



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
NATIONAL AGENDA 2022  
**“Politics by the Numbers”**

# **John Della Volpe and Jing-Jing Shen**

## ***“Breaking Down the Numbers”***

HOSTED BY University of Delaware –  
Center for Political Communication

## PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Lindsay Hoffman Director of National Agenda and Associate Director  
of the Center for Political Communication,  
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John Della Volpe	As director of polling at Harvard's Kennedy School, Institute of Politics, Della Volpe is a leading authority on global sentiment, opinion and influence especially among young people. In 2020 he served as a pollster and strategic communications advisor to the Biden-Harris campaign. He is the author of the critically acclaimed new book <i>Fight: How Gen Z is Channeling Their Fear and Passion to Save America</i> .
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Jing-Jing Shen  
A Harvard University senior, Shen served as the 2021 Chair of the Harvard Public Opinion project. Shen joined Harvard Public Opinion Project as a freshman because she was fascinated with poll data. She became interested in gun violence issues and mental health activism while still in high school in Cleveland, Ohio. Beyond the numbers she is intrigued by the stories that underlie people's perspectives.

## Transcript of Event

Date: November 9, 2022

Place: Gore Recital Hall, Roselle Center for the Arts,  
University of Delaware  
Newark, DE



[Musical interlude to 0:00:39.2]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Please welcome, your host for this evening, Dr. Lindsay Hoffman.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us at the Twelfth Annual National Agenda Speaker Series here at the Gore Recital Hall at the University of Delaware. We're here thanks to the University of Delaware's Center for Political Communication with generous support from the College of Arts and Sciences. Every fall we tackle a different theme related to what's happening in this country. This year's theme is "Politics by the Numbers." Yesterday we saw a massive turnout in states across the nation for this country's midterm elections. There are some surprises, some differences from predictions and some predictions that were dead-on. Tonight's guests will help us understand how to interpret polling and election results with a focus on the newest generation of voters: Gen Z. As usual, we will be inviting audience participation at the end of the talk but I'd like to remind our audience that civil dialogue is vital to the success of National Agenda. So let's agree to be candid but also courteous of other's views. I'll open it up for Q&A in the last half hour and our student volunteers will be helping you ask questions through the microphone and direct you back to your seat. Don't forget, all of our previous programming is available to watch on our website at [cpc.udel.edu](http://cpc.udel.edu). My conversation with an indigenous photojournalists, an indigenous photojournalist and a graphics editor for *The New York Times* was absolutely fascinating in looking at how you bring art and creativity and graphic design into the



understanding of the problems facing our country. We also featured voices this year from two former Blue Hens, *Washington Post* senior congressional correspondent Paul Kane and an editor for *The Atlantic*, Nora Kelly Lee. I'm so pleased to welcome back to the National Agenda stage John Della Volpe, director of polling at Harvard's Kennedy School of, Institute of Politics. In 2020 John served as a pollster and strategic communications advisor to the Biden-Harris campaign. The Washington Post called him one of the world's leading authorities on global sentiment, opinion and influence especially among young people. He's the author of the critically acclaimed new book "Fight: -- which I happen to have a copy of -- How Gen Z is Channeling Their Fear and Passion to Save America." Signed copies will be available for you to purchase in the lobby after the talk. He also appears regularly on MSNBC's Morning Joe and the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour. Please give a big Blue Hen welcome, welcome back, to the University of Delaware to John Della Volpe.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you. But we have another speaker – please have a seat – we are also joined tonight by a representative of that generation that showed up to the polls in the midterm, Jing-Jing Shen. She's a Harvard University senior who served as the 2021 Chair of the Harvard Public Opinion project. She became interested in gun violence issues, mental health activism while still in high school in Cleveland, Ohio. She joined Harvard Public Opinion Project as a freshman because she was fascinated with poll data. Beyond the numbers she was even more intrigued by the stories that underlie people's perspectives. Shen also volunteers as a crisict (sic) crisis text line counselor and



researches renewable energy, sustainable development and global mental health. These two speakers will help us unpack the most recent midterm elections from the perspectives of Gen Z voting attitudes and behaviors. Please also welcome to the stage Jing-Jing Shen.

AUDIENCE: [APPLAUSE.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you much for being here. So, let's get right to it – the midterm elections. This is kind of the story of the day. This must have been a big day for you guys and last night watching the returns. What were some things that you expected and what were some things that surprised you?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Well, again, thank you for having me. It's great to be on, back on campuses I spent so many – this is the first place I came to, to talk about my book last semester which I appreciate and I always enjoy spending time here with your students, Lindsay, and also as a fellow at the SNF, as an SNF Fellow at the Biden Institute. So I just really want to say thank you to having me back. I was thinking about this election over the last several weeks not sure by looking at all the data honestly whether we were going to see a blue wave or a red wave but I was pretty sure when we started to look in our 44<sup>th</sup> survey that we were going to see a Gen Z wave. I was sure of that. And, and the reason I felt so confident is that well before Dobbs, well before this election season when Gen Z came of age in 2018 they did things that no previous generation that we've studied has done. They voted at essentially twice the level of the baby boomer, the millennial and the Gen X generation in the 2018 midterms. They continued that in 2020. So I was I think more sure than others that we would see this wave. What I wasn't convinced of is the extent to which it would transform the election cycle. For example, unlike 2018, 2020 there were more undecided young



people. Persuasion was going to be a more important element of the campaign cycle rather than just mobilization. So what I was really looking for was not just will Gen people show up but what would be the margin and would it be enough to essentially cover the significant deficits that in particular Democrats had among folks over the age of 40. So that's kind of how I was looking at things. But to be honest, we weren't surprised, we weren't shocked. The Harvard Poll, Youth Poll designed by Jing-Jing and a couple of dozen other students we were you know exits polls had about a 28 point Democratic advantage among the under 30's. I think our final number was about 26 –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: – so we were kind of right, right there and that's, that's how we processed everything last night.

DR. HOFFMAN: So you must be feeling pretty good today?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Feeling tired but good, yeah. And –

DR. HOFFMAN: You, you, unlike some other pollsters you really sort of identified that, that this young generation was going to turn out in ways that maybe weren't expected.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: And, and honestly it's, it's frustrating from, from our point of view because a lot of members of our, of our broader community said yeah, we'll, we'll see, we'll believe it when we see it. And young people always say that. And, and what I had been saying is, listen, for the last 40 years if you bet on young people kind of disappointing at the, on election night, you would have been probably right more than you were wrong, right? But, again, that's when older generations were younger. You know, since 2018 it's a complete game changer. Donald Trump, the combination of Donald Trump and, and the

Parkland students I think really changed the dynamic of this generation. In the book we talk about the values and the reasons why but I think it's just really important that we focus on the, on the present dynamics and not rely so much on that conventional wisdom, frankly, from, from models that are a, a century old.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right?

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah. Well, so, Jing-Jing, I'd like to toss it over to you as a, as a member of this generation what were some things that you were looking for in the midterm elections yesterday and what are some things that maybe were, you were like yeah, I expected that to happen and some things maybe you were like that sort of took me by surprise?

