

# Greater Good Gathering – Panel I

## Context:

## The Politics Tearing Us Apart

*Moderator*

JAMES FALLOWS

*Panelists*

CHRIS WILSON

MAURICIO MOURA

ELI KAPLAN

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*The Greater Good Gathering held on February 6–7, 2019 explored the future of public policy and how best to advance the greater good in the 21st century in light of technological innovation, economic disruption, ideological polarization, and governance challenges. Event co-sponsors included Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia Law School, Union Theological Seminary, The Academy of Political Science, and Public Works LLC/Brain Storm Consulting.*

**JAMES FALLOWS:** My name is James Fallows. I am a writer for *The Atlantic Magazine*. I have known Eric Schnurer since he was in college, when we were working together on the Jimmy Carter speech writing enterprise. I have known Merit Janow over the years. I am really delighted to be here to see the flourishing of this gathering and the partnership with Columbia and Eric's works. I'm really looking forward to the conversation over the next day or so. The way in which we're going to begin our panel part of this presentation is by talking about the way some of the modern technologies of communication are affecting, for better or for worse, the ways in which communities hold together. We discuss public issues. We try to do our business as a collectivity.

This is a matter of ongoing, long-term interest for me. A little more than 20 years ago while working for *The Atlantic*, I wrote a book called *Breaking the News*, with the subtitle, *How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. I discussed the nascent technology of that era, which was 24/7 cable news that was just beginning to arise—Fox News Channel had just launched. There was a sense of the distractedness and challenges to existing journalistic organizations. The ways in which that was making it harder to get the information necessary for a democratic government, democratic populace to do its business.

I tried to point out something that I think is worth remembering as a background to our discussion—this is a very old problem in a very new form. The very old problem is how people get relevant information on developments that are not within their immediate personal experience. This is an old problem back to Plato and the shadows in the cave. It is an old problem in journalism. I talked a lot in my book about the one time editor of the then *Manchester Guardian*, Mr. Scott, who was quoting Matthew Arnold, “The function of journalism in a democracy is to see things steady and see them whole.”

Give people a picture of life that was proportionate and not wrenched around by a spectacle, and how we managed to do that with the technology of 20 years ago and the technology of today. It's a problem that, roughly a hundred years ago, Walter Lippmann discussed when he was raising the phenomenon of pictures in our head—how we were able to think about war in Europe, about conditions in China, about developments in other parts of the world that we didn't directly experience. He discussed what the mediating technologies did for the realism or the lack of realism of the ways in which we could decide.

The positive news, to a degree, I have to give you is that I have recent evidence regarding the ways the American public are able to judge experiences from direct, firsthand contact. More or less, the American public is still sane. This is the theme of the book that my wife Deb and I have done over the past four or five years of going around the country in small town America and finding that at the community level, people are able to integrate immigrants, make long-term plans, reach reasonable compromises, and make fact-based decisions for the future.

In the realm of firsthand experience, there is still a sense of people behaving the way we would like small democracies to behave. Even just yesterday, the American Enterprise Institute put out the results of a nationwide survey conducted in July and August of 2018 that was robust in its data sets. They found that by a more than two-to-one margin, people were concerned about what was happening in America as a whole, but by nearly a three-to-one margin, Americans across economic categories, races, and political affiliations, felt that their own communities were doing well. Their own communities were going in a positive direction.

The population is able to make reasonable and future-oriented decisions from their own experience. One of the challenges that our panel will be discussing, and I think will be running through some of our discussions over these next two days, is how the population deals with the changing by the month mediation of experience, which is making them feel bad about the country, suspicious of the world, suspicious of their neighbors, and polarized about events of the world.

First Mauricio Moura, an international specialist in these issues, will speak to us about some of the international dimensions, and the ways in which he has seen targeted political advertising—more and more specialized delivery of political messages—and the ways in which he has seen this work around the world, not necessarily in the United States.

Second we're going to hear from Chris Wilson, who has extensive experience in the Republican Party's use of specific messaging and ways to understand the psychometrics of an audience. He has worked recently on the campaigns for Ted Cruz and Greg Abbott in Texas, for Brian Kemp in Georgia, and for Ron de Santos in Florida. He can tell us about some recent experiences and what he's learned about the American electorate and about their ability to parse and direct messages.

Then we're going to hear from Eli Kaplan, who has complementary experience on the Democratic side, being one of the pioneers trying to have digital marketing and presentation of political messages through the media of this modern age. He will talk to us. I think you will then have the complementary message to what we will hear from Chris Wilson.

Finally will be Kathleen Hall Jamieson, whom you all know is a longtime head of the Annenberg School at The University of Pennsylvania. Whenever I write a story about the meaning of the press, I am always going to quote Kathleen on ways in which to think about the long-lasting, the contemporary, and the future problems of assessing knowledge of truth and trying to have the right kind of environment for democratic governments.

**MAURICIO MOURA:** Good afternoon. Thanks Eric for the invitation. I'm very happy to be involved in such an interesting conference. I want to highlight four issues that come to mind in terms of technology, especially in the political arena and in political campaigns.

