we seem less discussion of it in this last year too and and and and some of it but factors there we just reverting to the norm are there certain factors in this campaign that are kind of pushing it more to the side of the agenda M. what would you think it's like that barrier that significant barrier that causes like voters to view climate change as not as a high priority issue right you know so often in the elections we are focused on the immediate moment or what our candidate is promising in the days weeks months immediately after election if they are successful in being elected hence what you gonna do about the border what you gonna do about the price of a dozen eggs what employment issues these kinds of issues it is very easy to kind of kick climate change to the side because we may not think about it or feel its impacts on a daily basis even though the impacts related to weather events in the United States and certainly around the world have picked up with renewed intensity including some important developments whether hurricanes in the like in just the last few months so it has proven easy to to push a little bit to the side and of course in part there are no immediate simple answers to this even by acting aggressively the United States only has a limited total impact on global warming and global climate change and so there's this need for this larger global coordinated strategy.

So for whatever political reasons, while the candidates have taken very different views on this to actually join those differences and talk about these issues more directly in the campaign really has not surfaced all that much you're right yeah it would you say it's more the candidate's primary goal to frame it in a way that kind of resonates with voters or do you think it comes with the voters have to matter first like they have to see climate change as the issue to even hear what the candidates are trying to explain to them well so this raises an interesting question I do think we have seen some very interesting framing by both of the candidates aren't climate relevant issues even in cases where they may not specifically use the C. word of climate all that frequently really throughout this campaign Donald Trump has focused on a few issues actually much as he did in twenty sixteen where he was really focused on call and protection of the coal industry as his primary focus here he's really locked in on electric vehicles and in many many trips including the battleground states like Michigan where I live and work his consistent elevation of electric vehicles has been a constant theme he doesn't really talk about the climate impacts of this he talks about potential adverse impacts of

jobs in the auto manufacturing and assembly sector here in Michigan huge huge issue and sort of brings that out of the talks about steps that the Biden Harris administration may have taken to make it difficult to continue to use internal combustion engine vehicles in the future so that's been part of his attack what we've heard the vice president talk about is not to run away from the Biden Harris record but really apt emphasize the thought likely near term economic benefits from clean energy jobs as she likes to discuss initiated in the one debate that there could be some really large and significant benefits to the communities all around the United States through development of renewables are anti related to develop new technologies other kinds of transitions that might better position the United States to reduce the threat of climate change but also provide some economic benefits in the near term and this is all consistent with the direction of the Biden Harris administration has taken which is the kind of position climate policy not through regulations as much or certainly a carbon price which is used in many other places around the world but to use incentive payments most notably through the inflation reduction act funds that go to individual citizens that might want to purchase that electric vehicle or change the electricity sources in their homes or two firms or even state governments that might want to move in that direction as well so that's really been her push not to completely drop the word climate change but to argue that the path to try to decarbonize the American economy there could be some really really large benefits on the flip side Mr Trump doesn't feel if those benefits are gonna be there certainly any electric vehicle sector and so it's it's a kind of a shifting if you will of the kind of framing issue that you were asking about and focusing on other issues that aren't necessarily specific to what the impact is going to be on carbon dioxide or nothing yeah and I feel like when they start discussing about climate change when you use that word climb it kind of is a touchy kind of work for a lot of voters so I would have liked but then natural disasters that have been happening more frequently now do you think in the future does come out be kind of a shift with how people see things like major weather events and kind of understand why this is happening more frequently.

I do think that shift is under way when we look at public opinion in the United States for many years now many decades there clearly has been an uptick I would say the last four or five years about the percentage of Americans who believe that yes temperatures are increasing there is evidence of that that we're seeing more facts and impacts from that including some of the kinds of events that you're talking about where there is growing recognition of this kind of impact or causation from the way we use fossil fuels and love the atmosphere with greenhouse gases however even now those views are not unanimous and you can see and many political context even if we look at recent developments in Florida with multiple hurricanes or North Carolina or in my current state of Michigan where the tart cherry crop and iconic crop that is just central to the kind of ever cultural role

