



American Democracy at a Crossroad: The 2020 U.S. Election, It is Not about Who Wins

I. Executive Summary

Challenges Outweighing Trump's Structural Advantages?

- The political dysfunction that has been on display in the United States is unfortunately not just a one-off experience. It is reflective of deep challenges and problems facing American society and the American political system in particular that really hang over this presidential election. Political scientists have to be humble about predicting presidential elections because the United States never experienced an election against backdrop this time of economic and social crisis ranging from unemployment rate to public health crisis.
- There is an enormous uncertainty in this upcoming election because President Trump has both advantages and disadvantages. The important structural advantages in the upcoming elections might include his ability to control and direct the conversation and attention of media, and electoral college, whereas his disadvantages lie in his low approval rating. On balance, Paul Pierson considers President Trump to be an underdog attributing to the idea that those challenges at least somewhat outweigh the structural advantages Trump has.
- Both Professor Lee and Professor Pierson do not think that neither will Trump cast China as his enemy nor will there be a big rise in anti-Chinese sentiment in the U.S. in the coming years as there is not incentive strong enough for Trump to do that. This can be illustrated by a polling that only a small percentage of Americans have picked up this language calling "COVID-19" the China virus or the Wuhan virus.

How Far Has Democratic Backsliding Gone?

- The 2020 election is unlikely to be a typical election in which we can rely on the political science forecasting models or polling aggregator predictions for two essential reasons which is (1) the forecasting models will not be useful given that Trump is an uncommonly effective disruptor of political norms and institutions and (2) the U.S. is increasingly vulnerable to "October Surprises".
- The United States is polarized in a way that two political parties that are organized on a national level are coherent national political entities, where the same kind of cleavages work all the way from the top to all the way down to the locations all around the United States. Rhetoric and behaviors suggest that people see the other side as not just their opponents but their threat, which is especially true on the political right, where Republican political elites and the interest within the party have resorted to increasingly intense, extreme appeals, and particularly white working class voters.
- Concerning the influence of American white working class nationalism in the upcoming election, Professor Pierson sees the Republican party shift in the direction of bolstering its appeals to economically downscale voters, pulling back from trying to expand the racial diversity of the party coalitions and Professor Lee adds to the point that President Trump moved himself from white, working class nationalism "as a strategy" to "as an identity".



What if Democracy is Not the Only Game in Town?

- The upcoming election should be understood by how the fundamental elements of American politics, its institutions, identities and information are currently operating and evolving. In terms of institutions, the U.S. is currently undergoing major changes in that the Republican Party moves from being the Grand Old Party to so-called Party of Trump and that the Democratic Party is on the threshold of a deep divide between a Clinton-Obama-Biden Old Guard and Sanders-Warren-Ocasio-Cortez. In terms of identities and ideologies, the cleavage lines in American politics are becoming redrawn along Pro-Trump or Anti-Trump axis. Lastly, in terms of information, mediating institutions that inform the public and adjudicate facticity have been under assault.
- Professor Lee suggests four possible scenario that might happen in the 2020 election and points out that there is a possibility in which the Biden win and Trump refuses to accept that outcome or the vice versa. Given the scenarios, he argues that it can happen where the U.S. constitutional electoral democracy becomes under threat and where there will be a strong impetus to return to pre-Trump normalcy.

Implications to South Korea

- As Biden thinks of himself as relatively advantageous in foreign policy and if he is elected, the U.S foreign policy is likely to be rearranged in a way that is similar to that of Obama and Clinton.
- If going back to pre-Trump normalcy scenario is the case, especially for countries like South Korea, the U.S. will be a reliable ally, a regular trade partner, and a global leader. Additionally, there is expectation that new American administration will put more emphasis on the importance of alliance and revitalizing the importance of multilateralism. ■



American Democracy at a Crossroad: The 2020 U.S. Election, It is Not about Who Wins

- **Date and Time:** Fri, May 15, 2020, 10:00 – 11:30 AM (KST)
- **Speakers:** **Paul Pierson** (John Gross Endowed Chair of Political Science at University of California, Berkeley), **Taeku Lee** (George Johnson Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley)
- **Moderator:** **Yul Sohn** (President, EAI; Professor of Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University)
- **Discussants:** **Byoung Kwon Sohn** (Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Chung-Ang University), **Chaesung Chun** (Chair of the National Security Research Center, EAI; Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul National University)

Introduction

■ **Yul Sohn:** Hello. Welcome to East Asia Institute (EAI). I am your host, Yul Sohn, and I am currently president of EAI and professor at Yonsei University. I would like to thank everyone for joining us today. This event is the first of the EAI virtual seminar series titled, “the New World Order after COVID-19”. Today’s topic is the U.S. presidential election which is arguably the most consequential election of the world in the years to come. It is tremendously difficult to predict the results of the upcoming election, not just because it is already a close race but also because of the extraordinary circumstances the U.S. currently faces, including both health and economics crises. We will discuss election outcomes, post domestic politics and foreign policy implications.

“The U.S. presidential election is tremendously difficult to predict, not just because it is already a close race but also because of the extraordinary circumstances the U.S. currently faces, the crisis of both health and economics.”

We have two speakers to present today, followed by two designated discussants and a Q&A session at the end which is open to all of you. We encourage you to participate by asking questions.

I am pleased to introduce our two distinguished guests. Paul Pierson is the John Gross Endowed Chair and Professor of Political Science at University of California, Berkeley. Paul authored many books including *Off-Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy*, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis*, *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism* and *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment*, which won the American Political Science Association's 1995 prize for the best book on American national politics. Paul is also an active commentator for *The New York Times* and *the Washington Post*. Our second speaker is Professor Taeku Lee, who is also UC Berkeley professor. He is the George Johnson Professor of Law and Political Science. He is the author of *Mobilizing Public Opinion*, *Transforming Politics*, *Transforming America*, *Why Americans Don't Join the Party?*, *Asian American Political Participation* among many others. Taeku also serves on the National Advisory Committee for the U.S. Census Bureau. Now, Paul



We are delighted to listen to you first. You can speak about 12 to 15 minutes.

Presentation

■ **Paul Pierson:** Thank you very much, professor Sohn. It is a pleasure to be with you and have a chance even from this distance to speak with the South Korean audience. I think Americans who are aware of the broader global picture are very conscious of the striking contrast between the way South Korean government and society have dealt with the crisis, and the way the United States has dealt with the crisis, or rather failed to deal with the crisis. I start by saying this not just to congratulate you and your country but also because I think the kind of political dysfunction that has been on display in the United States is unfortunately not a one-off experience. I think it is reflective of deep, deep challenges and problems facing American society and the American political system and in particular, those that really hang over this presidential election. I think we need to understand the broader political context to say anything helpful about the election.

"Any of the standard things might be said by people who have studied presidential elections about predicting what is going to happen this fall, but we need to approach them with enormous caution under these kinds of circumstances."

So, a few quick remarks before I turn to talking specifically about what is going on in the election this year. The first is just a caveat: We should be very humble. I think after 2016, political scientists in the United States learned to be humble about predicting presidential elections and probably should be even more humble this time around because we have never experienced certainty in the modern era of polling, focused groups and electoral forecasting. We have never experienced an election against the backdrop of this time of economic and social crisis. The U.S. will almost certainly be facing 15 or 20 percent unemployment rate through

this year. Congress is, I think as it is on many issues, gridlocked and it is going to find it very challenging to respond forcefully to the economic crisis that we are facing. And of course, at the same time, there is a public health crisis which is also likely to continue to be severe even though the exact course of it is unpredictable. Any of the standard things might be said by people who have studied presidential elections about predicting what is going to happen this fall, but I think we need to approach them with enormous caution under these kinds of circumstances.