The first one that I see globally is that the politicians and the government are analog and people are digital. Technologically, there is a huge gap between what's happening in the people's lives, and how the politicians and governments approach them. There is an interesting statistic from Facebook that says on average we look at our cell phones 30 times per day to go on the web. My first point is that cell phones are really part of every political discussion today. To understand that and deal with that is very new, not only for politicians and for the government, but also for the media in general.

The second point I want to make is that last year in Mexico, and in Brazil especially, we learned that the elections were played in the WhatsApp environment. Most of Americans have WhatsApp to talk to people outside the United States, but the use of WhatsApp in elections outside the United States is huge. We did a survey in Mexico and Brazil that revealed that 95 percent of the responding voters got political content on a daily basis during the presidential campaigns. This year, we estimate that WhatsApp is going to play a very important role in the Indian elections. Just as an estimate, India has around 400 million active WhatsApp users.

Remember that WhatsApp has a different feature from Facebook and other social networks. There is no algorithm separating people. On Facebook we are creating bubbles of discussions. WhatsApp users have what they call WhatsApp groups. On average, any individual that has an active WhatsApp belongs to a family group, to a work group with colleagues, and to a former school group. The capacity of sharing information in WhatsApp is huge. We are not seeing that discussion because on Facebook we see what's going on in the different bubbles, but on WhatsApp we don't.

The third point that we are facing is a huge problem with fake news. When the presidential election ended in Brazil, we did a survey. 90 percent of the voters said they received fake news in their WhatsApps. From those, 20 percent said that they shared the fake news. There are a lot of people that don't admit to sharing. Of course, when you ask them, they don't admit to sharing it, so it's a huge problem because people are disseminating that fake news that they got from a social platform. They disseminate it to family and to colleagues. If you get something from your friend or someone close, there's much more value than if you randomly see it on your timeline on Facebook.

The fourth issue that I want to mention is that a goal for any political approach to technology is data privacy. I think this is a big discussion globally. It is interesting to see that in the United States that it has become a much larger issue after the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook discussion. We have the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in Europe. That is big for data privacy. We have Latin American countries discussing that as well. The question from now on is how can you relate data privacy, and how can you share content and have those political discussions on those platforms that are very open and complex? Those are big issues right now that we are seeing. I think the Indian election this year is going to present all those challenges.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you very much, Mauricio. Mauricio has laid out for us four important keys when we're running through our discussions. The politicians are analog and the voters are digital, the importance of WhatsApp, the challenge of fake news, and the ways in which privacy issues are involved.

Turning to Chris Wilson, before you started WPA Intelligence, you worked for Weber Shandwick. You also had some experience with Cambridge Analytica, which is very much in the news. From your experience in the last couple of years in this area that has been such a focus of present tension—of psychometrics, of targeted ads and being able to directly engage the electorate—what do you think we should understand differently from the way we do? Tell us how we need to think about these issues.

**CHRIS WILSON:** My role for Senator Cruz was that I was his director of research analytics and digital strategy in the 2016 campaign. In that role, I did manage Cambridge Analytica, and I'm happy to address that. There are really three things that you have to understand or three ways to discuss them. One is to understand what they said they were going to do. Two is to understand what they said they did. Then, three is to understand what they actually did, which bore no resemblance to either the first or the second.

That is Cambridge Analytica to me on the Cruz campaign. This was different because they were hired before I was. When I came in, they were running a digital data operation. We announced on March 23rd of 2015. We were the first to announce in 2015 for the 2016 elections. They were already online by May. They were a data science staffing firm. That's been well written around. Willa Paskin is here for *Wired* magazine. I've talked about this extensively. They very quickly moved into a role that they played very well, which was like an express personnel services for data scientists. They did a good job of that. My team was great at data science.

Having said that, let me now address what I planned to say because it is regarding your original point about the challenges that we face in politics—communicating directly to voters in a world in which we had seen voting participation decline. I believe we had seen voter participation decline because the ability to communicate directly to voters about issues they were specifically concerned about—that spoke to them personally—had also declined. What happened in 2016? We saw the largest turnout. I'll just speak to the Republican side because I can go through it case-by-case. We had record turnout in the 2016 primaries. To give you just one example in Iowa. In 2008, 114,000 people voted, give or take 5,000. In 2012 it was 119,000. Then in 2016 we had 167,000 people turn out.

Jump forward to 2018. We saw the largest turnout since 1914—104 years. I am an optimist about data and about politics. I believe the use of data in political campaigns is at least as important as the use of data to sell you products through Amazon or recommend you a television show through Netflix. Having said that, let me be clear. I do believe everybody should have absolute and complete control of their own data, which they do not today. But they don't when it comes to Netflix or Amazon either. That's a problem that must be fixed.

Really, we do have the ability to fix it, but like everybody else here I just hit 'Agree' every time something pops up and asks me whether I agree or disagree. Of course I agree. Take my kids away, whatever it takes. I just want to watch this movie or kill some birds that look angry. The point is, I believe the use of that data—the ability to speak to voters specifically about issues they care about and directly through a medium in which they consume information—certainly had that impact in motivating voters in our primary in 2016. I'd like to think we had something do with that.