in the state and we're seeing huge huge problems were the worst tart cherry crop in decades in memory questions emerge is that linked to changes in rain is that natural we still can kind of go back and forth on this and so I would argue Xavier that we are seeing an uptick in those linkages up take up taking concern but it doesn't necessarily translate into a broad and deep mandate or even support for some of the policies that we might take to try to mitigate those problems going forward if we did have our way and people started advocating more and saw that climate change is a real issue do you think the problem solving could be done with a bipartisan way or is there some other method of ways that we can start fixing this climate problem or is it too far gone clearly the partisans of device on this issue if you look at the most recent efforts in Congress historic efforts or a great many states the partisan cleavages and divides are there but twenty years ago I first began to move into the Syrian wrote a book that Brookings published called state house and greenhouse published literally twenty years ago I was looking at the kind of bottom up developments on climate change at the state level and finding that a great many cases there was a kind of broader bipartisan coalition in many states regardless of what the particular strategy might state might be taking that has clearly been strained in recent decades recent years of both the federal and state level and yet I would not rule that out entirely there are some areas and sectors for example the chemicals that we use in the cooling sector this is a conversation I had with their west on a previous TechTank broadcast moving those toward more climate friendly chemicals that has moved forward with bipartisan support in Congress and even Senate ratification just a few years ago of a global treaty in the area of of nuclear energy or nuclear is clearly going to play a larger role that we might have expected even a decade ago fighting non carbon electricity for the United States second run on a kind of twenty four seven basis and possibly supplement rules rules there we've seen even in bill that was passed just a few months ago the advance act so called answer ways that the parties have actually been able to work together so I wouldn't rule it out in theoretical terms and there are many ways in which this question can cross partisan divides and boundaries I also think of very interesting test going forward it's always regardless of how the presidential election goes forward is if we can assume there's going to be continued spending ox the inflation reduction act funding on the prospects for a politically are much easier obviously gonna Harris election in a Trump election but we soon that's funny that spending continues there's no secret that a good deal of in some cases the majority of it is going to red states that historically paid a pretty big role in advancing wind and solar and other kinds of technologies including some of the battery development and all the rest.

So we've even seen some push back in Republican circles to the Trump comments and the Trump positions that we would not want to see that such financial support from the federal government and in part because

it's beneficial to red state constituencies Republican lead states Republican lead legislative districts begin how that all plays out in a post election context regardless of who you know once we know what the election results are going to be is uncertain but I would not want to rule out the very real possibility of at least some continued progress that has more about cross partisan or bipartisan nature to it speaking on like the the cross partisan way of working with climate just beyond the United States as you mentioned earlier do you think what would be the ways that we work internationally what are some of the ideas to help climate change from the US standpoint and an international standpoint and here we come up against the limitation of domestic politics unless domestic policy is linked to global international policy the United States is no longer the largest producer on an annual basis of greenhouse gases the overall share coming each year from the United States has been dropping even though the legacy emissions from United States remain just shoot you in the United States still has a large economy this produces enormous amounts of carbon dioxide methane and other greenhouse gases are each year it's somewhere at some point the domestic and global have to be willing to think it was very interesting Todd stern or Brookings colleague I gave a book talk yesterday it concerning his reflections on what his work was like in the state department negotiating the Paris agreement the main global climate agreement that we have and it's a huge achievement you know it is very very loosely structured I do think with that involves national pledges but they aren't there's no sanction for failing to meet them I do think we have begun to see a pivot whereby there's more and more evidence on a nation's actual carbon dioxide or methane record emissions per unit of economic production and this could be wired into trade and trade discussions going forward with them begin to think of terrorism someone like Donald Trump at the idea of linking climate in trade is clearly been on the ascendancy driven in part by the European Union which is taken much with far more apart earlier and far more aggressive steps to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions has a large continent wide trading mechanism as of twenty twenty six is planning to launch a so called carbon border adjustment process where they would actually put terrace at the point of imported goods coming from other nations looking at their carbon content or the carbon price or lack of a carbon price and using kind of trade as a leverage and linking that to in some way climate performance our carbon emissions performance of the US this could pose present some really interesting challenges for the United States are quite interesting in the one vice presidential debate debate that senator Vance the Republican nominee for the vice presidency talk about American production as the cleanest in the world I think that's a direct quote if we actually agree to some sophisticated measures it's possible that is not necessarily the case that we may not be better we may be worse than some of our leading trade partners including the European Union but also others and so this whole question of how we actually measure emissions and the technological precise precision or accuracy of those could

increasingly be joined in trade issues were by nations that have had strong climate mitigation records may begin to apply pressure on other reporters this could put the in the United States in a very interesting position in deciding how it is going to try to leverage this is certainly the area of carbon but also increasingly nothing with the United States is the world's largest producer of oil and gas and we export a lot of that and the whole question of one of the in the methane releases in the United States before we export that energy abroad including places like the European Union is probably going to be looming large in the in the months and years immediately following the election regardless of how the U. S. election goes because the pressure is going to be placed from other nations so you could say that globally working with other countries and Khanna determine how we process climate change could have a real effect on the landscape of like U. S. political topics and subjects it can really change the landscape of that and change the landscape of how we look into the election.

I think that's right I think there's the kinds of trade issues that we have mentioned there are also issues of not just nations like the United States or China developing technologies for reducing their own emissions how open our global markets going to be to cross border trade in those technologies if in fact the United States does continue to make major major advances in how the technology we have to measure with precision greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide methane nitrous oxides and others or to minimize or abate them through using renewable energy energy efficiency alternative energy sources that are non carbon in nature how do major industrial powers like the United States share that technology with the rest of the world in here it's no secret that American trade relations have been tents with much of the rest of the world certainly in the Trump era because of terrorists and outright conflict but there's also been a lot of global push back to the US for developing through the inflation reduction act a series of policies that are seem to be designed principally to advance American economic interests to protect American jobs without mechanisms for sustaining a sharing of those technologies with less affluent nations of the light so I think realistically all of this is has a certain momentum to it and puts the United States in a very interesting position especially as we double down and try to develop you know cutting edge technologies and all of these areas what does that look like we begin to talk about the rest of the world working with us and engaging us on a course living all over all of this is the relationship between the United States and its major trading partners most notably China where they're just across the board strains Arraf issues that haven't been advancing or both resident Trump but also in the Byron Harris administration and those issues will not go away anytime soon I want to get back to the kind of like how the boulders kinda see climate change I want to ask if you think that any like misinformation or disinformation can be like a major key to why people don't have this as a high priority because looking at the public