"The country is extraordinarily polarized, in a way it has not been since the period leading up to the Civil War. You see a lot of rhetoric and a lot of behaviors that suggest that people see the other side as not just their opponents but their threat."

The second thing I want to say is a little bit about the nature and the deeper political turmoil facing the United States. The country is extraordinarily polarized. Polarized in a way I would say it has not been since the period leading up to the Civil War. I know some political scientists argue that polarization is not that unusual in American politics, but I think the kind of polarization that we see now is one in which two political parties that are organized on a national level are coherent national political entities, and the same kind of cleavages work all the way from the top, all the way down to the locations all around the United States where you see the same kinds of divides and the same kind of folks falling on the opposite side of divides all across the country. You see a lot of rhetoric and a lot of behaviors that suggest that people see the other side as not just their opponents but their threat; potentially, as an existential threat to things that they value. I want to emphasize that this is especially true on the political right in the United States. I do not think it is equally balanced in the same way that Joe Biden represents a radical figure in American political life, or in the way that Donald Trump represents a radical figure in American life. You see that reflected in the coalition. And over the past generation, what has happened in the



United States is that Republican political elites and powerful interest within that party have increasingly found that they have to resort to increasingly intense, extreme appeals, and particularly those that appeal to white working class voters, who see themselves as losing grounds in America: losing grounds economically, losing grounds in terms of cultural status by seeing the United States slow but steady shift towards multiracial democracy as something that is threatening to them. Powerful groups within the conservative coalition such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), right-wing media, especially Fox News and talk radio, and evangelist Christians as an organized political movement have really amplified this sense of threat. That development generated the extraordinary presidency under President Trump and that is the other factor I want to talk about briefly before turning to the election.

"I think there is actually an enormous evidence to suggest that considerable democratic backsliding has already taken place in the United States."

Presidency under Donald Trump is a very new kind of presidency in the United States. It's one that I think should be seen as part of the international trend towards soft versions of authoritarianism, or what Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky in their book, *How Democracies Die*, described as democratic backsliding, where you can continue to have elections but during an increasingly unbalanced and unfair state as country slides into something more authoritarian. While some American political scientists would be resistant with me raising this as alarmist, I think there is actually an enormous evidence to suggest that considerable democratic backsliding has already taken place in the United States. Since Donald Trump became president, he has engaged in increasingly aggressive attacks on any independent source of political mobilization in the United States or political organization in the U.S., whether it is related to the judiciary or the civil service, where he has systematically tried to replace anyone who shows any kind of real independence with somebody who is going to be loyal to him. The same thing is happening with

the media. The same thing is happening with the political opposition. Just in the last 24 hours, the president has indicated that he thinks both his immediate predecessors, President Obama and his current opponent Joe Biden should be in prison, which is something he has said repeatedly about his opponents in the last election, Hillary Clinton. Even though there are people who want to dismiss such statement as loose talk, if we look at other countries, or if Americans were to look at Hungary, Turkey or Brazil, they would recognize this kind of behavior, and the way in which President Trump's party has embraced that behavior, as something we would call democratic backsliding and something that represents a real threat to democratic practices that have been core parts of American political history.

So, I see 2020 as an absolute watershed election. It is going to be a moment where the United States is going to decide what path it is going to be on. Whether it is going to continue on the path that it has been on for the past few years, moving and slipping towards less free, less open society, one that is not governed by the rule of law, but governed by whether one is not in political favor or not. Or whether we will steer away from that direction towards the path that I think the United States was broadly on before 2016 which was a gradual and very difficult turbulence, but gradual evolution toward a multiracial democracy. That is what is on the ballot in 2020.

"I see 2020 as an absolute watershed election. It is going to be a moment where the United States is going to decide what path it is going to be on."

Now, I have already said there is an enormous uncertainty how the election itself is going to play out. Obviously, a lot of things can happen between now and November and we never had circumstances like this before. President Trump has a couple of important structural advantages that I want to mention quickly. One is his unbelievable ability to control the conversation, to direct the conversation and attention of the media. He does not always do it to his benefits, but he is very good at attracting attentions and getting people focus on



things that he wants people to focus on and I think that's an advantage.

"Trump has an advantage in the electoral college which decides who wins the presidency and the advantage that exists there is because republican base is more rural and democratic base is more urban. When you have a winner-take-all system for each individual state, that provides an advantage for the more widely dispersed party. Trump has actually lost the popular vote by almost 3 million votes in 2016 but won the electoral college."

More fundamentally, he has an advantage in the electoral college which decides who wins the presidency and the advantage that exists there is because Republican base is more rural and Democratic base is more urban. When you have a winner-take-all system for each individual state, that provides an advantage for the more widely dispersed party. As you probably know, President Trump has actually lost the popular vote by almost 3 million votes in 2016 but won the electoral college. The projections are that this time around because a lot of the rural/urban split has intensified, it is possible that he can lose the popular vote by 4 or 5 percent and still win the electoral college by winning the more rural states and by winning hotly contested states that lean slightly Republican and that could carry him over the top of the electoral college. So, he has those advantages against that and he has the disadvantages that he's not popular by historic standards. His approval rating has always been pretty low and it's definitely in the danger zone for a president running for reelections. There are lots of people who don't just disapprove of the president but who's strongly disapprove of him so he will have a hard time winning them over. So, he can't afford to lose more support before his prospects for reelections become really critical and he now has to do that not with a decent economy in his back but with the economy that is going to be pretty going to

be depression level unemployment in the fall and probably very significant continuing difficulties around the pandemic. Very hard to know how this will play out.

On balance, I would consider President Trump to be an underdog. Those challenges at least somewhat outweigh the structural advantages that he has. If we have open, free, fair elections and people feel like they can safely go to the polls in November, I would say that he is likely to be a slight underdog. But I do not take it for granted that we will have those kinds of electoral circumstances in November. I feel like things have gotten to a point in American politics where the level of conflict and now the level of social crises are so high we cannot be fully confident that we will have free, open, easily contested election in November. I will stop there.

"I would consider President Trump to be an underdog. Those challenges at least somewhat outweigh the structural advantages that he has."

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you Paul. Excellent presentation. Before moving on to Taeku, I have a quick question. You said that there is an uncertainty about free and open elections in America. What do you mean? Can you elaborate on the last point?

■ **Paul Pierson:** Well, here I think I would point to the kind of arguments that Levitsky and Ziblatt make in their book which is that we need to recognize that democracies in the real world are not all pure. They often have impurities in them and democratic backsliding is often about increasing the amount of impurities. So, if you can make it more difficult for your opponents to vote, then that gives you a big advantage. One of the things that are interesting in the United States now is that because the electoral coalitions are so predictable of the two parties, there are all sorts of interventions you can make. And conservatives have already been doing this in many ways to try to raise the threshold to



make it more difficult for voting to be carried out by their opposition voters.