Then in 2018, in the races you spoke about, each one of those states had record turnouts. Georgia, Texas, Oklahoma, Montana, Arizona—I could go through every state we were involved in when we did statewide races. The ability to communicate on behalf of many analog politicians, as you so articulately stated, to a group of voters that receives information digitally—whether it's through their tablet, cell phone, TV—I believe, is changing politics. Like I said, I'm an optimist about it. Although there are negatives, there is a net positive. I think that is represented in the fact that turnout has increased as dramatically as it has over the last few cycles.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you. Let's turn now to Eli Kaplan both to talk about the complementary Democratic experience you had and to begin to queue up the next discussion of how we can positively work with the technology of today to have some kind of workflow governance.

**ELI KAPLAN:** Thank you. I think it's interesting, because even as we've seen an increased technological ability to cheaply communicate using micro-targeting techniques, probably more so

on the left than the right, the dominant medium of political campaigning continues to be a broadcast medium where you're talking to basically everybody with the exact same message. I'm not sure that I would attribute each individual moment or greater turnout to the mechanics of campaigns, but rather the broader environment that we live in. I think this is a trend that is going to exacerbate dramatically in the next few election cycles.

There are a couple of things that I think are important to think about, both in terms of how we've gotten to this point and where we're going forward. The first is that this isn't unique to digital. I think you mentioned when kicking off these remarks that we had interesting moments at the beginning of cable news. The ability to use data and track individuals goes well beyond what's happened in political campaigns at this particular moment. When you go to the grocery store and you get a coupon, your behavior has been tracked, and it's been used to serve direct marketing techniques via mail and other ways for a very long time.

I think it is necessary to parse out the data privacy component versus the transparency component, on which I feel like we have had an abject failure for several election cycles now to tackle something that really blew up in our faces in the 2016 election. Working on a variety of different campaigns as early as 2012, it became apparent to me that there was a giant loophole in the way that digital campaigns were working. On television, if you were to spend a large amount of money, whether it was on broadcast or cable, that would be reported and shared very quickly with all of the relevant players who were covering and competing in a political campaign. In digital, it was clear that because there were no transparency guidelines, the government had not regulated this in many states. The word 'internet' was not even in the code that regulates elections. Ad tech companies like Google and Facebook are unlike cable television, where they would freely share when groups spent money to influence the election.

In fact, most of the big players considered it a breach of privacy to say what was going on. Then you had the media who dropped the ball in sounding the alarm bells of all this, even though I felt like a lot of this was very predictable. As we are transferring from a broadcast medium to one that is going to be increasingly individualized in terms of the type of communications that you get online and in your social media feeds. We really have not solved the problem. There hasn't been government regulation in this area.

Some of the big advertising technology companies have had minimal amounts of regulation. Others have basically had none. I'm not sure that we've really done a whole lot to address the challenges that we saw in 2016 when thinking about how they can impact future elections.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you very much Eli. Now for this opening round, Kathleen, you have written over the years about the ways in which the press does and does not engage properly with democracy. You have a recent book, *Cyber War*, about the ways in which you contend that modern social technology played an important part in this most recent election. What would you add to this conversation of how we should be thinking about the functioning of democracy with these digital tools?

**KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON:** The concept of fake news is deeply problematic to me because you destabilize the notion of 'news' when you say fake news. For me fake news is an oxymoron. When we use the words 'fake news', we've essentially adopted a category, which in some circles means 'anything I don't like that is represented in a construct called news'. I would prefer to say we want to mark off those things that we object to so we're more likely able to see them and then deal with them on the grounds that we object. I'd like to call it viral deception, VD for short. I want the venereal disease notion to be operative.

I'd like to have discussed the notion that something is circulating in viral form and is deceptive outside the structures of traditional media analysis—the gatekeeping structures that

could create a context—and outside the awareness of the opposing political candidates who also have an obligation in our system to catch deceptions about them and get them conceptualized.

I'd like to think in terms of the virality and the deception, and ask how the capacities of a digital culture increase the likelihood of like-minded transmission inside communities that have amalgamated because they are like-minded and as a result are not going to spot the deceptive nature, but do produce increased virality.

On the second theme of mobilization, I think it's wonderful when we see increased numbers of voters mobilized. I think using digital capacities to be able to do that is potentially extraordinarily important. We've been studying over the decades as we've looked at elections, the ways in which people vote, not simply whether they vote. Let me stipulate voting is good, but if you cast a vote against something instead of for something, you've lost the tie between campaigning and governance.

If we get into an environment in which the digital capacity increases the likelihood that what we circulate is fear, anger, and hate against someone—instead of making the case that my candidate will be better than that candidate because on these issues the person will behave differently—we've created a structure that makes it more difficult for campaigning to forecast governance, and that fundamentally undercuts some of the representative capacity of our system. I think we've done something highly problematic for democracy, if our digital environment is increasing the likelihood that within like-minded communities we're sharing viral content without correction that is premised on bigotry, anger, and fear. It is problematic for democracy if we increase no voting as opposed to yes voting and if we reduce contrastive voting and say, "I'm just going to vote because I despise that person."