MS. SHEN: Absolutely. I think first of all, thank you all so much for coming and for the opportunity to speak here. It's an honor. John really captured the sentiment of young people and their motivations to turn out extremely well. I think how I would succinctly put it is young people this cycle really recognized that all that was at stake this election was on the ballot. And so, when you're looking at fundamental foundations of our society and our lives that have historically been taken for granted, rights to abortion, our democracy, climate change, gun reform, like all of these different factors really coalesced in energizing young people to turn out and to vote and that's been very impactful. The interesting juxtaposition in numbers that I think brought some people to doubt the power of youth was that only four percent of our young American respondent base – so 18 to 29 year olds – this year characterized the U.S. as a healthy, strong, functioning democracy. And yet when you look at the expected turnout amongst that same demographic it was at 40 percent. And so there's this



question of how can you have people who are, I mean, disillusioned with the state of our nation and the direction of our politics. Biden's own approval numbers were just dipping from spring 2021 at 59 percent amongst youth to 39 percent now and yet you have this turnout. It really shows you have this demo, democratic trifecta in control of our government but these issues really galvanize youth and they, they recognize everything that was at stake and at risk and they turned out and you see a faith in and resolve to participate in the process because we believe in it. And hopefully that faith in democracy will, will increase as a result of this generation.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, so, I, I can't go without saying that you guys newly dropped your Fall 2022 poll, your 44<sup>th</sup> poll at Harvard Institute of Politics. And, I, I thought it, it was, it was fun yesterday the, some students released a video featuring the students quizzing other students on campus to see if they could tap into what is driving Gen Z's political attitudes and behaviors this midterm. So, I want to start with a question for the audience. One of the questions that you guys asked was what issue do you think was most important in determining young Americans to vote in the midterms of 2022? So, I'd like to turn it over to the audience. What's; just shout it out. What's one issue you think drove young people 18 to 29 years old to vote yesterday in record numbers?

AUDIENCE: [Response from numerous audience members] Abortion.

DR. HOFFMAN: Abortion. [Chuckle,] okay. That was definitely one of them. What –

AUDIENCE: Gun control.

DR. HOFFMAN: Gun control.

AUDIENCE: [Response from numerous audience members] Climate

change.

DR. HOFFMAN: Climate change.

AUDIENCE: Democracy.

DR. HOFFMAN: Democracy was definitely one of them.

AUDIENCE: Economy.

DR. HOFFMAN: What's that?

AUDIENCE: The economy.

DR. HOFFMAN: The economy. So, all those things.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Um-hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think the top three; the first one was inflation, the second one was protecting democracy, and the third was abortion. So, these are issues that were incredibly important to young folks. Let's; I'm going to keep doing this. I think this is fun. What percentage –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – of young Americans believe, do you think, said that they believe that their rights are under attack today in America?

AUDIENCE: A lot. 75 [laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: 70-75; that's a lot.

AUDIENCE: 67.

DR. HOFFMAN: 67. That's very specific, 67.

MS. SHEN: [Laughter.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Laughter.]

AUDIENCE: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: It's a little bit; it's a little bit lower. Its 59 percent; 59 percent of young Americans believe that their rights are under attack. And

what's interesting when you ask the question of the rights of others that number jumps to 73 percent, right? So –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Correct.

DR. HOFFMAN: – when they're concerned about rights of others. Indulge me. I'm going to do this a little bit more.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: What percentage of young Americans believe –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: We should be filming this, yes.

MS. SHEN: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I guess we are but we should be doing it for –

DR. HOFFMAN: We are; we are.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: – [indiscernible], yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I think you, you kind of alluded to this Jing-Jing but I don't know if you gave the exact percentage. What percentage of young Americans believe their right – oh, I'm sorry, what percentage of young Americans believe American democracy is healthy? We know they don't think it's very healthy but they showed up. What percent?

AUDIENCE: [Indiscernible] 30; 37; 4.

DR. HOFFMAN: Four percent. Lauren, you got it. Four percent.

AUDIENCE: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: And then we saw that at the same time like you said Jing-Jing, 40 percent of young Americans said they intended to vote. So, John, help us breakdown those numbers compared to what we actually saw yesterday. What do we know today in terms of young people's turnout and how that

matches their intended participation?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, we're not going to know, honestly, until members of the political science community, census bureau, numbers crunchers really kind of carefully look at everything. What we do know is, is that for context twice as many turned out in 2018 as 2014. Twice as many in a midterm election; highest ever. That number was in the mid-30's, okay? Based upon what source you're looking at mid-33, 35, 36 percent. I don't know the exact number of young people who turned out yesterday. And talked to a lot of reporters whether it was 25 percent, 35 percent, or 45 percent, my short, my shorthand answer was it was enough. Right? It was enough young people to stop what would have been that, that red wave. So that's, you know, it's going to be, it's going to be hard, it's going to be hard to calculate what we had seen and what we, I believe we also saw on the ground is that in battleground states that number was even higher than it was in the traditionally red states or blue states. So this is going to be a complex issue to understand. But what's, I think a noteworthy point is when we started this project 20 years ago there was really no significant generation gap in American politics. A younger person or older person voted the exact same, the exact same level in terms of Democrats versus Republicans in the 2000 presidential election, 2002 similarly. It's been over the last 20 years that this generation gap has, has become one of the more important things to understand in American politics.

DR. HOFFMAN: Right, it's more about, you know, gender and political party and other types of identity.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Race, ethnicity, etcetera but I, I, I think we're clearly in a country that's divided 50-50 but the real divide is based upon your age and, and



this is the third cycle in a row where folks under 40 voted strong democrat; folks over 40 voted the other way. What's interesting is we now have these two generations – Gen, Gen Z as well as millennial – who will out vote baby boomers in this next cycle. Right?

DR. HOFFMAN:       Hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: We'll likely have 40 percent, close to 40 percent of the next presidential cycle be, be, of the electorate be composed of members of, of these two, of these two generations. And, and over 60 percent will again, we'll figure out in the next several days, 63, 65 percent of people under 30 in those two generations voted blue. Down the street in Pennsylvania over 70 percent voted for, for John Fetterman.

DR. HOFFMAN:       Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: You know; young people played a critical role in every single state. The, the, with the role of social media and the internet generally, you know, blue states and red states it's just not as, it's, it's not as relevant when we're talking about young people right? A young person off in say Lexington, Kentucky has as much in common with someone from Lexington, Massachusetts

—

DR. HOFFMAN:       Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: — even though a red state versus a blue state. So we really need to think about the, the lack of borders and understand that young people are young people wherever they live. In the last presidential election the only two states of significance that the republican Trump would have won were Tennessee and Indiana. The rest of them would have been blue just based upon the votes of younger millennials and Gen Zer's.



DR. HOFFMAN: So, Jing-Jing, can you maybe talk to that? What is it that's, that sort of feels like there's two, two kind of things to think about here. So, of course there's a lot of students that were voting blue, your young people are voting blue, but as Andrew, one of my students, pointed out there's also 60 percent of young Americans that did not plan to vote and there's clearly a portion of both those voting and not voting who are conservative or are on the red side. So, what's, what's your take, Jing-Jing on the conservative students, conservative young people in Gen Z in this country? Where, where are they, are they motivated to vote in the same way that, that young democrats are?

MS. SHEN: I think fundamentally young democrats, young republicans, young independents, we're living in the same America and we confront a lot of the same issues ranging from concerns about mental health and inflation to worries about LGBTQ+ rights and the future of the planet alongside that of our democracy. So there's a lot of shared struggles on many fronts. What's interesting is that for the breakdowns of the youth electorate by partisan affiliation we've seen the democratic share of that steadily grow over the last decade of so even though the fraction of that, that is comprised of young republicans has stayed steady at around 30 percent. So that's an interesting dynamic to see the Democratic Party's vision for the future of America seems more closely aligned with the values that young people have. As an example of this, just this past summer we, we saw a slew of legislation passed by the Democrats so you had the bipartisan gun reform law in addition to the Inflation Reduction Act as well as student loan debt cancellation. And, in each of those cases a majority of Americans said that America would be better because of these initiatives and actions. And I think that speaks a lot to really how

consistent the platform of the Democrats is with what young people are looking for in this moment. Now, it's not hopeless for the conservatives and the Republican Party. It's really about aligning interests with what young people desire. So, another really valuable statistic to keep in mind is that for both young democrats and young republicans three in five of each of those groups said that they were voting more for their own party rather than in opposition to the other. So, it's not just about recognizing on the democratic side, okay there's the potential for a red wave and like what do we do about it? And for the Republicans like a referendum on the Democrats means we have to really base all of our stances on what is wrong with the party in power. A lot of that is just who is best representing my, my voice and my interests and young people across the aisle have really emphasized that to us.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, so less about maybe what is, is appealing to and persuasive to older audiences which is the other guy is the enemy but it's more about okay what can you do for, for me. So, I think I'm, I'm going to pull up a – I warned you, John –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Hum, oh boy.