Of course, one thing that is very unusual about the United States is that local and state elections are generally run by political officials; not by neutral, independent officials, but by political officials who may be associated with one party or another. There are many decisions they can make. In Wisconsin, there was an election a few weeks ago in which, the Democrats were arguing that in the middle of the pandemic, it is important for people to have a chance to vote by mail or, to vote remotely so that they would not put their lives in danger by going to the polls. Republicans in Wisconsin and the Republican-dominated court prevented Democrats from pursuing that ‘vote-by-mail’ strategy because they thought it was going to be their political advantage that the restriction of such strategy would harm more turnout among Democrats than that among Republicans. Actually, Democrats ended up winning that election. Voters were not happy with that but it gives you an illustration of the kinds of things that potentially could be done.

“We need to recognize the democracies in the real world are not all pure. They often have impurities in them and often democratic backsliding is about just increasing the amount of impurities.”

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Let us now turn to Taeku.

■ **Taeku Lee:** Great. And what Paul has mentioned are the things that I am trying to touch on as well. I want to first, sincerely thank President Sohn for the opportunity and the honor to deliver some thoughts on the 2020 presidential election in the United States. The United States and Korea are special allies with a linked history, at least throughout my lifetime, and I very much look forward to sharing my thoughts with you this morning.

I want to begin from the same place that Paul began. In most of the U.S. presidential elections in my career as a political scientist, there is a familiar cadence and rhythm between the moment that candidates declare their interest in running for president, and the

evening when results are counted and a winner is declared. Somewhere along that road, political scientists like Paul and I might wager our forecast as to who will win, and all the way along that road, pollsters will gauge the sentiments of American voters with horserace polls that give us a further fine-grain sense of who is likely to win and why. Political science forecasting models using variation on a theme of indicators such as economic well-being and presidential approval can often predict who will win, the Labor Day before the year of an election. And even this year, the first of the most commonly recognized half dozen or so forecasting models, which is Helmut Norpoth's “primary model,” is already out with a prediction. In case you missed it, in January of this year, Norpoth declared that Donald Trump had a 91 to 95% certainty of being reelected. At the same time, there are also poll aggregators like FiveThirtyEight, the Princeton Election Consortium, Votermatic, that are also remarkably good at not only predicting who will win, but also estimating the margin of victory in a given election. And here, aggregators like FiveThirtyEight.com currently predict the exact opposite outcome at the present moment if you look at all the A-grade polls reported by FiveThirtyEight. They all show Biden ahead of Trump by about a 7 to 10% margin.

And that leads to my first key point which really should not surprise anyone in this learned audience

“Somewhere along that road, political scientists like Paul and I might wager our forecast as to who will win, and all the way along that road, pollsters will gauge the sentiments of American voters with horserace polls that give us a further fine-grain sense of who is likely to win and why.”

and which you have already heard this from Paul: The 2020 election is unlikely to be a typical election in which we can rely on these political science forecasting models or polling aggregator predictions. The first reason for this is that we only need to remember the 2016



election when all the major political science forecasting models confidently predicted a win for Hillary Clinton, and then Clinton lost. The 2016 election gives us at least two reasons to be skeptical that forecasting models will be useful in 2020. One is the lesson that we continue to learn, often in shocking and even lethal ways, which is that Donald Trump is an uncommonly effective disruptor of political norms and institutions. The other reason is that the United States, for a whole host of reasons from foreign intervention to domestic polarization, is increasingly vulnerable to “October Surprises” that could completely upend our expectations about who will win and who will lose. And 2020 is shaping up to be an election in which there could be an unusually high number of potential “October Surprises” from legal challenges, to “release Trump’s tax returns.” We are currently seeing constitutional challenges in terms of the emoluments clause, telltale books that are currently being written and ready to be published by Trump’s former confidants and appointees, not to mention the possible Russian interference again, or the fallout from another wave of COVID-19 in the fall. Of course, one major surprise is already upon us in the socio-economic and political, and the public health earthquake, which is the coronavirus pandemic. And there is no understating the extent to which COVID-19 is a once-in-a-century crisis with really unpredictable consequences on American politics; so much so that even Helmut Norpoth, the person who had 91-95% prediction of a Trump win, has updated his website to say that “the massive disruptions caused by the coronavirus outbreak may prompt me to revise my forecasts.”

“The 2020 Election is unlikely to be a typical election in which we can rely on these political science forecasting models or polling aggregator predictions.”

So, how should we think about what is likely to happen in an upcoming election, if the existing models are unlikely to be useful, and if we continue to face this unprecedented once-in-an-epoch crisis? Here is my second point: I think we should think about the coming election by identifying and understanding what has

changed, and what continues to change in the United States in terms of the basic building blocks of voter preferences. And I am going to refer to these, alliteratively as stories about institutions, identities and ideologies, and information. A lot of my thoughts here share a common thread with comments that Paul has already shared, so I will try to be brief here. Each of these things can be an entire treatise by themselves.

So, in terms of institutions, political parties in the United States are really a living organizational form

“There is no understating the extent to which COVID-19 is a once-in-a-century crisis with really unpredictable consequences on American politics”

that is currently undergoing major changes. On the right, the Republican party continues a metamorphosis that we started to see in 2016, if not before, with the tea party movement from being the Grand Old Party that most of us grew up with, to what can now be called a “party of Trump.” One consequence of that is that we cannot continue to expect things like party leadership and party discipline independent of what Trump wants, and where Trump is taking the party. On the left, the Democratic Party is, as much as it has been for a couple of generations, on the threshold of a deep divide between a Clinton-Obama-Biden Old Guard, and an angry, insurgent, mobilized Sanders-Warren-Ocasio-Cortez leftist wing. One immediate consequence is that it is yet unclear whether Biden will or should try to win back independents and moderate Republicans by moving to the center during the election, maybe naming somebody like Amy Klobuchar as his running mate, or whether he will or should have an enormous potential of a re-energized left by naming somebody like Warren, Kamala Harris, or Stacy Abrams as his running mate. And at the same time this backdrop of parties is organized, we see norms of bipartisanship continue to erode, polarization continue to grow, and the proportion of Americans who do not identify with either parties continue to grow. My own personal view here is that Biden would do better to move to the left, but I can save that



for the further discussion later. So that is about the institutions.

"It is yet unclear whether Biden will or should try to win back independents and moderate Republicans by moving to the center during the election, and maybe naming somebody like Amy Klobuchar as his running mate, or whether he will or should have an enormous potential of a re-energized left by naming somebody like Warren, Kamala Harris, or Stacy Abrams as his running mate."

In terms of identities and ideologies, American politics, more and more, is defined by “cleavage lines.” But the cleavage lines that have traditionally divided the country, by party, by ideology, by identities, are increasingly becoming redrawn along Pro-Trump or Anti-Trump axis. One important trend here, in American politics, is that power struggles are increasingly moving from what political scientists would call the “first phase of power” – who wins or loses, for example, on policy issues – to struggles in the “second phase of power.” Without getting too into the ways of how political scientists think about power in the United States, the upshot here is very similar to President Sohn’s question to Paul about how this might not be a free and fair election. Which is, the second phase of power is all about battles over the rules of the game itself, such as battles over checks and balances, whether we will be governed by the rule of law, the constitutionality of certain exercises of executive power, and conflicts over who gets to vote, and how we get to vote. And these all come down to likely battles we will see in the future over the exercise of democracy itself. So this matters because we need to expect in 2020 that who wins and how they win may very well be a story of who wins the battle over the rules of the game, and not so much what we are used to, which is characterized by which party was better organized, which candidate had the better ideas or more money, and whether voters fundamentally wanted to change or remain more of the same.