I'm using a little bit different language because I want to use the language we previously used when we talked about it in the broadcast/cable/radio era. Candidates have always had the capacity to micro-target. They have always tried to get content to their own supporters, and sometimes it's great. They are telling them what they want to hear, not pandering to them, actually telling them what they will do in office. It is a forecast of governance, and it's accurate. That's all terrific. If we increase the likelihood that gets to people who need to know it, bravo. We have increased the capacity of campaigns to forecast governance. But we've always also had the capacity to find the people who could be manipulated, and to lie to them.

For example, using micro targeting through radio, a medium people did not tend to look at anymore in 2008, the Obama campaign lied to voters about McCain's position on stem-cell research. On the radio, it was not picked up by the fact checkers. I run factcheck.org. Although Eugene Kiely heads it, I am ultimately responsible for the thing. We picked it up late. That micro-targeted ad—according to a rolling cross-sectional survey we were running at the time, which means we're in the field every single day and we can generalize for day-to-day variability—shaped the perceptions of voters who were deceived and they may have cast a vote against John McCain that they otherwise might not have cast.

Now jump forward to a digital age in which we have heightened the capacity to micro-target because of all of this information that we can now aggregate about the individual, as well as the capacity to reach individuals through channels no one else is monitoring. The difference between that 2008 move and 2016 is that in 2016 it undoubtedly happened a great deal, but no one knew.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you Kathleen. Your training as a debater comes in very well here. There are a number of rich questions you laid out. I'd like to have Eli and Chris respond to what you were saying about a fundamental contrast between tools that make for more and more effective campaigning and whether these are fundamentally contradictory to effective governance—whether

the tools that allow people to become more motivated, including in negative ways, can get us into a vicious cycle of government. Eli, what is your sense about that?

**KAPLAN:** Well, I think one of the things that is difficult for me, being a political hack, is that that is not my job. My job is to give candidates advice about the best way they can win elections, and it is up to them to be effective in governing. I certainly think that there's a lot to that point; if you go too far, you're going to be unable to effectively govern. Sometimes I have been in conversations where folks want to achieve certain public policy objectives. But looking at the data, there's just not a path there to win an election by campaigning on those exact sets of priorities.

Obviously I think if you're able to do it, that is going to be a whole lot more effective. But I also think there is a distinction between being honest about comparing what you're doing and what your opponent is doing, and the type of things that Dr. Jamieson just pointed out, which are completely, factually untrue. I think that's one of the reasons why it is important that we get transparency right, so that campaigns can be held accountable. It should be such that if you put out egregious content that is factually wrong, your candidate is penalized for it and they are less likely to win an election. Increasingly, the way that these technologies are going, I'm not sure that is the direction we're headed at all.

**FALLOWS:** Before turning to you, Chris, I wanted to reinforce one thing that Kathleen said about the long provenance of these kinds of targeted messages. Of course, back during Abraham Lincoln's era, there were campaign flyers about him depicting him as a gorilla or an ape to certain markets. In Georgia politics where I once worked, I think it was Herman Talmadge or somebody, apocryphally at least for Herman Talmadge, would say his opponent's sister was a known thespian, for example. This kind of argument going on.

Chris, the Trump campaign was, in a way, epitomizing the contrast between getting people angry and preparing for governance. What do you think of Kathleen's point that there is a tension between getting people motivated and preparing them to govern?

**WILSON:** I agree with almost everything Eli said except for the last part about where we are heading. I do believe we are heading to a point to where transparency is increasing.

Your point about Trump, that didn't really exist in the primary. They did not have much of a digital data campaign in the primary. That emerged in the general election. The primary was really just him speaking and all three networks covering him constantly from the second he got off the plane to the second he got back on. It was the most remarkable thing I had ever seen in terms of press coverage of a single candidate. Not that I'm bitter or anything.

From a standpoint of where we are moving, as I'm sure most people are aware, Facebook changed their policies. You can now go back and look at all of our ads from 2016. You can go back and look at all the key ads the campaigns were running. I do think that had a cleansing effect because of the transparency it created, at least on Facebook.

Also as Eli mentioned, the number one medium is still broadcast. That has always been accessible. When somebody puts an ad on television, we have access to it, and we can pull it down from multiple services. There are still some services in which we do not have that ability, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for a campaign to do what they did in 2016, which is run an ad without anybody finding out about it. I will tell you, at least in the campaigns I was involved in, even where they were trying to target ads through apps—like when you see an ad pop up on Yelp or ESPN or things like that—in 2016 we didn't know about that until it was too late. In 2018, because people became more aware of the problem, we had it sent to us almost within hours after they're running.

The transparency may be more like a posse or a vigilante that is reporting people, but at least it is expanding outside of Facebook. There is a line between running a negative ad where you're giving a truth about someone's record, and doing what Kathleen described, what was done to John McCain, saying something that's untrue about their record.