DR. HOFFMAN: – that I've, I've been tweet, tweet stalking you –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: You posted this; this is the Harvard Youth Poll –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN: – A Shape of the Midterm Elections. You were looking at likely voters and the sort of, the number of people who say they definitely vote over these different years. Tell me about what you see in this graph and, and, and what it means to you to look at those intentions to vote across those different

years?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So the, I have several graphs with similar data points that I've tweeted in the last three or four weeks and the reason I tweeted is because I was unsure whether the, the reporters in the political community appreciated that we shouldn't be surprised; that this is a new chapter and as you can see in this data in 2010 and 2014 27 to 26 percent of young people on the left-hand side said they would definitely vote. Gen Z enters the equation in 2018 and you can see 40 percent indicated that they would likely vote. Most people recognize that was a high-water mark; that was record level turnout not only for all Americans but specifically for this generation. Younger people turned out at such a high number that they increased their share which means that while everyone voted there, there are more younger people in the electorate and therefore the influence of older people actually went down.

DR. HOFFMAN: And speaking of, of water I'm going to show the next one which was the, the Gen Z wave.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oops.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Oh, and, and then, and then that the, the 2022 –

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay. Hang on.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Sorry, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: There it is.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right. There you go. And the Gen Z wave. This was when a reporter says I'll believe it when I see it and I said I'm literally showing it to you right now and it looks like a wave. This data goes all the way back to the 1986 midterms and you can see 2018 it looks like a wave. The same number of

people in this survey said they were going to vote as last survey that's why we were so [indiscernible] literally on a Saturday morning literally had to draw it out for some people.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle] so –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I've got problems.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: But that's what I did.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, one of my students, Gabrielle, and, and a lot of my students have been asking, so do you expect this wave to continue beyond the midterms? Do you see this as a, a continual increase or are we going to see some sort of stay, stabilizing off?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I think it, I think it depends. We saw little spikes there, you know, pre and post 9/11, pre and post, you know, Clinton, etcetera. But they, they lasted a cycle till they dipped off. It, we don't know but I'm not expecting this to, to dip in a significant way, right? We have now seen three election cycles but beyond election cycles think about, right, our conversations on this campus. Think about the rates of legis (sic), of, of registration. Think about the activities and the protests and the organizing how important these issues are to people. So, as long as, as long as we have administrations that continue to listen and engage I'm hopeful that will continue just to build upon this. But think about this, once you're, once you're in the system – we have, we have 50 percent more young people in the system today than we did a, a generation ago, right? They will be even more active in those communities at an earlier age and I think the more activity among better representation the, the better everybody, the better we all are.



DR. HOFFMAN: So, let's go back to this most recent poll that just dropped a couple of weeks ago. It, maybe Jing-Jing, you can take this. How, this question comes my student Kallie, can the trends among young voters be seen from young people in both urban and rural areas? What are some of the differences between students across those, those different regional perspectives?

MS. SHEN: Sure. It's a, a really important question since we know that young people come from different backgrounds and that includes geographically. Ultimately, I think news source is a prominent difference amongst these different groups in which for those who are more keyed-in to the news especially following the policies of the administration, and how Biden has really acted upon his promises to young people, his approval is actually much higher than general. So, for those who don't follow the news we see that number at around 28 percent approval but for those who do that number jumps by 20 percentage points for 48 percent. So where you get your news is, is really a key factor. But in addition to that, you also have the, the particular sources that, that youth are drawing upon and we're increasingly seeing a reliance, an interest in following media: social media, Instagram and Tik Tok in particular. So, although the composition of cities might differ across these geographic locations you also have an opportunity to connect with people regardless of where they physically are located if you can tap into where young people are turned in and for, for many that lies in social media.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, a couple of my students also have questions for if, if you all interested in the next generation that comes after Gen Z they're called – does anyone know?

AUDIENCE: Alpha.

DR. HOFFMAN: Alpha. Generation Alpha. So, do you have any, this is for both; either of you, do you have any predictions for how Generation Alpha may grow up to be different from Gen Z? And, and Ryan in particular wants to know, where do you think Gen Z will be in terms of political activism and progress in ten years? So, if Gen Alpha is being born approximately 20 – they're still being born; 2015, 2025 and these, these aren't hard and fast years –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right.

DR. HOFFMAN: But, what do are you seeing in terms of – I know you're not polling young people in Alpha yet, but what do you, what are your expectations –

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – or predictions?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, so we are, we are, we are polling outside of Harvard. I'm, I'm polling at high schools a lot, right? And, and where I keep in mind that not all of Gen Z is, is, is age of 18. But when you think about generations, you know, I don't know if we know yet because I'm not the kind of person who says you have to be born on this day on this month in this year to be a member of this generation. We talked about the fluidity of, of, of generations and it's really about this like, this collective experience in that group of adolescent folks have, right? And the importance of those events and their lives and the lives of all of us as an American and this neutrality of those and how they shape your values not just, you know, for the moment or for, or for your early years but for the rest of your life. This generation of Gen Z I argue has had, has to, has had to deal as you all know with the most more trauma more quickly than any generation since the



Greatest Generation thinking about these experiences coming of age in the wake of 9/11, the Great Recession, response to Katrina, school shooter drills, opioid crisis, climate change, concerns about sexual violence, concerns about climate change. We could go on. That ending up with this horribly sad spike in, in, in death by suicide among younger people when your generation is, is, is turning into adolescence. That's before Covid, all of which was exacerbated by, by social media. So, those are the, among the critical factors that have shaped Generation Z. So, honestly, from kind of from where I sit we, we certainly, we, we certainly understand that Covid and the response of Covid and the, the, the lack of social interactions that many members of, of, of Gen Alpha are dealing with will be a component but I think we just need to, as we talked about at dinner, be a little bit more patient before we think about the larger ramifications.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay. So, I still want to stay on this, this poll because these, like I said, these data just dropped. What about; we know inflation was one of the most important issues for not just young people but people across the, the country, across age groups. Can you and – and I mean, Jing-Jing if you want to pick up on this or either of your – can you describe Gen Z's view on the economy and there, there were a lot of interesting questions of their own financial lives and how they see themselves as, at their parent's age? What they see themselves looking like in the future financially? And, maybe John you can give us some idea of how that differs or is similar from previous generations of young people.

MS. SHEN: Do you want to start?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah. So, I'll, I'll, I'll start with – so, as, as you said, inflation, cost of living, that was certainly the number one issue volunteered as



well as chosen from the, from the poll. And that's something that we've been hearing well before the, the last year in terms of this, this concern about cost of living and I remember a focus group that we did just a few years ago where like we asked people like what is your version of the American dream and often times it's as simple as getting a job that you feel really good about that you can have an impact, you know, that you could grow from, that you can have an impact on our community. Maybe that's a, maybe that's a schoolteacher or maybe that's a nurse or maybe that's, you know, working in a business and not having to rely on five random roommates from the back pages of the internet to afford an apartment. Like that's young person's version of the American dream, right? And the, this is the first generation as we can see in this data that is unsure whether they will have a better financial, a, a, a better kind of level of financial stability than their parents. One of the things that we, we focused on in the last couple of semesters is this idea of financial independence. This is something that younger people really strive for in this next phase of their lives. It doesn't necessarily mean be financially independent. It can, you know, be wealthy. It just means being able to live outside of like excruciating debt and be able to again, live that simple life. That you spent a lot of time in focus groups on other open-ended questions analyzing this didn't you?