Then third, the Pro-Trump/Anti-Trump axis is also increasingly redefining and resorting Americans by social cleavages around race, religion, gender, class, citizenship, and critically redefining and re-sorting Americans around relatively new ideological beliefs such as the belief in fake news, the prevalence of conspiracy theories, and the renewed distrust of science and evidence. This is the third key to understanding what may happen in 2020, and this is the story of information. In terms of information, the ability of the democratic voters to voice their opinion, against elite-level tactics and strategies over institutions and ideologies, depends crucially on the help and functioning of mediating institutions that inform the public and adjudicate facticity. Those institutions, most prominently the mainstream media, but I would add universities, and the scientific community, have been under assault. We are witnessing the lethal consequences of it this very moment in terms of COVID-19 and we will witness, unfortunately, much more of this between now and November.

"American politics, more and more, is defined by "cleavage lines." But the cleavage lines that have traditionally divided the country, by party, by ideology, by identities, are increasingly becoming redrawn along Pro-Trump or Anti-Trump axis."

So far I have stressed two key points about the 2020 election. First is that we should not look to traditional forecasting models for our expectations about what will happen this November. Second is that we instead need to understand how some of the fundamental elements of American politics, its institutions, identities, ideologies, and information channels, are currently operating and evolving. I want to make one last, third key point about 2020, which is that we need to also keep in mind that for 2020, there can be more than two possible outcomes to the presidential election. In stable, consolidated democracies, there are two outcomes to accompany two major party candidates: either candidate A wins or candidate B wins. And the litmus test



for democracy's stability as Adam Przewolski once famously put it, is when democracy is "the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside democratic institutions, when all the losers want to do is try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost." To me, it is unclear that in 2020, all the losers on either side would just want to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost.

"The litmus test for democracy's stability as Adam Przewolski once famously put it, is when democracy is, "the only game in town, when no one can imagine acting outside democratic institutions, when all the losers want to do is try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost." To me, it is unclear that in 2020, that all the losers on either side would just want to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost."

Specifically, I think we need to keep in mind that in 2020, there are four possible scenarios to what may happen. The first two are familiar: 1) Trump might win, and the Democrats would accept that outcome; 2) Biden would win, and Trump would accept that outcome. But there are two other scenarios. One is that Biden wins and Trump refuses to accept that outcome, throwing the country into disorder and political violence. Fourth, Trump could win and the Democrats can refuse to accept that outcome, throwing the country into disorder and political violence. These third and fourth scenarios of the loser not conceding, I think, are more plausible than what most of us would like to imagine possible. As mentioned before, Trump is a preternatural disruptor of political norms and institutions, and for Trump, the threat to de-legitimize democratically held elections has already been rehearsed in the 2016 election when he repeatedly voiced his worries publicly about the legitimacy of the election, anticipating that he would lose. And he has been waving the flag of electoral fraud throughout his presidency as well. For Biden,

if the Democrats lose because of things like foreign interference, voter suppression, or other kinds of corruptions or shenanigans, it is entirely plausible to me that Biden and the Democrats also will not go as quietly into the night in defeat as Al Gore did in 2000.

So the third key point is that we need to expect potential scenarios in 2020 where our constitutional electoral democracy itself is under threat. In addition, and I think this is a really important point, in only one of those four scenarios, will there be a strong impetus to return to some sort of Pre-Trump normalcy. That is, in particular for countries like South Korea, a return to normalcy in which the United States can be a reliable ally, a regular trade partner, and a global leader. Only one of those four scenarios. And even if Biden wins, and Trump peacefully concedes the election, this will only happen if Biden wins by moving more to the center, than by Biden moving to the Sanders-Warren Ocasio-Cortez whim of the Democratic Party, in which we might return to something other than the Biden of the Biden-Obama years. So, this is a lot of doom and gloom, but I think it is a realistic assessment, at least on my part, about the upcoming election. For both personal and institutional reasons, I am personally very invested in the scenario in which Biden might win and Trump might concede, the legitimacy of that election, but I am also far from optimistic that that will actually be the outcome we are all faced with come Wednesday, November 4th, 2020.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you, Taeku for your excellent but gloomy presentation, portraying America as not the country we know. Let us turn to our designated discussants. I would like to first invite Professor Byoung Kwon Sohn from Chung-Ang University, who is a leading expert in American politics in Korea.



Discussion

■ **Byoung Kwon Sohn:** Thank you for your presentations. They helped me to understand the workings of American democracy and your concerns about the prospects of future American democracy. My first question goes to Professor Pierson and the second question to Professor Lee. The first question is about the repetition of the 2016 white working class nationalism and my question is this: What would be the influence of the American white working class nationalism and the anti-American sentiment in the 2020 presidential election cycle compared to the 2016 presidential election? Would they be weakened or strengthened? Or would they remain at the same level? Related to this rampant COVID-19 chaos, how could COVID-19 affect the influence of the white working class nationalism in this 2020 presidential election?

"What would be the influence of the American white working class nationalism and the anti-American sentiment in 2020 Presidential election cycle compared to the 2016 Presidential election?"

The second question, for Professor Lee, is about the Sanders faction within the Democratic Party and their relationship with the Old Guard, or the Biden faction. So, my question is this: What would be the prospect for Sanders' supporters and his faction in the Democratic Party to also support Joe Biden? And if they would support Biden, why would they vote for Joe Biden instead of being stuck at home on the election day? What kind of counter-offer should Joe Biden prepare for in order to gain the support of the Sanders faction? If Joe Biden embraces the left-wing agenda, can there be risks of losing middle-ground voters in the 2020 presidential election?

And this is a very trivial question. I hope Professor Taeku Lee will answer the question. You divided all the democratic factions, insurgents, and angry factions led by Sanders. You categorized former President Obama as an 'Old Guard Democratic leader.' Can we

say he is in between Joe Biden and Sanders? I would appreciate it if you could elaborate on that. Thank you.

"What would be the prospect that Sanders supporters and his faction in the Democratic Party also support Joe Biden?"

■ **Paul Pierson:** Great questions and I will just say a little about Trump and the white working class. It is part of a longer evolution. This is the direction in which the Republican Party has been moving for some time. It is shifting in the direction of really bolstering its appeals to economically downscale voters with less education, pulling back from trying to expand the racial diversity of the Republican coalitions, becoming more hardline on immigration and so on. Trump just accelerated this progress and what is interesting is that since the 2016 election, he has intensified that movement in the party. You might have thought he would actually sort of moderate a little bit and find ways to expand the Republican electoral coalitions and reach out to voters who traditionally had voted Republican, and especially white suburban college-educated people many of whom did vote Republican because they like low taxes. Trump has made no efforts to expand his coalition in that direction, quite the opposite. In fact, there were movements away from Trump among those suburban voters, which is probably why the Republicans lost the House of Representative in 2018.