When that happens, that is when you've crossed the line. I agree 100 percent with what Eli said. I can honestly say I have not been involved in a campaign that I know that has done that; said, that even though this candidate did not vote this way, we're going to say it because we think it will help us win the election. Frankly, I would leave. I would resign immediately. I do not know anybody that I work with in this business who would stay involved. At least I hope I don't. If you made that decision, if it was ever discovered, I think your campaign would be over almost immediately.

**FALLOWS:** Before asking Mauricio about another aspect of this, I have a quick follow-up for you. This could last a while, but a quick answer. I think you are the only person in the room who has worked with Cambridge Analytica, and probably the only one who's working Republican primaries. What is your visceral response when you read news reports that Cambridge Analytica essentially swung the election?

**WILSON:** It's just a joke. I will say for anybody who worked with, or covered them, or dealt with anyone there, outside of speaking to their CEO, Alexander Nix—and I'm sure everyone who's seen the exposé that Channel Four in Britain did on him—you are appalled that someone could make statements that are so patently and knowingly false. It's remarkable to me that he got away with it as long as he did.

I'll tell you, Vicky Ward wrote a good piece in the Huffington Post called “The blow-it-all-up billionaires” in which she details point by point our experience with them on the Cruz campaign, and then the experiences they had with the Trump campaign. It was the kind of claims that they made. I have so many journalist friends who were talking to them that said they were doing off-the-record background conversations in which they were completely cleansing themselves of any responsibility to the Trump campaign the day of the election. For them to make claims they had something to do with Trump's election is just completely laughable.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you. Kathleen Hall Jamieson was saying that instead of the term ‘fake news’, she thought there should be this new term for viral deception. Does your international experience make you think that there is any hope for reestablishing any gatekeeper, truth teller, fact checker or viral deception type standard?

**MOURA:** Before anything, I just want to agree with one point that was made about votes and elections. I feel globally, votes and elections are represented to voters as a binary decision or as a referendum. It is always a referendum, a binary decision. Some places you have votes that you can rank candidates and options, but still the narratives are easily put as a referendum. That's very tough.

To address the fake news. I'm going to make a comparison. I liked the virus stuff, it is a very good metaphor. One thing that we learn of viruses historically is that you can only deal with them with a lot of education. We are going to have to start educating, starting practically in kindergarten, for people to start asking themselves every time they get content in their cell phone: What is this content? Is this really true? If I share this will it have an impact? I believe it is all about education. When I talk about fake news, these are false claims or false information. When I see people above 60 years old working in WhatsApp in India, in Brazil, in Mexico and



sharing fake news, we are not talking about young people we see. There is a long road to educate people about analyzing information.

**FALLOWS:** I’m going to put you all on the spot with a question, a last big-picture question before I involve people from the crowd, because most of us practice as analysts or activists in some sense as opposed to prescriptive reformers. I’m going to put you all in the reformer and prescriptive mode in the following way. There is a fundamental tension between governance and technology in governance, which is sort of the subject of this entire conference. That technology, this kind of information technology can more and more precisely target information to the person—what I want, what my children want, what my spouse wants.

Governance by definition has to be us. Not me, but us. It has to be some kind of greater good, some common interest. I mentioned earlier that at the community level, people still seem able to manage that conflict. They can comprehend, yes I’m going to have to pay higher taxes for this bond issue for schools, but it’s worth it for the community. That kind of management is practical. I’d like each of you from your respective expertise to say given the technology you have assessed so acutely here, how we can improve the balance and find some way to reset the collective good which is necessary for governance. Anybody in a democratic system must keep a majority eventually on his or her side. What we can do to have more of the “us” interest in a time when the “me” interest is more and more precisely defined. Professor Jamieson, I’m going to start with you. What do you think we can do to use this technology and discipline it in a sustainable and survivable way?

**JAMIESON:** One of the things we know is that the news has the capacity to set an agenda which focuses on some things and not on others, to the extent that the press is now chasing tweets and letting an agenda be set almost hour by hour in different places. It is sacrificing its capacity to talk about the common goods that we need to address as a collectivity.

I am astonished, given the fact that the Democrats and Republicans both agreed that we had an infrastructure crisis in 2016, did not find a way to tee up solutions. I blame the press for not holding those candidates accountable for taking the common ground all parties articulated in 2016, and holding them accountable in governance. When the news does not say that this is important and here’s why, we do not have that in common as a priority enough to exercise our accountability function by asking those people that told us in 2016 that they were going to address it, where is it?

I am embarrassed for the Democrats and the Republicans and for the press that we have cities whose water systems are unreliable right now. This isn’t just Flint, Michigan. This is any city that is older than about 40 to 50 years old. We have road structures that are embarrassing in a country of our stature. Donald Trump went around saying that we are embarrassed by our airports and he is absolutely right. Compare our airports and our rail systems to those in the other “great countries” around the world. We don’t look like we belong in the same class. To the extent that there is a common problem and a common need and we don’t focus on it, I blame the press and our political leaders.