MS. SHEN: Yeah specifically we posed a question in Fall 2021 that was open ended and it was to just fill in the blank to, to me a good life is. And overwhelmingly the, the most popular responses were rooted in the simplest of things, to have food, a roof over my head, a loving community, and a little extra to enjoy life around me. That was really profound because it really suggests that young people struggling as they might be aren't asking for much. The formula is

not super complex with a lot of moving parts. It's just a couple of key components that if aligned could really have a profound difference. And, beyond the very tangible immediate concerns about the economy and inflation that definitely drove a lot of young voters to the polls, I think it's also very valuable to contemplate how young people aren't just perceiving their own finances as they're contemplating independence and establishing themselves distinctly from their parents but also that they're aware of others around them. And so, even for those for whom the American dream seems very attainable those who say my personal finances are okay, I, I think I'm on track to do better than my parents; there's this awareness about maybe that's not the case for everyone. So, for instance, in spring 2022 our poll before this one we actually asked a question about student loan debt forgiveness and nine in ten young Americans desired some form of action to be taken on student loan debt by the government. Maybe that was helping with repayment, cancelling all student loan debt. But only one in ten said do nothing, we're fine as is. So that speaks to this environmental and collective perceptibility of, of where we are as an economy. And I'll also add a tracking question we've posed to young people for the last decade or so has found that increasingly with almost a point increase by, by each year young people desire the government to do more to lift up those who are in poverty. So, not only do we care about others and their personal economic situations even when we ourselves are doing okay but also we want the government to do more to help out those in need. And I think that trend is on track to, to continue influencing young people not only in their own behavior and, and how they spend and save money but also in how they vote which influences everyone else.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I'd like to shift a little bit towards polling more

broadly. And you talked about doing focus groups. I'd love to get into a little bit of the, the nitty gritty about that but I think first I, I'll pull up a tweet that you put out a little while ago. Despite – oh I can't read that far. Despite rigor and thoughtfulness that we used – I remember when it was basically hard to get people to pay attention –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN: – to the Harvard Youth Poll and now there are so many polls –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Hum.

DR. HOFFMAN: – out there that, that are not rigorous, they're not forthright with their limitations that are getting, getting attention on, on news networks. So I wanted you to talk a little bit to that but I also wanted to point out, A) you had a tweet go very viral last night, so congratulations.

AUDIENCE: [Indiscernible]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Many of you saw it –

AUDIENCE: [Chuckling.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: – right?

AUDIENCE: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: Eight million people saw it –

AUDIENCE: [Chuckling.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – and counting. But, I wanted to also say as important you have now been given a Room Rater –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – rating of a ten out of ten. So if you're not familiar there's a, a, a Twitter account called Room Rater. They rate people's art and,



and, and environment in, in this period of Covid imposed Covid what their, their background looks like. So, congratulations on that ten out of ten.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I worked really hard on that.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let's go back to this point about, about the Harvard Youth Poll compared to other polls. What, what kind of pieces of advice can you tell viewers who are looking at polls and looking at polling results, what key factors should they be looking for, for what makes a good poll versus what makes maybe a more newsworthy poll that might not be as accurate? What are –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right.

DR. HOFFMAN: – what kind of factors should people be looking for?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right, so I, I never believed there was going to be a red wave and the reason I chose, I, I did not believe that is because the rely, the most reliable polls showed relatively little movement over the last year.

DR. HOFFMAN: And which were the, of those would you say are reliable?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: The ones that have a, an extended track record like ABC Washington Post, NBC, CBS Battleground Tracker. Those three have, they do regular polling, they have large, robust sample sizes and they have a history not just; they have a history over, over years if not decades of being reflective of, of the mood of the electorate based upon their, how close they, they see the, the, the popular vote especially in midterm years. So those are the ones I spend the most time looking at. The reason I'm able to do that is because they share their data, right? Oftentimes they'll have a thousand or a couple of thousand plus

interviews so all of us can access those and see the, the, the differences or similarities between Democrats, Republicans and Independents, male/female, based upon ideology, level of education, etcetera. You can get in to see the, you can get, get in and get comfortable with the data. I often compare those youth oriented data sets with our own like more or less tracking the same way. When we see a two to one preference for Democrats in theirs as well as for ours it's a good poll. I'll get a lot of confidence in that. What we saw in this last cycle is relative to 2018 there was less polls available, okay, to review, and, and a larger percentage of those polls were what I argued were less rigorous, from organizations with less history with opaque methods, with unknown sponsors.

Let's talk about that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-um.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Because this is a serious issue that's driving how we collectively think about public opinion in this country. In both FiveThirtyEight as well as Real Clear Politics are aggregators, they both published these polls.

Okay? So, let's go through these one at a time here, okay? A little history. Some of these companies have not been in existence more than one election cycle. We have no idea what kind of track record that they have, right? So, I'm going to look at those in a, a more skeptical viewpoint.

DR. HOFFMAN: So they don't have much experience with –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: How much experience they have, have they done their job before, opaque methods, share your data. You know, are you, are you collecting information on the internet, telephone, what's the combination? Share your methodology so we, we could see that. Specifically, share cross tabs.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.



MR. DELLA VOLPE: You know, there are, there are several pollsters out there that are, that are adding their numbers into these averages that don't literally share their cross tabs or the full questionnaire.

DR. HOFFMAN: And can you elaborate on cross tabs a little bit. So, and, and if you go to the, the Harvard Youth Poll you'll find cross tabs. What does that mean A) –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah.\

DR. HOFFMAN: – and, and what are some of the limitations on – I don't mean to get too wonky here but –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Sure.

DR. HOFFMAN: – the limitations of the sample size and being able to evaluate those cross tabs effectively.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, our, our survey every semester we conduct at least 2,000 interviews, okay? That means we have a margin of error of less than three percent overall. The reason we conduct so many interviews is because we want to understand the differences based upon where people live or whether you're a college student or a graduate or in community college or never attended. We want to look at some of the subgroups within the electorate. Okay?

DR. HOFFMAN: So the more you break people down into these smaller and smaller categories –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: The larger sample size you need. Okay? So, with each sample size you're seeing, you're seeing less reliability. Okay? So, so we'll talk to a thousand men and a, a thousand men and a thousand women but we can also look at white men versus white women; white men, you know, with an education that extends beyond high school versus others, etcetera, etcetera.



Generally, cross tabs subsamples of a 100, 150 rely, are, are reliable directional indicator if things are in the right direction, okay? That has a, a margin of error of seven, eight, nine percent based upon how low you get. But at least directionally it should be pointing in the right direction, right?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, that's kind of where, that's kind of where we cut things off, okay? So those are the cross tabs. And it's really kind of interesting to see, you know, where the differences are among, among some of these groups, okay? And we color code them on the IOP website so you can see if there's a color on it there's a significant difference –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: – no color, you don't need to be a statistician, no difference. Okay? So, that's often what I do. I go in to look at these other polls to see how whether they're sharing cross tabs and how reliable. And I see a lot of problems within them. But the biggest issue, okay, is who the sponsor is. It's not easy to do polling. It's not easy to do polling every single night in an election year, tabulating that data, putting presentations together and there's one pollster, Trafalgar Group that has a poll out – 11 polls this week. I don't know who sponsors them. I don't know what their agenda is. I don't know how they collected the data. I haven't, don't know what their methodology is. I don't know what questions they ask. All I know is they thought that the New Hampshire senate race was a tossup. They thought the New York was a tossup. They thought that the Oregon race was a tossup. None of them were tossups. None of them were close. Okay? But it fed the narrative that this was going to be a red wave. Right? So, so that's, that's my – so, so my frustration in these tweets