During the current campaign, I think we can see that Trump almost knows how to really play it this way, which is to do the kind of red meat appeals, using populist kinds of rhetoric where it is all about whom you should hate and whom you should be angry at. He is trying to increase the intensity with which he can mobilize these working-class voters. Now, that is going to be more challenging because the economy is performing so much worse. Many of the working-class voters are going to be badly damaged by this change in the economy. But it is already clear that this is the direction he is going to go in, trying to generate hostility toward China. You can see already that he has tried various rhetorical moves: hostility to China being a prominent



one that he is going to try to use to mobilize that kind of sentiment. So, Trump may be continuing gains in 2020 with these groups that were sort of off-set by his loss of white suburban votes. The question is “what will now happen over the six months?” and I think one aspect of it that is really interesting to watch is it appears that he is losing ground among white Americans who are over the age of 65, which had become a very strong voting bloc for him. That is a very important voting bloc for him because these people actually turn out as an issue in American elections. We do not typically have very high turnout in our elections, but older people vote. So that has been a very reliable constituency for Trump among Whites 65 and over in the U.S. Or it could be that there is much higher proportion of people that age group that are White in the U.S. But that support seems to be really softening in part, I think, because of the virus, because Trump’s eagerness to actually say “let us not worry too much about grandma, let us get the economy going again”. That does not sound good to some voters who are grandmas and grandpas.

So, I think that is going to be an interesting thing to watch and the other aspect of it is that those voters mostly do not find Biden to be very threatening. Biden actually appeals to them and he is well-known by older voters so he has more appeal to them than Hillary Clinton did. Now Biden’s going to lose votes among younger voters, it looks like; he is not as popular as either Obama or Clinton was at this point among younger voters so that feeds into the question you asked Taeku. I will leave with that.

■ **Taeku Lee:** Great. I cannot resist the opportunity to say, I just think that Paul predicted that Biden will win Florida.

“During the current campaign, I think we can see Trump really knows how to really play it this way, which is to do the kind of red meat appeals, populist kinds of rhetoric where it is all about who you should hate and who you should be angry at.”

■ **Paul Pierson:** Well, if I were a Republican I would be worried about Florida for these reasons.

■ **Taeku Lee:** Yes. I think those are great comments to think about. The one addition I would say, even though I know the question was mostly directed at Paul, is that what has happened during the Trump presidency is that he has moved himself from white, working class nationalism “as a strategy” to win the election, to white, working class nationalism “as an identity.” And I think in the process of that move the potential electoral base around white working class nationalism has shrunk a little bit, and in the close election that might matter. In terms of the Sanders faction, I think the two important parts of that question are: 1) “Will they move over to Biden?” and “Will they actually turn out to vote? Or will they move over with enthusiasm?” I think the easy answer is to say it depends, in large parts, on whom he picks as his vice presidential candidate, but that is also probably putting too much weight on vice presidential candidates than it deserves. And I think on Biden’s part, if he picks a vice presidential candidate, that outshines him as a presidential candidate and that too, can be a liability. If you know about Joe Biden’s performance as a political candidate it might be not too hard for a vice presidential candidate to outshine him. So I think he has to be very careful about weighing too heavily on the decision about a vice presidential candidate to do the work for him of bringing the Sanders voters over to his side.

“If you know about Joe Biden’s performance as a political candidate, it might be not too hard for a vice presidential candidate to outshine him.”

I think potentially much more promising is the consequences of COVID-19, which I think has been such a crisis in the United States that it really revealed a lot of the structural problems in the United States, both in terms of its economy and the way in which politics works in the United States. And if the core of the



Sanders-Warren-Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) wing is a structural critique of business power and American political economy, I think voters, even those in the center, are much more open to hearing that argument now: arguments such as a need to universalize our health care system to something closer to what they have in the United Kingdom than what we traditionally had in the United States. I think it is inconceivable that we would have been at this particular place but for the fact of this crisis. So, to the extent that Biden uses this opportunity to move the Democratic Party towards more of a structural critique of the American economy and of the business power, then that could do more work to bring Sanders' voters over to his side, than picking the right vice presidential candidate.

"I think Obama was very transformative in the way he thought about mobilizing voters to win election, in ways that I think we would continue to see in the 2018 midterm elections when there was large scale repudiation of Trump in elections which we usually see very low voter turnout."

In terms of Obama, I described him as part of the Old Guard in part, because of my own personal views of Obama. I thought he was a transformational candidate and a very Old Guard president. There was much more continuity in terms of how he governed, with Democrats of the past such as those from the Clinton-Gore administration, than there was anything that was distinctly different. I think he was very transformative in the way he thought about mobilizing voters to win election, in ways that I think we would continue to see in the 2018 midterm elections when there was large-scale repudiation of Trump in elections which we usually see very low voter turnout. We will wait to see whether Biden will be able to tap into that as well. I think Obama as a candidate was quite different from who Obama was as a president, and I would read Obama as a president as part of the Old Democratic Guard.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Now let us turn to Chaesung Chun.

■ **Chaesung Chun:** Thank you for your great, insightful presentations. I have two questions related to U.S. foreign policy, which many people in South Korea are interested in. First question is about the bilateral relations between the United States and China. The second one is about the expected foreign policy of the new administration from next year: what would the top priorities of foreign policy be for the next administration whether it will be a Biden or a Trump administration. If possible, both professors could answer that question.

The first question is the following: We expected that the coronavirus situation will be facilitator of the bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and China because it is a common threat to public health. But it turns out that coronavirus is not bad enough or fatal enough to facilitate the bilateral cooperation. There are many discourses and narratives about the 'blaming game.' Who will be more responsible for the aggravation of this situation? Do you expect this type of escalation in confrontation starting from both countries will define the short-term bilateral relations until the election time? Will it be President Trump's short-term election strategies to blame China probably to aggravate the trade tension in the coming months by starting the second phase of trade deals, or is it a result of long-term aggravation of the American public's perception of China saying that China is the disseminator of its national, global, collective facts, such as the virus by mishandling the virus situation in each phase? So, will it be the result coming from the generally aggravating American perception of China? What will be the long-term prospect of this bilateral confrontation? How



would it define American foreign policy for months and years?

"Will it be the short-term President Trump's election strategies to blame China to aggravate the trade tension in the coming months by starting the second phase of trade deals, or will it be a result of long-term aggravation of the American public's perception of China saying that the country is the disseminator of its national, global, collective facts?"

The second question is the following: When we go back to the 21st century in general under the U.S. unipolarity, many American administrations started with crisis. The Bush administration began with the terrorist attacks, the Obama administration with the 2008 economic recession. And now, the next administration will be confronted with serious challenges coming from COVID-19 situation and public health. So, we expect that the top priorities of the next Americans administration will be very much different from those of the past ones. We can easily expect that the top priority will be how to deal with this health situation. The second one will be to revitalize the American economy. The question will be what would be the third if there is a Trump administration in the second term. Will Trump be different in dealing with foreign policy situations, thinking probably about the legacy in his mind to change his course of foreign policy? There are possibilities of that. The more interesting question will be: What will be the foreign policy of the candidate Biden if he becomes the president? We expect there might be a return to the pre-Trumpian normalcy by reassuming American global leadership and providing international collective goods to all the countries, but still there are concerns that in this a very different situation. Even though Biden will pursue different foreign policies, there will be a continuation of somehow Trumpian, "America first" type of foreign policy even under the Biden administration because there are America lacks a lot of capability in deal-

ing with this situation. But in South Korea, there is expectation that the new American administration will put more emphasis on the importance of alliance and revitalize the importance of multilateralism. What would be the public support in the U.S. about reassuming the American leadership generally for the next administration?

"What will be the foreign policy of the candidate Biden if he becomes the president? What would be the public support in the U.S. about reassuming the American leadership generally for the next administration?"