**FALLOWS:** That’s a very good point. Like many in the room, I am in the press. Here is something I know firsthand. Over the last three or four years, I’ve written hundreds of posts about the way Dodge City, Kansas is incorporating its new majority Latino population, or the way that Fresno, California is training its children of migrant workers for better futures, or the way that Allentown, Pennsylvania is reviving its downtown. I’ve gotten big following for that. We have a best-selling book, but I know that if I write something in the next half hour saying that the State

of the Union speech was the worst written speech I've ever heard, it will get 10 times the traffic on the *Atlantic* site. That just is the reality.

Anything you write about Trump or anything that is about white-hot politics this minute will get literally 10 times the attention. We at the *Atlantic* try to then meter that, doing only so many 'this is horrible by Trump' pieces, and more 'here is what's happening in Fresno.' What do you advise people in the press to do in a market environment about this reality?

**JAMIESON:** Salience predicts attention. If talented reporters who write better than any of us cannot find a way to make salient the fact that those who are immunocompromised should not drink water in our urban centers, there is something wrong with their writing capacity or their consciences.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you. Eli, as a practitioner, as you mentioned earlier, your practice is to try to get your side to win, which may involve techniques that make it harder to knit together the civic fabric afterwards. Based on your knowledge, what would you do to allow for better governability of the United States in the long term?

**KAPLAN:** I think we need to get these transparency requirements right. I don't think that anyone has done a very good job so far. I think Facebook, to Chris's point, has made probably the most progress in terms of now, if you put together a political ad and you put money behind it, somebody can look up what happened. They did that entirely by self-regulation—probably in the wake of the bad press that they got after the Cambridge Analytica scandal. There are tons of places on the internet that you can micro target, in much the same way you can on Facebook's platform, without having to disclose who paid for that advertisement.

A lot of the places that have sought to regulate have gone completely overboard. In Washington state, for example, you can no longer advertise in any real way on the internet. If you are running for a non-federal office in Washington, Google and Facebook won't take your advertisements. As Mauricio pointed out, this is how people live and get their news. You destroyed the ability of a political campaign to get out where a candidate believes there are issues, and set the agenda to a huge swath of the electorate that doesn't pay attention to anything except for digital media.

I think many of the proposals that are going to Capitol Hill to address this problem—and I think they're well intentioned and my hope is that they get this right—really risk some very bad unintentional consequences, because of the ways that people are talking about regulating publications. There is a big difference between the big folks that have walled gardens that collect tons of data like Facebook and Google, and the way that you can buy advertisements across thousands of different local news affiliates, blogs, and websites. I think there's a risk that if you do this the wrong way, you end up making the big players bigger, and starving good journalists of a way to get additional revenue, which they're finding harder and harder in today's digital environment.

**FALLOWS:** A follow-up before turning to Chris. I lived in China for a long time, which made me think there are three great world regimes about the state and internet relationships. There is the Chinese regime, where the state says everything that the internet can do. There is the U.S. regime, which has presumptively been that what is technically possible and profitable should happen. Then there is the European regime of trying to regulate it in various ways. European or American, which of those models will prevail here, do you think?

**KAPLAN:** Tough for me to choose because I think there is a distinction between what Europe has done in GDPR, which is a lot of restrictions on data collection. I am not sure you have to do that to get to a place where people can be held accountable for viral deception. I think there are mechanisms that you can use that are short of that. Ones that are more in line with the American framework, basically taking the small steps that Facebook has done and go a lot bigger with it to ensure that if you're putting out content on the internet, that you can be held accountable and people can know who put out that content and who paid for it.

**FALLOWS:** Chris, your positive recommendation, based on your knowledge of the tools and the electorate, of ways in which we could find better steps towards governability of the United States.

**WILSON:** Well, I listened to what Kathleen pointed out. I do get concerned about the way in which the media covers elections and governance, too. From that matter, however, I also would be far more concerned about any sort of government regulation about how it is handled.

From the 2016 cycle, there is a study that was done by MediaQuant. Again, I knew all these numbers after 2016. I have forgotten now, but somewhere from around January 1 through the end of May of 2016, if you took all the coverage of every single candidate and compiled it, Donald Trump got somewhere in the range of 70 percent. Hillary Clinton got somewhere in the range of 20 percent, and the rest was split up between all the other candidates—remember 16 candidates on the Republican side. I don't know how many on the Democrat side, five or six legitimate ones. From that standpoint, it made it very difficult for anybody to break through.

I remember sitting at the Republican convention doing an *Atlantic* panel with Ron Brownstein. Kellyanne Conway and I were talking about the same issue: How it was covered? What does it mean? Where are we going to go from here? My comment was, "Some of it's a failure on my part." If only I had the time to prepare for every state the way that I did for Iowa, in which we were able to understand every single voter and understand as the electorate was expanding. We knew that electorate grew from 124,000 to 167,000, and with whom we were communicating with, and what we were saying with them, and how we were reaching them. That is why I believe we won Iowa. In fact, if you go and look, the RealClearPolitics average, every single poll had Trump winning. Most had Rubio winning and going into second, but we knew internally that we were going to win.