from a, a researcher is it took us a decade to get folks to pay attention to an academic, academically rigorous report on, on young people, right?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: It, it takes some of these other groups no time at all to be a part of the, the FiveThirtyEight and the Real Clear Politics aggregation sites which are changing the narrative and which has dire consequences especially if the election results are different than what the polls suggest because people, you know, who believe in conspiracies could think that the election results were tainted in some way. So, my concern is that a new arm of propaganda and PR in this country is based upon sponsoring polls that are being infiltrated, and that are, that are part of this narrative. I think that the, both aggregation sites really need to take, take a deep look at their responsibility and clean this up.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, let's, let's switch over to the book, this book that was published last year. One of my students, Rebecca, noticed that many adults dismiss the anxieties that Gen Z faces and she noted that reading Fight has been a nice change of pace and it was very validating. I heard this from a lot of my students who were required to read your book for [chuckle] my class.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: And Rebecca wanted to know how do you communicate this validity and sort of help older adults understand where Gen Z is coming from and, and how do you convince them to try and take Gen Z more seriously?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I think that – that's often the question when I ask younger people like, you know, what they need from us, from us as adults they often say, you know, help us break through, you know, that we; they're, they're real, what the underlying causes of our concerns are. And that you can't just say don't be

stressed anymore. You know, Jing-Jing alluded to the fact that – listen to this for a second – that half of young Americans more days than not in the last two weeks dealing with some significant form of anxiety, hopelessness or depression. The younger you are the more likely you have it. It doesn't matter if you live in a rural community or in the, in the middle of a city, college and non-college [indiscernible]; 25 percent say – 70 million people in this generation – 25 percent say that its so bad, the weight is so heavy that they have thought about self-harm or death several days in the last two weeks. Five percent say this every single day.

DR. HOFFMAN: Five percent said they've thought about self-harm –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: – or death every single day.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Every single day in the last two weeks. Which means that on this campus, in every high school in this state and in every high school in America you've got a handful, a dozen or more young people doing this every single day. And what they want their parents and their adults to recognize is its real and if I could help explain where this, these challenges and stresses are coming from I, it's a real responsibility I feel. And, and, and I say to kind of the, the parents and the adults I talk to say you don't need to agree with their politics or, or their, or their perceptions or their vision but let me walk you through some of the more significant ways in which they, that life has approached them. You know, let me break it down in ways that you can perhaps understand so you can kind of to deal with this. As on example, people brush off oh, student loan debt's not a big deal, right? Or, the snowflakes or, or this that or the other thing. Well, I remind them that when they were likely going to college you could work a,

a part-time job, or you could work a minimum wage job for summer and pay for private or public year of tuition. Impossible to do now, right? Right? So, when I think the right, mostly the right calls your generation snowflakes I kind of get like almost like offended myself now. Right? And I said despite all those things I talked about I think these challenges have made you like harder, stronger, more resilient; the opposite of snowflakes. Right? And, despite all these stresses and all these anxieties what 's remarkable is I would understand, you know, if you kind of checked out and said, you know what, I've got to focus on myself, I'm not going to deal with some of these issues. Right? But, you, you, this generation cares as much about other people, the future, as themselves and they're choosing, you know, to spend this time to try to make, I think, yes, make themselves feel better by having some agency in doing something but also trying to kind of correct the systemic failures that we've left for them.

DR. HOFFMAN: Jing-Jing, if I can follow-up with you, one of our speakers earlier this semester was the CEO and founder of the Listen First Project, Peirce Godwin, who talks about the power of listening. From someone in Gen Z, what kinds of things do you wish older generations would listen to you on? What kinds of issues or concerns other than mental health I think is one that has come up a lot, but are there other things that you would like older adults to, to listen to you specifically in your generation?

MS. SHEN: Can I put in a request for everything? [Laughter.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. SHEN: That would be ideal but yeah, to go back to mental health just briefly the, the fact that we have bipartisan support for increased



governmental assistance with regard to mental health concerns preceding the pandemic and the very alarming and un-budging numbers that John touched on for feeling down, depressed or hopeless and self harm, this most recent poll but also over the last several points to the fact that there is this consensus amongst our generation that the mental health crisis unfolding is, is very much real and we need to validate that in order to address it. But beyond mental health and wellbeing you have a bunch of other threats that young people perceive to, to their lives and that oftentimes it seems as though there's a disconnect with older generations and taking that seriously. So, so one is climate change. In our fall 2021 poll we noted that almost half – I think it was like 47 percent of young Americans – reported already perceiving the affects of climate change in their own communities. Like, that's alarming. Like across the country. And, just over half said that the government should do more about climate change and that paid dividends over the summer with the Inflation Reduction Act but it absolutely doesn't end there. So, that is one instance of, you know, it's not just our personal survival and mental health that matters but also our survival on this planet. Like, that is in jeopardy and we're going to be around to live with the consequences of, of the action that gets taken or fails to get taken today. Beyond this survival of our democracy also figures front and center, the fact that there's so much polarization perceived in our, our governmental leadership even when our own every day communities aren't that different. To give you some idea of this one and two young Americans say that people with opposing beliefs or ideas, viewpoints, still want what's best for the country. I think that speaks volumes about how highly we regard each other and productive discourse. And for, for older generations that might dismiss us and say Gen Z doesn't know what they're



talking about, they're apathetic, they don't care or they can't agree on anything. That's just not what the data shows. If three in four young Americans in 2020 can tell us that we desire more open mindedness in politics that also shows we're willing to engage not only with each other when we have diverse viewpoints but also with other generations. And we're going to need everyone together in this fight for the future. So, if we're willing to listen and validate each other's concerns and, and find common ground and work together that is absolutely actualizable.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Thanks for the plug.

MS. SHEN: Absolutely.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.] Well, and, and, and I'm hearing also in, in your answer I interviewed David Hogg for this, this conversation last year who writes the forward to your book and one thing that I, I would, found remarkable from David Hogg who's, who's running this kind of the March for Our Lives against or, or for gun control in this country. He said it, he's like, you, you can disagree with me or agree with me but what has to happen is that we need to come together as generations and not see each other as, as distinct from each other. If we want to make change you have to find a way to reach across those different generations. So, thinking about other generations I think a lot of times we look back to and sort of romanticize. I think young people in the 1960's and the Civil Rights movement and movement towards LTBTQ (sic) acceptance; Elijah had a question that was about a, a speech that recently happened here at UD. The Reverend Al Sharpton stated that Gen Z needs a goal similar to the baby boomers of the 60's. And they need a specific goal to set them on a steering course forward. First of all, do you agree that they need a goal similar to

the baby boomers of the 60's, and if so, what goal do we as a generation or we, as Elijah says, as a generation need to emphasize to maximize achievements for us and for our children in the future? Do we need a second sort of 1960's revolution movement or does what's happening with young people look different, fundamentally different today?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I think its fundamentally different today but I think that if there was a goal – this is the first time I've been asked this question – I think the goal should be civic participation, right? That currently the U.S. ranks around 28 in terms of the number of young Americans who, who, who vote. And in this generation I think unlike other generations has determined as Jing-Jing talked about, like, the series of challenges we have today there is an urgency that requires young people even though they may not like it, like they might not like to go to the dentist. I may not like to spend time at jury duty but it's my civic responsibility or it's good for my health in the former. And this generation thinks the same way about voting. They may not like the characters. They may be disappointed in the results but they believe it's a civic responsibility. And I think that could be a goal, right?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: And that we went from averaging less than 20 percent to the mid-30's just in these midterm elections. But if we had a goal where younger people participated not just in the presidential – by the way we have a very different, a different President today because of young people. Donald Trump won the vote of everybody over the age of 40 in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Those are the five states that went from red to blue because of young people. Now, for younger people, Trump is in the office,



we don't have KBJ, the first African American woman on the Supreme Court and all the accomplishments that Jing-Jing talked about whether you like them or not, it's a different country. So, imagine the way our schools would be run, right? And the allocation of resources, for example, for mental health if young people participated even at this level in local elections. So I think if there were a goal perhaps it could be a goal of 50 percent participation in local elections, you know, in the next ten years.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Or something reasonable. And that we were all focused on that, parents educators, mentors, coaches, each other, something like that could be attainable and change the country over night.