there's some notions that like why which we believe worry about emissions when there's other countries doing a lot more pollution than us or just like a nine that pollution at all so I just want to see if you think that any misinformation or disinformation could be a key to why this isn't a high priority for many voters S. you know those center that sponsors this podcast has demonstrated repeatedly these issues cut across policy areas and climate change certainly is not exempt from that through misinformation misleading information videos interpretations whether it is whether events such as hurricanes or other kinds of interpretations this is an across the board way in which it is possible to manipulate evidence frame evidence in confusing ways and sort of underscore that level of of uncertainty or concern or even go out about the existence that temperatures are warming the weather is changing so really all of the above and ways in which this can be constrained and manipulated and here we've even seen in the United States you know huge shifts in public opinion even do basic questions do you believe there's evidence of warming global temperatures from about two thousand nine or ten after that period just staggering drops and Americans basic attitudes our understandings of weather warming temperatures were occurring this clearly driven the shift influenced in part by some really really suspect information sources that were you know very persuasive very engaging and all of that really does come into play and with that than a real challenge for government agencies domestically or globally to find ways to measure these issues with the greater sophistication accuracy possible be as transparent as they can engage and clear communications and viable communications it's evidence based about just how serious this problem challenges and how it's being manifest in our lives and likely to be manifest in our lives.

Going forward it's an enormous challenge and being able to have a serious conversation about this is chalice Miley by the kinds of disinformation issues that you're you're you're articulating and speaking on like the from the drop from like two thousand nine and up do you see like a difference between the kind of like age groups or what political affiliation what's a typical person that would like to have this as a high priority and what's this book a personal habit at a low priority certainly this shift overlaps deeper divides on a range of policy issues across partisan divides and that perhaps of all the possible categories suggests a deep deep divide in clearbridge monks citizens who affiliated with one of the two major parties or declare themselves as independent we can break it down into other different groupings and sub constituencies but at the end the partisan affiliation is probably the best single explanatory of of some of these differences some in terms of age and the like but here I would also note Xavier that there is a kind of American exceptionalism all of these things we have not seen these kinds of shifts in public opinion or even to this day this significant chunk of the American public is reflected in surveys that does not believe that there is evidence of either warming temperatures of any sort or this question

of any role in human causation if we ask if you can look at polling data from our neighbors in Canada or other trade partners they've not seen that kind of volatility other than some shifts and adjustments but it's been much more intense in the United States and again that may to a large degree overlap with those deep deep partisanship justice again we've been become so divided on so many other partisan issues you know across the board is reflected in this campaign climate is certainly played into that in the United States as well for my last question not I just want to see what your thoughts are for the future of climate change especially in this after the selection and how do you see like the political landscape handling the climate issue going on in the future well actions matter this one is no exception to that and we could see some fairly a difficult differences in policies depending upon who next occupies the oval office that set I do think that there is a certain momentum certainly in the United States but also in many many other nations to begin to take this seriously begin through our range of policy tools think about the kinds of technological changes we are going to want to pursue to live in a more climate safe world that takes advantages of some of the economic opportunities linked to the development of those new technologies there really is some momentum under way this is I think in system with what I was saying earlier that we're seeing states in some respects regardless of party control getting and using federal funding and incentives to pursue technological transition in a number of areas so I think the momentum is continues in the United States and given some of the developments that we're seeing there really has been some very very significant progress to me still the gold standard for this is what how we deal with the cooling sector air conditioning refrigeration the hydro fluorocarbon transition that is underway with strong American support but also basically support from all nations are almost all nations of the world is just staggering to see how that is come together that for me is still the gold standard of how we should be thinking about climate policy linking domestic and global using technologies adoringly appropriately linking in with technology and then providing funding to help less developed nations enjoy these technologies as well we're not nearly as far along for fossil fuel transition or the agriculture sector in most areas of methane Congress has is being made and with hope we see some momentum to continue that even accelerated both in the US and around the world going forward as we move beyond this election cycle but it's not easy yeah definitely not easy and there's a lot of work to do I just wanna thank you for joining us today I really appreciate you talking to me and just answering all the questions I had was really insightful senator thanks very much for asking those questions I enjoyed the conversation as always and wish you well going forward take care thank you for listening to TechTank a series a round table discussions and interviews with technology experts and policy makers for more conversations like this subscribe to the podcast and sign up to receive the TechTank newsletter for more research and analysis from the Center for Technology Innovation.