■ **Taeku Lee:** Those are great questions. In terms of bilateral relations between the U.S. and China, I am thinking a bit about a presentation I gave at a KIS conference in the fall, where I thought out loud about a theory in international relations about domestic audience cost. And why it is that you would expect the idea behind the theory is that when a leader makes a lot of empty threats and engages in a lot of cheap talks as hostile to another party, often times that leader has to bear the domestic audience cost for having done so. In Trump's case, especially with respect to China, there seems to be close to zero domestic audience cost for the kind of depurative rhetoric he has engaged in, with respect to China. And there is a lot of reason why that might be the case, but I think the upshot of, if that is the fair characterization of the absence of the domestic audiences cost in Trump's case, is that he is freer to basically move around as he chooses to in terms of how he thinks about and uses U.S.-China relations for his own personal political purposes. And I think anything that concerns predictions about a second Trump administration has to start from observations about his record in his first administration, which is, in my reading, not an administration that has a grand design either with respect to domestic politics or foreign relations, but really emanates from the personality of Trump. So, from that perspective, if Trump sees it necessary or expedient to



try to cast China as his enemy for the purposes of political gain, he certainly is going to do that between now and November. It is important to keep in mind, though, that to the extent he has already done that in the last three years of his presidency. For the most part it hasn't had that much traction with American voters.

"Americans still value the idea of a globalized economy, they still like the idea of America being engaged in multilateral relations with other countries, and they certainly think of that as being the way forward in terms of how we move on from the current COVID crisis."

So, in the polls that I have looked at, for the most part Americans still value the idea of a globalized economy, they still like the idea of America being engaged in multilateral relations with other countries, they certainly think of that as being the way forward in terms of how we move on from the current COVID-19 crisis, in terms of having coordination with WHO, for example. So there are some slight upticks, specifically in terms of how the U.S. thinks about China in slightly more negative terms, but I do not think we are in a situation so far, based on the first three years of the Trump presidency, of Trump really being able to rail against China and against Xi Jinping to create this mass upsurge of angry Americans and angry sentiments towards China. For example, if you try to project to a worst-case scenario of whether or not the U.S. and China might be engaged in military conflicts as a result of this kind of incendiary rhetoric, I do not see any appetite on behalf of American voters for anything like that. Even though I think Trump likes to, opportunistically, choose enemies for personal, political gains; and China is certainly a low-hanging fruit from that perspective. But I do not really see him as being able to gain that much from doing that.

For the most part, I have already touched on some parts of an answer towards your second question about top priorities. The one other thing I would add is that Biden really sees foreign policy as his strong suit.

That really has been one of his top priorities and one of the areas of a unique policy expertise from his years as a senator. Based on his record from those years, unless there is a really strong poll towards the left from the Sanders wing of the party in a way that really compels Biden, Biden's first goal after winning the presidency would be to try to return the United States to some resemblance of a Pre-Trump normalcy in terms of foreign relations.

"I do not think President Trump will hesitate for a moment to turn China into a demon if he thought that it would help him electorally."

■ **Paul Pierson:** It would probably be more interesting if I disagreed with my colleague but I do not about anything that he said. Those are both great questions. I will sit very quickly on the first one. I do not think President Trump will hesitate for a moment to turn China into a demon if he thought that it would help him electorally. But I agree with Taeko. I actually don not think the evidence so far suggests that that is likely to work all that well. For example, I have seen polling on what percent of Americans have actually picked up this language, calling it the "China virus" or the "Wuhan virus," and it is vanishingly small. I think there are additional obstacles like the fact that Trump is on video saying many of the things that he wants, to accuse other people with respect to being duped by China. He would not hesitate to play that card and I am sure that they will try anything they can. They would not hesitate but I am doubtful that there will be a big rise in anti-Chinese sentiment in the U.S. in the coming years. Looking ahead to future administrations, I think the thing that I would say about the Biden administration is that I am sure that Biden would want broadly to recreate the kind of foreign policy you might have associated with Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama. He would aspire to do that. The challenge is going to be that it is a lot easier to break things the way that the Trump administration has than to re-establish relationships that are based on trust, credibility, and reliability. I think I would expect other



countries to be much more careful in their dealings with the United States in the future and much more skeptical of the idea that they can expect a reliable negotiating partner. So, that is what is going to be an addition to all the other crises the Biden administration would face. I think it is going to be very, very hard to put back together the pieces that have been broken over the last four years.

Now, the second Trump term, I will be blunt. I do not think that his foreign policy is “America first”, I think it is “Donald Trump first”.

Now, the second Trump term, I will be blunt. I do not think that his foreign policy is “America first”, I think it is “Donald Trump first.” Pulling out of the constraints that are created by international agreements and alliances is a way for him to put himself first. I think many things that are genuinely alarming about this situation the U.S. finds itself in now is that related to the second Trump term. I think we are already seeing this in the last year of the first Trump term, but he is unshackled now. He is unchanged. He is quite confident that the checks and balances that are built into the American political system do not constrain him. He does not have to worry about Republican senators removing him from office. Increasingly, he does not have to worry about the courts checking him and if he has another four years in the office. My guess is that he will not be as worried about the media. He will feel like he will have more leverage over the media as well. One of the nice things about “Trump First” or “America First” foreign policy is that when Trump is negotiating with foreign countries, he can accept massive side payments to his personal economic, financial interests that will not be visible, and that will especially not be visible if all the checks have been removed. There are many countries that would love to negotiate with a broken superpower that is willing to make confessions in return for private benefits. So, I agree that his foreign policy in many ways is incoherent, but I think that kind of coherence is what we would expect out of this second term.

QnA

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Let us turn to the audience. The first question is as follows: “Is it projected that the 2020 presidential election will be held by absentee ballots only across 50 states?” The second question is: “How many independent candidates will there be, and how important will independents be in the election?”

■ **Taeku Lee:** On the first question, I think every state should be preparing for the possibility of an absentee mail and ballots only. But I think that circumstance would only arise if there was a second wave of this outbreak that spreads across all 50 states. And there will be a lot of states, as Paul pointed out, that will play out the dynamic that we witnessed in Wisconsin, where if Republicans are in power in a given state and they see value and holding elections at actual voting booths because they think it will have the effect of suppressing voter turnout and depressing the turnout in ways that will benefit Republican candidates and Donald Trump. Then we will probably see, even if there is a massive second wave of COVID-19 that spreads across the country, a lot of states that will insist on having real elections as well.

On the second question, there is typically a libertarian candidate and I think this year, Justin Amash is running as a candidate for that party's ticket, but there is nothing else that I have heard of. The biggest threat would have been if somebody like Michael Bloomberg chose to run as a third party candidate. And so far, for a range of reasons, it even though you could argue that he was treated poorly as a candidate, but maybe only as poorly as he actually performed as a candidate for the Democratic nomination, it does not seem like he is motivated to, for any personal reasons, to run as a third party candidate. He seems more motivated to actually defeat Donald Trump.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Here is another question: This question goes to Taeku. You talked about the scenario of Biden winning and Trump refusing to accept. What do you think are the direct actions that Trump would take?



■ **Taeku Lee:** I think these are the kinds of scenarios that, especially political scientists in advanced industrialized democracies like the U.S., are really not trained to think about. A part of an answer is the way in which Trump regularly, especially at his rallies, talks about how he has the military on his side and how he has the police on his side. I think I would not put it past our president to play out scenarios in which he would not peacefully leave from his political office. And that involves a lot of ugliness, domestically in the United States, and most of those scenarios are not ones that I am trained as a political scientist to really carefully think about. And a lot of it also will depend on what role the Congress is willing to play in that situation and what role the courts are willing to play in that situation.