DR. HOFFMAN: So just like you wouldn't skip your six month dental cleaning [chuckle] make sure you go and vote. I think that's an interesting goal. So, let's talk a little bit about again this kind of disconnect or perceived disconnect between younger generations and older generations. Keshawn (sp?) asked why do you think there is such a generation gap in terms of political views? Why is it when Gen Z members talk about their realities say the job market or housing –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN: – the older generation sees a disconnect; that they don't understand what Gen Z goes through. What are the value differences between older generations and younger generations and again how can they sort of find ways to communicate across those differences? And, and maybe Jing-Jing can speak to that in terms of, again, kind of a what would you, what kind of conversations would you like to have with older generations so they understand

where you're coming from?

MS. SHEN: I think a lot of the struggles that we have gone through and are going through are also shared with older generations. Like, in that sense there is that common experience. There are profound differences in I think magnitude or severity. For instance, the ability to go to college and to look at that tuition and realize like you can't save up for that in like a summer or two. Like that's something that very much our generation feels that maybe our grandparents generation might not be able to connect with as much because it was just a different reality back then. In addition, these perceived risks of misinformation and disagreements about our sources of, of news –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Hum.

MS. SHEN: – and data, there was already going to be disagreement about policy, about politics and that's natural and, and honestly healthy in, in a democracy. But where we can't agree on, on facts and election results like that really cuts at the integrity of the processes that formed the bedrock of, of society. So, even with this most recent midterm election with one in three young Republicans and yet one in three young Democrats fearing that there might be some interference in the election and that it would maybe come from the other party most likely. Like that doesn't portend well for an election in which you would desire high faith in the process. So, the divergent and inconsistent basis's upon which we form our beliefs, upon which we talk about policy because that seems even more fractured and fragile now. I think that poses a challenge that is particularly severe for Gen Z though not insurmountable as I'm sure we will touch on later. And we can learn a lot from past generations and all that they've gone through; the progress that they have enabled for us to build on. Like, it is very



much there. It's just recognizing we are different generations, we have different experiences, but, you know, we're all trying to ultimately make the most of our lives, have a net positive impact on the world, find meaning in what we do, and that common ground is absolutely a vehicle through which we can connect with each other.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Can I offer just one other observation?

DR. HOFFMAN: Please.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: That was so perfect. I don't know if I should. But, the observation I will make is that what older people often times stops them in their tracks is when – I talk about the trauma and the chaos not to, not to diminish anyone else's experience. Right? All generations, all individuals have their own struggles. And I would never kind of diminish or, or misrepresent that. However, despite the, the chaos that we saw around Vietnam and, and, and Watergate, etcetera, there were collective moments where all Americans across our differences came together.

DR. HOFFMAN: 9/11.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Okay. One of my first experiences, 1980 as a young, as a young boy watching the U.S. beat the Soviets in the "Miracle on Ice." 9/11 I think one of the differentiators between you in the millennial camp or Gen Z-er camp is your memory, recognition of 9/11 but also September 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> when regardless of what neighborhood you lived in, what your political ideology was you, you, if you had a flag you put it on the front door, you hung it up, right? And we had that collective experience of feeling united. One of the most challenging questions I can ask a young person in any setting is when was the last time you felt proud to be an American, right? When America's united. They

cannot name that other than perhaps a sporting event but other than that it's a really challenging question.

DR. HOFFMAN:       Hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: And, that's something that I, that, that I think helps older people think about how younger people think about themselves, their country and our relationship with others around the world.

DR. HOFFMAN:       Um-hum. Well, we're about to ready to get, to get to questions and I'll ask Millie and Kate to come over to our microphones – there you guys are – and, and we'll get setup. So if you have a question be thinking about that. And but as we transition to that I, I have another question from Anna, what, and this is for you John, what's maybe one factor, one thing that's changed the most since you began with the Harvard Youth Poll to now other than some things you've already mentioned. What's surprised you most about –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN:       – what's changed or maybe what stayed the same?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: well, obviously the methodology. You know, over 22 years ago you may not appreciate the fact that there were actually landlines in dorms that people would answer. And that there was a relatively small number who offered up their cell phones. So, clearly the, the methodology has changed in a significant way. I still think the biggest, one of the biggest surprises – so this, so this is, this is an interesting I, I, I think question. A margin of error of, of five points means essentially that one in twenty surveys has an underlying problem with the, with the sample. And it's unreliable and we do it again. So you do enough pulls you start to see a data set that doesn't look quite right so you do it again. So, it's been a long time now, it's probably a decade ago where we had

this student names Jeffrey and he, he was with us for all four years and he was a, a, a I think a biology major. He had a hard time coming up with questions, you know? And I was like I really hope he could come up with something really good for his last semester and he finally did and he says, we're uncomfortable with, with political and other kinds of labels, I want to see what identities younger people kind of assume or kind of connect with. So we had a dozen of these different labels one of which was capitalism, one of which was socialism, and then we had patriots and feminists and a, just a variety of things. And what I found was that less than half the people supported or connected with capitalism. Less than half. Fewer supported socialism. I went to, to Catherine McLaughlin who at that time was running the IOP; I said I think there's a problem. I think this is a one, this is the five percent. I think we need to do another poll. I don't, I don't trust this is, I don't really trust this data. I did another poll and I found it wasn't until we surveyed people over the age of 50 where there was like net support for capitalism. That's a significant – no one had talked about this before. Right? I then argued to find a little bit more money to go out and do some focus groups to get some understanding of it and it was such an impactful like series of weeks for us because what I learned was, not necessarily a rejection of capitalism, rejection of the way in which capitalism is being practiced today which led into obviously the occupy movement and helped us understand those factors. And really, when we spent time talking with the young people and I talked a little bit about this is fight is that they're asking not for socialism but for a more modern, more fair, more moral capitalism one as a student from Franklin and Marshall College at the time reminded me it looked a little bit more like if the Roosevelt's got together – Square Deal, New Deal. Right? Where, where,



where we might make it more challenging for monopolies to operate on one hand while at the other hand we might provide some social infrastructure to help Americans move forward. So, that's just an example of something in how we had to respond to that --

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: -- over the course of the last, you know, couple of decades doing this.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's fascinating. Okay, I'd like to open it up to questions from the audience so if we could bring the house lights up a little bit so I can see our audience. Who would like to ask the first question of one or both of our speakers? Just raise your hand.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: We see a hand over here; second row.

Q: Hi John. So this question is for you. I wanted to ask , so you mention in your book Fight how Zoomers (sic) opened up to you in a way that millennials never have.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Hum.

Q: I wanted to ask you what did that exactly look like and what were their common fears?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Well, that's a great question, thank you. So, at the end of every semester in the summertime I spend traveling around the country conducting a qualitative research sessions; large like these, small and midsize and I ask with the basic questions and often I think – this is actually good advice for anyone to, to model to have productive conversations – I'd ask before about like the topic, if I was going to focus on a, a conversation about climate change or education or whatever the issue is I'd start with like getting to know each other

building some trust and some rapport saying what's a good day? Right? What's keeps you up a night? What are some of the challenges? What are the same, some of the things that, that connect us as Americans, connect you as a generation? Give me a word or a phrase or, or image from your phone that might describe America today. Those are the kinds of questions. I've been asking them for at that point 15 years. 2017 I, I walked into a room in Columbus, Ohio and I was just kind of met with a completely different kind of vibe. Dystopic, off the rails, a bloody mess, terrified. Those are the questions that young people, you know, offered up immediately in terms of the America they were dealing with. Okay? What are the things that connect us? I was ready to hear opportunity. That's what I heard the previous several years regardless of where in the country I was, instead I heard fear. I said, fear of what? And this, and I have the exact quote and this young woman rattled it off like she'd been preparing for it for her entire life, she said "you know, fear of death." Fear for our children. You know, fear for our health. Going through, right? Basically what young Americans are dealing with today; this was five years ago. And then I said what don't we understand? She goes, you know what, the way – someone else said this, the way you guys, older guys think about money, taxes that's the way we think about living and dying every time we walk into an auditorium just like this. That's the weight that we carry. Right? So that just hit me like a ton of bricks wherever I was around the country I was seeing the same things. It's nearly impossible to talk to a group of African American men or women where most of them don't know someone who's been a victim of gun violence; mostly impossible. It is mostly impossible to talk to any group of teenagers -- white, black, Hispanic, Latino, Asian American, it doesn't matter who or several of them have an