The reason is because we knew who we were talking to. We knew who was going to vote. I believe that is the value behind the current evolution of the ability to communicate digitally, and the ability to understand voters from a data perspective. I am hesitant to see further restrictions and further governance handed down because I believe in a modern environment. 2020 is different than 2018. 2018 was different than 2016. In a modern environment, if a campaign were to do some of the things that were done in 2016, and I'll just leave it unsaid who did them, they would be found out immediately and they would lose the election because of it. I think you can point to specific cases in 2018, specifically in the primaries, in which that did occur.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you. Mauricio—your personal views or your international experience on ways you have seen to take positive steps to allow us to harness modern digital tools to governability?

**MOURA:** First of all, I believe that technology will evolve, I agree. Every cycle we are going to have different technology and everything that you did two years ago won't work. I remember 10 years ago that the big discussion was how to use Orkut during the elections. Orkut is now gone. Facebook is going to be less and less relevant.

I agree with him. There are many ways to run ads without using Facebook. On top of that, the data privacy discussion in laws and regulation, in my opinion, they are going to go on and on and on. It is going to be part of every election. We are going to have new discussions about data privacy and how people handle their own data. I believe in transparency, and I agree that we have more transparency today than we had before. More and more transparency will empower people much more. This is the key. I know this is a broad concept, but this is the key.

I just want to finish with something that the former president of Uruguay mentioned in an interview last year. He said that we have done a good job in making and building consumers. We have not done a good job in making and building citizens. Work on education. How to handle technology, how to handle transparency, how to handle data is the key to success.

**FALLOWS:** Thank you. We have time for a couple questions. Yes, Tim.

**QUESTION 1:** Hi. My name is Tim Wu. I am actually in the next session. Whenever I hear people say that transparency is going to fix things, I feel very skeptical. I feel like transparency is what you say when you have nothing else to say, because we've had tons of transparency in other things. What does it do? It often encourages an arms race.

I am not saying it's nothing, but the idea that we're going to have a few transparency rules and fix some of the problems in American democracy seems to me ridiculous. The question I have, is there anyone thinking about structural solutions? From people who have worked hard on elections and primaries, should we do away with them? Primaries are not set in stone. Should we have primaries? Should they be structured differently? Is there something structural here that creates the kind of bad campaigns that we are talking about? Could there be a more structured solution?

**FALLOWS:** I think we should probably start with our two operators here. Is there a concise structural fix?

**WILSON:** That is tough. I do not have any great ideas from that standpoint. One thing—I think if you drop out, you shouldn't be on the ballot. I say that because we would have won Arizona if Marco Rubio hadn't been on the ballot. He still was, but he collected enough votes because of early voting. I'm for early voting, but if I cast a vote and somebody dropped out, I should be able to get another vote, right? It seems to make sense. I think of those things like that. I am hesitant to take away and change too many rules.

If you made me king of America, I would make Election Day on April 16—so you pay your taxes and you vote—because I think Republicans would never lose again. Eli is probably against that, so I'd lose. I don't know that I have any great solution. There are little things along the way that, as we were dealing with the primaries and going through them, I think all in all our system works pretty well. I may not always be happy with the outcome. As a Republican, I lose just as much if not more than I win, but having said that, in the end I feel like voters usually make the right choice.

**FALLOWS:** Eli. What about your structural ideas? Also, Maine with its ranked-choice voting seems to have made a difference.

**KAPLAN:** I do not think any of these things are going to be a panacea to fix American democracy. Certainly, I think that what I am saying about transparency might have the ability to mitigate the foreign interference that we saw in the last presidential election, but it is not going to fix all of these problems. I think one thing that should be widely adopted is just making voting

a whole lot easier. Other countries make it compulsory to vote. If you hate all of the politicians, you can write in Donald Duck or something like that. However, it is amazing the lengths that I have seen many different places go to in order to stifle people from voting. I think it has a bad impact on American politics. I am in favor of ranked-choice voting. That being said, I also do not think that it's a panacea either.

**FALLOWS:** Kathleen you can have a turn. Also, how about redistricting like in California?

**JAMIESON:** I think we are engaged in a very interesting experiment in California. Let us see how it works. I would like to see the primaries clustered in ways that focus on issues so that we have primary states not randomly distributed, but rather say: We've got some issues facing the country. Let us cluster the primaries so that candidates address the issues that are more central to those parts of the country—so the public as a whole becomes more knowledgeable about the issues. We get a clear relationship between candidate stances and what they will do in governance, and we have more capacity to hold candidates accountable.

I feel very sorry for these candidates being accountable for everything in every debate, and then they only get one question that has nothing to do with the central platform they are offering. I would like to see the opportunity for candidates to have an advantage in the area of their issue expertise, somewhere across a national issue agenda, with the public paying some attention to them and to it.

**FALLOWS:** Do you have a structural reform?

**MOURA:** No. I fully agree with my friend here. When I came to America the first time many years ago, I said, “Oh my God, how difficult it is to vote here?” It begins with the day of the voting. In every country that I work in elections, we vote on Sundays. Here, you put an election on a working day to begin with. I fully agree, making it easier is basic, even to transparency. People do not know where they vote.