Imagine that on election night, Trump declares the election has been stolen from him. What would happen then? I do not know but it is not an implausible scenario at all.

■ **Paul Pierson:** I want to say first and I know I have some of the same discomfort Taeku feels with this. It is quite extraordinary. I was trained to teach and do research about a very peaceful and highly stabilized, at least in terms of its formal institutions, democracy. It feels very peculiar to have to wrestle with this kind of questions and I don't think we can hide from them. I think the realities are apparent which is not to say that we're necessarily slide in this direction but there is enough going on that to me it is not intellectually honest not to attempt to wrestle with it. Just as an illustration of that, today, the state legislature in the state of Michigan announced that they were going to go out of session of the legislature because they were fearful of the armed groups that have been protesting including inside the Capitol building, where the legislature meets. These are people carrying automatic weapons and protesting against the fact that there were stay-at-home orders in place in Michigan. The situation there is serious enough that the state legislature actually Republican

majority in the state legislature decided that they had to go into hiding. They could not meet in public sessions. So now, imagine what happens if a president who has been saying for years that the other side is cheating and stealing elections and is backed by powerful media that is taken as gospel by tens of millions of Americans. Imagine that on election night, he declares the election has been stolen from him. What would happen then? I do not know but it is not an implausible scenario at all. If the election is closed and, of course, one thing is going to be the case in the U.S. and will be probably more the case because of the virus is that the absentee votes, or mail-in votes, come in slowly. The vote in California comes in slowly and I live in California. Most people in California vote by mail and it can take ten days to count all the ballots in the various districts. It is quite possible that our president could declare a fraud at that point.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Here is another question. In the recent Korean general election, we witnessed the rising generation gap among voters. For the U.S., are there any political characteristics distinctive of millennial voters and do they particularly support America's global leadership?

I would be very pleasantly surprised if young voters continued to turnout and mobilize in the way that they did in the 2018 midterm elections.

■ **Taeku Lee:** One thought I had in listening to that question is if America's young voters were like South Korea's young voters, Trump would not have won in 2016. And the question over who is likely to win would be much less of a debate. So that even in that, there was an election this week in California, in Southern California, to finish the term until November, of a currently elected member of Congress in 2018 who had to resign because of an affair that they had with one of their staffers. But that was a democratic member of Congress and they lost their seat to the Republican candidate running to fill that seat until November and that surprised a lot



of people but part of the story of that election especially during the COVID-19 crisis was that older Americans turned out to vote and younger voters in that district did not turn out to vote. That is a very old story in the United States. The 2018 midterm congressional elections were really an exception to that, and I would be very pleasantly surprised if young voters continued to turnout and mobilize in the way that they did in the 2018 midterm elections. I worry that they might not, in particular, given that Joe Biden is at the head of the ticket for the Democratic Party.

When a president runs for the second term, the election is mostly about how people feel about the president's first term or at least the end of the president's first term, and I think there is a lot of reason to think that that is a big problem for Donald Trump.

■ **Paul Pierson:** I do think that is one of the biggest to the extent that there's a campaign here to follow. I do agree with Taeku that this is one of the biggest questions is “What is going to happen with young voters?” And they are not going to vote for Donald Trump. There is a big gap where young voters have been tilting strongly Democratic in recent years and Trump has just accelerated that trend. The question is more about how many of them will vote. Potentially it could be for a third party, but it does not really look like that. That is going to be a big issue. It is more whether they will turn out to vote, and I have to say I remain inclined to think, at the end of the day, that youth turnout is likely to be pretty high. It is actually likely to look like 2018. And I think it probably depends a lot less on what Joe Biden does than just the fact that Donald Trump is going to be on the ballot, and the election is going to be a referendum on his presidency, which is traditional in American politics. When a president runs for the second term, the election is mostly about how people feel about the president's first term or at least, the end of the president's first term, and I think there is a lot of reason to think that that is a big problem for Donald Trump.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you. Here is another question. Both of you mentioned democratic backsliding, which occurs across the world, and particularly in advanced industrial countries. Do you see any particular American element in comparative perspective?

I watch Game of Thrones and the famous line was, “Will you bend the knee to the person who is asking for your loyalty?” Basically, Republicans have it the end of the day that they have bent their knee. That was not supposed to happen in a Madisonian separation of power political system.

■ **Paul Pierson:** That is a great question. I think the American system is peculiar in certain respects having to do with the nature of our institutions. Traditionally, our institutions did provide pretty strong check against that kind of dynamic because the political system was so fragmented that the idea that you would get on national coalition around a figure like Donald Trump, who would not effectively be checked by other parts of the political system that have their own power. That just seems like a really hard thing to pull off. One of the things that has been really stunning, I actually have a book coming out with Jacob Hacker that tries to explain some of this, is that the Republican Party really has rolled over. I watch *Game of Thrones* and the famous line over and over again in it was, “Will you bend the knee to the person who is asking for your loyalty?” Basically, Republicans have it the end of the day that they have bent their knee. That was not supposed to happen in a Madisonian separation of power political system. It is interesting to understand why that might take place.

The other thing that is interesting about the American case for this is that you do have this kind of unusual possibility in the American system which is that you can get what Jacob Hacker and I call a “minoritarian government.” You can have a unified minority country because of the way minorities are located geographically to actually able to govern over the majority. So, the Senate in the U.S. bears no resemblance to the population of the United States and so if you are a



strong party in rural areas of the country, you are going to have real advantage in getting a Senate majority and Republicans have lost the overall national vote in the Senate in most recent elections and they have a majority of the senators because of this rural advantage. The same advantage helped President Trump to win even when he lost the popular vote in the presidency. I do not want to get into the complications of it but it even helps the Republicans in the House of Representatives because Democrats waste so many of their votes in urban districts. So, you potentially have a system especially if you can stack the Supreme Court with your supporters, you have a system where you do not actually command the support the majority of the country but you can run the country. So, that is a little different than the kind of democratic backsliding that Levitsky and Ziblatt talk about but it is part of what is going on in the U.S.

"Trump almost does not exist without Obama as a president that preceded him. And so it is hard not to at least entertain the argument that the trigger for democratic backsliding in the United States was the Obama presidency."

■ **Taeku Lee:** I would just add to that. Anytime you ask a question about whether something that is happening in the United States is exceptional, compared to what happens in other countries in the world, I think you have to think about the role that race plays as an organizing principle in American politics, in a way that it rarely does in a lot of other countries. Part of what's happening today, I think, is one party's reaction to what seemed to be almost inevitable demographic change which was likely to secure the long term dominance of the Democratic Party at the national level, electorally in the United States, and the way the Republican Party, already even before Trump, had begun to prepare for that inevitability, was to change the contest from a contest over who wins and who loses, to a contest over what are the rules of the game; whose votes get to be disqualified, whose votes get to be suppressed, and so

on. And now with Trump it further becomes, I mean Trump almost does not exist without Obama as a president that preceded him. And so it is hard not to at least entertain the argument that the trigger for democratic backsliding in the United States was the Obama presidency. It is not clear that the Tea Party movement on its own, had enough momentum to really fundamentally uproot American social, political, economic institutions in the way that three years of the Trump presidency has done. And I do not think the Trump presidency would have happened without the Obama presidency.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Final question to each of you is that if Biden wins, in terms of foreign policy, would that be a true rigorous course really going back to pre-Trump normalcy or will he try but basically it show a continuation of the current leadership which is in decline?