experience around sexual assault or sexual violence. Same thing goes for, for young people dealing with depression and the effects of suicide. This is just, this, these are just random samples of people I've, I've taken all over, right? And, that was just a game changer and then when I followed up a little bit I realized that for the first time I think there was a connection between the disquiet in our politics and these additional stresses. So that's when I really began to see if there was this disconnect and honestly I think we were among the first to really kind of put these two pieces together. And that was before Charlottesville, before Las Vegas, and before Parkland. The combination of those events really just made everything that much worse and, and we're thankful that – I talk about this in the book – that David Hogg's parents chose that school because of their media capabilities and the opportunity that he could have to tell a story and he insisted that he was going to use this moment, you know, when the cameras were there to try to awaken the, the other Americans. And I was able to watch. Again, our polling showed an overnight change, 12 point change and we talked about this wave, that wave was just beginning to develop during those times. And pollster after pollster were quoting the same articles as I was in *The New York Times*. You can look at them. They said we don't see any wave. We don't see any difference. Young people never vote. Well, they weren't voting yet but they were registering. Wherever March for Our Lives rolled out – Chicago, Parkland, Boston, Cincinnati – voter registration went up. What happened in the summertime? AOC knocks off Joe Crowley, number two and number three person in the House. What happens again in November? You know, it happened. And, and that's where, that's when I wrote the book proposal because that says they took all this fear, all of this anxiety and they channeled it



into a pretty important place to make themselves feel better, to heal the country, and again, you know, we know we're living in a better place because of it. So, thank you for all of you who went out and voted; wherever you have an opportunity, it's important.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you. Do we have another question from the audience?

Q: Thank you. Hi. My question was did you notice any particular campaigns, I guess, this time around that did a pretty good job of like garnering the Gen Z vote? Like what strategies they were able to use and do you think that will be like because of this Gen Z wave do you feel like that will reduce skepticism around like the voter turnout for Gen Z? I mean, obviously there's so much to be done but like in the current state like there was quite a bit of turnout in comparison to previous years. So like do you think that will reduce skepticism?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: I, I'm an optimist and, and I hope so but we've been, we've been doing this for such a long time that, that it's hard to, it's hard to change I guess old habits. I don't, I don't, I don't really know. I think the, the, the most compelling stories aren't from campaigns. They're from people. You know, they're from Aidan Kohn-Murphy, you know, who was frustrated, a high school student, you know, who, who leveraged his, his Tik Tok handle with other people and created a Gen Z for Change. Right? Where they, I think they reached a half a billion people this network. You know, and there are other people like him. Santiago Mayer who started a [indiscernible] called Voters of Tomorrow. Four years ago he was in high school in Mexico. And now he's one of the most influential young organizers in America if not the world. Right? So,

so that's where the real "change" is coming from but I will tell you not only because that I, I served on the, on President Biden's campaign, it's because of this bottom up energy recognized and empowered from the administration, specifically the White House, right? Where they included – they, we got, they have got these weekly talkers right? So folks that go on TV get these talking points. Well, you know what? Younger people who are talking to their friends and their communities and their peers also get these talking points. They get invited to White House, White House events to celebrate the passage of the IRA just like members of Congress and the districts in, in where you live. They empower them, they recognize them and those are the young people who did all the work that made yesterday possible from a Democrats point of view. They did literally one group did a million phone calls. A million phone calls, right? So, I think this happened not, not in spite of President Biden but because of President Biden, his administration because unless you're in regular conversations with the frontlines of these organizers, these relational organizers – it's not about TV – it's about these relational organizers which people like us don't see. Unless you connected with them they're not motivated to make the case to their friends and their colleagues. I was just on the phone with a reporter – this was a theory I came up with today actually – and had indicated the exact same story from an organizer who said he really, they really relied on student debt and climate to move over some of these late deciding people, you know? But they felt comfort – they wouldn't be doing this if they didn't feel comfortable and authentic with that sort of connection. So, so I just think, I think we'll, we'll, we'll see you know how this develops but I think it's a, it's a, it's a really kind of important way to understand politics in the future through this, these relationships and this access

to decision makers.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you very much. Let's take another question from the audience. How about somebody over on this side? Thank you.

Q: [Indiscernible] we've talked about some of these problems with polling – small sizes. MSNBC had a issue about creating the [indiscernible] polls so that they could [indiscernible] election.... How come I didn't win? There's got to be something wrong with the votes.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right.

Q: How do you see your industry progressing from where we are now to new methodology. I'm a guy who owns a landline so [chuckle] –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah.

Q: -- when you said landline [indiscernible] I've got one [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

Q: [Indiscernible] and how people respond? I never answer the phone if I [indiscernible] –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Right.

Q: But, how do you see yourself progressing so that polling becomes more reliable, more worthy of us actually paying attention –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah.

Q: -- and then we get better results so that when the national media says FiveThirtyEight says that, you know, Fetterman is going to lose because he's behind Oz. Well, we come to find out that he kind of crushed him. We really did. The crudités really did it though but I'm just asking. How do you see your industry improving?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, a couple of things. One is I'm not sure I associate with a lot of the folks who were doing those kinds of polls, right? There's a couple of different – and that's, so that's an issue in itself, right? You have for, for – not you but like I would, I would, I would understand if you viewed you know kind of me skeptically based upon how other people who have the same title approach their work. Okay? So, that's one thing that we need to some, kind of get over, right? What makes our, our work I think unique and has the longevity of it is I'm not going to just tell you who's going to win or who's going to lose with the youth vote. I'm going to tell you why. I'm going to tell you like and, and where, and not only why but what the, what the, the values are that led to them having this particular kind of opinion, right? Go well beyond whatever that top line kind of number is because that's actually the least important number as far as I'm concerned. Right?

DR. HOFFMAN: And, just like you explained cross tabs, could you explain the top line a little bit?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah. The, the top line number is the percent of people who, who say they're going to vote for this person or that person. Okay?

DR. HOFFMAN: So this is the, just a raw number –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- that doesn't –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Raw numbers like, you know, Fetterman's 48 Oz is 46. I call them the top line number. I say that's the least important because what's more important is where is that 48 percent coming from? How is he doing in Western PA versus Eastern PA? You know, what is he doing with men who were in college versus men not in college? How does that compare to Pat



Toomey's race? How's that compare to Joe Biden's race? Why, why not? That's what pollsters do. Right? Instead what's happened is the combination of Real Clear and then Nate Silver aggregating everything focusing everybody on who's going to win and who's going to lose I think has really devalued the value that we can provide the public in terms of understanding public opinion. Does that make sense? Right? You know, Jing-Jing talked about the value of young Americans – sorry to correct you – is 8 out of 10 not quite 9 out of 10 believe that we should be doing something to relieve student debt. Right? Whether that comes from the public, from the private, all or none that's an, that's a helpful piece of information and then we can dig a little bit deeper in terms of what's the right policy on that. So, I'm hopeful that, that the aggregators have, have, have more rigorous techniques before they let people just publish their polls, one. I'm, I'm hopeful that they stop with these grades A, B, C based upon choosing a couple of races, the right way even though it could be completely by accident –