**FALLOWS:** We are going to take one more question.

**QUESTION 2:** You were talking about the responsibilities of press in all of this. I think there is a lot of merit in that, but I'm curious that I did not hear a little more about responsibility on the technology platforms themselves, especially given how difficult it is to do good journalism at this moment. We are seeing layoffs recently. The business model seems to be shifting. Facebook is still making tons of money on advertising. That used to be how journalists made money and could talk about the things that people were not chasing towards because it was crazy or what have you. I am just wondering if you have any response or thoughts on that as sort of the business model that the ecosystem is now favoring.

**FALLOWS:** I have a thought on that. That is, you are right. I think that the press companies are at least trying. I feel that digital companies are not trying as hard as they should, but who has been? We are at our time limit here. Who has concise responses to that? Anybody want to say that yes, the tech companies should be trying harder?

**KAPLAN:** Yes.

**FALLOWS:** Okay. Well, with that, I think this is an upbeat panel and “yes” is the right way to end. Please join me in thanking our panel.

**ABOUT THE PANELISTS**

**JAMES FALLOWS** is a long-time correspondent for *The Atlantic* magazine, and author of 12 books. His latest, with his wife, Deborah, is *Our Towns*, about the local-level renewal of economic, civic, and educational life across the country. The book has been a national best-seller and is the basis of a forthcoming documentary on HBO. Fallows has reported for *The Atlantic* and for public radio and TV outlets from around the world, including multi-year stints in Japan, Malaysia, China, plus Texas, the Pacific Northwest, and California. In that time, he won the National Book Award, for a book about defense policy; the National Magazine Award, for an article warning against an invasion of Iraq; and a New York Emmy for a documentary on China. Early in his career he spent two years as President Jimmy Carter’s chief White House speechwriter. He and Deborah Fallows met in college, at Harvard, and were married after graduation. They have two grown sons, and five grandchildren. He is originally from a small town in inland California.

**KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON** is the Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor at the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania and Director of its Annenberg Public Policy Center. She has authored or coauthored 16 books, including *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect A President*, published in October 2018 by Oxford University Press; *Spiral of Cynicism* (with Joseph Cappella); and *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (with Kate Kenski and Bruce Hardy). She is a member of the American Philosophical Society and a Distinguished Scholar of the National Communication Association. She also is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the International Communication Association. For her contributions to the study of political communication, she received the American Political Science Association’s Murray Edelman Distinguished Career Award in 1995. In 2016, the American Philosophical Society awarded her its Henry Allen Moe Prize in the Humanities.

**ELI KAPLAN** has been at the forefront of digital marketing innovations in Democratic politics ever since Facebook introduced the newsfeed. As a founding partner of two leading digital marketing companies that help Democratic candidates and progressive causes navigate the changing media landscape, Eli has pioneered some of the best practices for using “big data” in the world of online political advertising—both for email acquisition and fundraising, and voter persuasion and mobilization. Rising Tide Interactive is a full-service digital agency that has helped Democrats win dozens of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial elections over the past four election cycles. DSPolitical is a programmatic trading platform that specializes in voter-targeted online advertising; it has helped power thousands of Democratic campaigns at nearly every level of politics. Prior to founding DSPolitical and Rising Tide Interactive, Eli managed the digital media operations on some of the most competitive political campaigns in the country. Eli is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a bachelor’s degree in English.

**MAURICIO MOURA** holds a bachelor’s degree in economics, a master’s degree in social sciences, and a master’s degree in political management. He is a Doctor of Economics and Public Sector Policy. He recently received the Harvard Business School Owner/President Management Program certificate. He taught Microeconomics as a Professor of the Executive MBA - IBMEC São Paulo. He was also Professor of Econometrics at Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie and Professor of Statistics at FMU. He was a Senior Investment Officer at IFC, the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation in Washington, where he served in the Syndications Group

for Latin America and the Caribbean. He was visiting professor at George Washington University. Mauricio is the Founder of IDEIA BIG DATA.

**CHRIS WILSON**, Prior to starting WPA Intelligence in 2004, Chris was Global Director of Research for Weber Shandwick International, the world's largest public relations firm at the time and led research for Fortune 500 companies such as Coca-Cola, American Airlines, Kodak, Wells Fargo, and Boeing. In 2016, Chris served as the Director of Research, Analytics and Digital Strategy for the Cruz for President campaign. Using a meticulous, technologically advanced, and highly individual approach, Chris led the campaign to reach voters by predicting voter behavior based on ideological segments, personality modeling targeting each voter based on the issue most important to them. During the 2018 cycle, WPAi provided analytics and polling for key races at the state and federal level around the country, propelling winning campaigns such as Ted Cruz and Greg Abbott in Texas, Governor-elect Brian Kemp in Georgia, Governor-elect Ron Desantis in Florida, Governor-elect Kevin Stitt in Oklahoma, Senator-elect Kevin Cramer in North Dakota, as well as dozens of Members of Congress and down ballot races.