■ **Paul Pierson:** I am not an expert on foreign policy at all so it is highly speculative but maybe I can answer in one way that kind of ties back to the things that I know more deeply about. I suggested that the challenge Biden administration would face in foreign policy is "How do you glue all this back together?" particularly in a context where American power is seen as a relative decline. I do think that it is a huge challenge. It's a very, very heavy lift even under favorable circumstances for an American president. The one thing that I think might if one hopes for that kind of outcome, the one thing that I think might generate some optimism would be the following. It really follows from what Taeku was saying a minute ago which is the Republican Party in some way is engaged in a race against time. They are pursuing a political strategy that makes no long-term demographic sense in the context of an American democracy and they are alienating minority population that are growing, they are alienating anyone under 45 so as Senator Lindsey Graham described it, we are not producing enough angry, White guys anymore. They are not making old, White, angry guys to maintain this strategy. So, if you accept that and suggest that hope has to be that the Republican Party at some point is going to have to



change course. If the American democracy can hold itself together and get through the dark tunnel, then the Republican Party in order to be competitive is going to have to change course away from the very narrowly targeted constituency that it has been hindered. Of course, American foreign policy traditionally depended on that kind of bipartisanship and that kind of consensus. So, that is my general take about American politics. We need a healthier Republican party if the American politics is going to thrive. Our political system cannot have one of the two major parties not be a healthy political party and have the system hold up in enduring ways. If I were going to try to paint an optimistic picture, the future of Biden's foreign policies, it would be that I am sure they are thinking these terms that they do want to try to engineer a shift towards a different kind of future for the Republican party that is less based on strategy of burning everything down.

"One of Biden's strong suits is not only the fact that he sees foreign policy as his area of expertise, but over the many years that he was a senator on the Foreign Relations Committee and over eight years of being vice president, he just literally knows a lot of people on the global political stage and has personal relations with them. And that is a good foundation to start rebuilding a lot of the trust that is necessary for the U.S. to return to the position that it has been in the past as an ally and as a global leader."

■ **Taeku Lee:** I think Paul is absolutely right that it is much easier to break things than to build them back up.

I also agree that a key part of building it back up is rebuilding a lot of trust that has been frayed. So here, I think there are signs of potential optimism and signs of potential pessimism. I think one of Biden's strong suits is not only the fact that he sees foreign policy as his area of expertise, but over the many years that he was a senator on the Foreign Relations Committee and over eight years of being vice president, he just literally knows a lot of people on the global political stage and has personal relations with them. And that is a good foundation to start rebuilding a lot of the trust that is necessary for the U.S. to return to the position that it has been in the past as an ally and as a global leader. I think reasons for pessimism are that the United States is not the only country that has changed over the last few years. I think NATO is not the NATO that it was before Trump stepped into the presidency, and the U.K. is not the U.K. it was a number of years ago. It is very difficult to think about how you could resuscitate the Paris Accord given COVID-19. It is very difficult to see how you might resuscitate the TPP given a lot of what has happened in many Asian economies in the last few years. So it is not just that the United States has changed quite dramatically over the last few years but a lot of the world has changed quite dramatically over the last few years, and that also will be a constraint in terms of the likely success of Biden bringing us back to Pre-Trump state of the world.

■ **Yul Sohn:** Thank you, Paul and Taeku, for sharing your insight with us. It has been truly intriguing and enlightening discussion today. I would like to thank Chaesung and Byoung Kwon, and also the audience for your excellent questions. ■



Speakers & Discussants

Paul Pierson is the John Gross Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University. He is an active commentator on public affairs, whose writings have appeared in such outlets as The New York Times, The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, and The Atlantic. He has served on the editorial boards of The American Political Science Review, Perspectives on Politics, and The Annual Review of Political Science. He has also served as Chair of the Berkeley political science department. His research focuses on the fields of American politics and public policy, comparative political economy, and social theory. He is the co-author (with Jacob S. Hacker) of the forthcoming *Let Them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*. Earlier books include *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Abandoned the Middle Class* (2010), co-authored by Jacob Hacker, and *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis* (2004). He also authored *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Retrenchment* (1994), which won the American Political Science Association's 1995 prize for the best book on American national politics, and "Path Dependence, Increasing Returns and the Study of Politics," which won the APSA's prize for the best article in the American Political Science Review in 2000, as well as the Aaron Wildavsky Prize in 2011.

Taeku Lee is George Johnson Professor of Law and Professor Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. He is co-Principal Investigator of the National Asian American Survey, co-Principal Investigator of the Bay Area Poverty Tracker, and Managing Director of Asian American Decisions. He also serves on the National Advisory Committee for the U.S. Census Bureau and has previously served as member of the Board of Overseers of the American National Election Studies, member of the Board of Overseers of the General Social Survey, Treasurer and the Executive Council member for the American Political Science Association, Department Chair at Berkeley, and Associate Director of the Haas Institute at Berkeley. His research focuses on racial and ethnic politics, public opinion and survey research, identity and inequality, and deliberative and participatory democracy. His recent publications include the *Oxford Handbook of Racial and Ethnic Politics in the United States* (2015) and *Asian American Political Participation* (2011).

Yul Sohn is the president of EAI and a professor at Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. He previously served as the dean of Yonsei University GSIS, president of the Korean Association of International Studies, and president of the Korean Studies of Contemporary Japan. His research focuses on the Japanese and international political economy, East Asian regionalism, and public diplomacy. His recent publications include *Japan and Asia's Contested Order* (2018, with T.J. Pempel), and *Understanding Public Diplomacy in East Asia* (2016, with Jan Melissen).



Byoung Kwon Sohn is a professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Chung-Ang University in Seoul, Korea. He teaches American Politics, American Foreign Policy, and Party and Legislative Politics as a subdivision of Comparative Politics. He got both BA and MA degrees from the Department of International Relations, Seoul National University, and Ph.D. from Department of Political Science, the University of Michigan, majoring in American Politics. He published several books and articles, including *Climate Change and the Dilemma for the U.S. Hegemony* (2012, written in Korean), *Is U.S. Congressional Politics Still a Model to Follow? The U.S. Congress Captured by Partisan Politics* (2018, written in Korean), “The Superdelegate Reform in 2018 in the Context of Democratic Party's Delegate Reform History” (2019, written in Korean).

Chaesung Chun is the chair of the National Security Research Center at the East Asia Institute, and a professor of the department of political science and International relations at Seoul National University. He received his Ph.D. in international relations from Northwestern University. He serves on the policy advisory committee to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Unification. His main research interests include international political theory, the ROK-U.S. alliance, and Korean Peninsular affairs. He is the co-author of *The Korean War: Threat and Peace*, and the author of a number of publications including *Are Politics Moral* and *International Politics in East Asia: History and Theory*.



Knowledge-net for a Better World

- The East Asia Institute takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the Korean government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

Date of Issue: 18 May 2020
American Democracy at a Crossroad:
The 2020 U.S. Election, It is Not about Who Wins

ISBN 979-11-90315-79-1 05340

The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, Eulji-ro 158, Jung-gu,
Seoul 04548, South Korea
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1684
Email eai@eai.or.kr Website www.eai.or.kr