DR. HOFFMAN: So this is evaluating different pollsters –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Evaluating the polls.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- or giving them a grade?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Like an academic grade.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Like a, like an academic grade, I think that's ridiculous, right? And instead what we need to do is, is we need to be more flexible and more thoughtful in terms of how we reach people. *The New York Times* has done a really great job recently experimenting. One of the – and I'll just give you one example – and then this information is shared within our industry. But they just released an experiment, I think it was actually on Election Day maybe a day

or two ago, where they conducted a poll the traditional way – cell phone and landline the way in which they do it in Wisconsin – and then they, then they affixed a five dollar bill and mailed, mailed a survey to a number of other people to see what would get a better response. Their, their, their hypothesis was that shy Trump voters, people who won't pick up the telephone may be more responsive to a mailer, maybe more, feel a little bit guilt, a little bit guilty for taking a five dollar bill up to twenty dollars in exchange for their opinions. Okay? So, folks like The New York Times and others are experimenting different ways to, to identify better coverage.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: What they found was there was no difference.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: The person who took the money, the person who didn't take the money, okay, had no difference in their political opinion. And by the way, that doesn't mean that both were wrong. You know, one of the mistakes that I think our industry makes is just because we had an error around shy Trump voters or not finding less educated, you know, white –

DR. HOFFMAN: In 2016 –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: -- men in 2016 or 2018 that they'll necessarily repeat, okay? So, one of the mistakes I think that people made here this year overcorrecting for that while missing the wave that we talked about earlier. Looking for one thing but the, the youth wave comes up. So, you know, the way we do it at the Institute of Politics, we don't care about what technology you use, we choose you based on your, your address, based upon where you live. The way Gallup did it almost a hundred years ago –



DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MR. DELLA VOLPE: -- okay and then we provide you with, then you can provide us with data – cell phone, your tablet, your desktop, you can give it to us at 2:00 in the morning, you can wait three days – at your leisure as long as you do it. And if for some reason you don't have technology we'll actually pay to give you the technology in exchange for your opinions. I mean, it's a very expensive way to do it but it's the, it's the reason that we're able to sit here with confidence to tell you what just happened.

DR. HOFFMAN: And I think I'll, I'll add to that, that, that you want to make sure that the organization that you're, you're looking at is it a trustworthy one, did they have a good track record? And you're looking at the methods and I think that it does require a little bit of effort on the part of the viewers and, and the audience to, to hold these polling organizations to more accountability and asking for basic statistics like margin of error or, and, and statistical significance. Without getting too wonky about it, I think you can really get, identify what makes a good poll and what makes a bad poll. Speaking of polls, I want to plug for our students in the audience that one of the projects that my students work on in National Agenda the class is every year we do the Blue Hen poll which is a student, a survey for students by students and we are able to gauge the opinions and attitudes of students on the University of Delaware campus. So that will be going out to a random sample of students in the next day or two. So if you do get, get invited to take that survey recognize that some of these folks in the front row here who are in my class need you to respond to help their, them get some data to analyze for their, for their project. Let's take maybe one more question? Tim? Sorry, I happened to see that it's Tim.

Q: I, I was going to say if, if, if you'd rather have a student ask a question. Mine's a slightly wonky question for John.

DR. HOFFMAN: Let's do that –

Q: I can, I'll be quick and then we'll hand it off over –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Can't Jing-Jing get the wonky one?

MS. SHEN: Ooh.

Q: All right I'll take her. Well, we'll see. Well, I mean it actually kind of builds off of the question that was just mentioned, asked a moment ago. You, you talked about kind of Gallup a hundred years ago and so the, the name that was kind of in my mind is, is, is Dan Yankelovich right, and some of those kind of work around public judgment and, and you know, the way that you were speaking about – and I, and I think what we just kind of navigated, right, watching all these gauges of tossups and all this sort of stuff and, and I think we've become slightly accustomed to, to leaning into that and, and almost expecting it to be just accurate, right? And if it's not then it's this really kind of big question around these, these surveys. But, folks like Gallup and Yankelovich and others, they, they spoke about and did work kind of in this vein of kind of public judgment, right, of, of leaning into doing public opinion polling but with a, you know, slightly more substantive kind of trying to get at what's, what, what was going on. So it's not just this kind of gauge but really trying to understand what was underneath, right, not just that kind of short term. So, can you speak at all to how, because, I, kind of read between the lines and I know we've had some interactions in the past but to, to what extent does the way that you do the polling – and you maybe alluded a little bit a moment ago to this – this gets a little bit

more at this not just taking a temperature, a temperature check in that moment but to think about it in a more kind of long term fashion or what, what moves us as, as he would talk about it this kind of judgment from –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Um-hum.

Q: -- not being informed to, to truly being an informed then possibly kind of an engaged person from that?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: So, generally, so there's every, you know, polls are insights. I'm not much of a scientist. I'm more of the artist in terms of I don't know much about math or statistics to be honest with you, right? My skill is, is, is asking questions and, and surrounding myself with addressing people who like to ask questions. I rely a lot on qualitative research, okay? A lot on those kinds, kinds of questions. What's a good day? Right? And then if you could lead to that, like, what role does government have, you know, and, and, and those sorts of things. So, I lean heavily, heavily on, on developing thoughtful questions in ways that Americans are kind of living their lives. That's kind of a one part that I think is somewhat unique. I'm not going to call you up and start asking you a bunch of questions about a Supreme Court case you never heard about; it's not going to really impact your life, right? A lot of other polls do that. That's one. The second thing is we, we, we did this early with consideration in, in participation with students to kind of understand not just what party ID but typology. You know, that we can measure over time, so thankful that we did, borrowing you know kind of borrowing well, inspired by a world value survey and, and some of the other academic work is to develop again, what Jing-Jing said was not do you support or oppose a particular program but do you believe government should spend more or less time, you know, helping those who are



needy. Do you believe we should be engaging in, in the world of free trade.; those sorts of things that we can kind of measure over time and see where these opinions form and where the clusters are, right, and where the, the divisions within society are. So, our, our work is heavily based upon qualitative with a real mix of academic rigor, academic questions but also very, very practical things that if you've got a minute or two to spend telling the story to help an elected official connect with a younger person to get them to hopefully build faith in the process and vote can also provide that practical aspect of it well. It's a very unique set of, set of tools all of which, all of which are driven by, inspired by people like Jing-Jing and by your Blue Hen pollsters and other young people because they're the ones who are curious and I'm just trying to help them, you know, develop a frame to help them understand the things that they care about.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I think building on that question and, and the previous one is, is understanding that, that again public opinion polling is both an art and a science and you kind of need an understanding of both those things. And then also to keep in mind that most of these polls that you're looking at are what we call cross-sectional polls which means they're, its one sample of people at one point in time and I think we all know that things can change from one day to the next in terms of how you feel about something. So, you have to kind of take those, those polls with a grain of salt. I think we have time for one more student question right here? And then we'll wrap up for the evening. Thank you.

Q: So, you mentioned that the [indiscernible]. What would be the first thing that you'd want informed people [indiscernible] smart readers to look for [indiscernible] first –

MR. DELLA VOLPE: First thing?

Q: [Indiscernible] look into?

MR. DELLA VOLPE: That I, oh, so, for, for you names of organizations that you've heard of, nice place to start. Okay? And then, then look into those, you know, read the questionnaire and look into those cross tabs and just look at one, just look at yourself, okay? You are a, a young person under 30 or under 44 based upon what the cross tab is. Read through the cross tabs from your perspective okay and say is this the way I think, people like me, feel? Okay? That will just kind of give you a – that's the way I do it, right? That's going to give you a little bit of a sense of okay, this feels kind of right, okay? I'll give you just a, a couple of quick things Like, YouGov and the Economist, Politico/Morning Consult all like these, they do really large samples. They're online and they ask tons and tons and tons of questions. They're accessible. You can look a lot of, look at a lot of those cross tabs. They're not necessarily the best at predicting within a point to what's going to happen but they're going to ask a lot of interesting questions that you can kind of get a sense of and get familiar with that. YouGov, Economist, Politico/Morning Consult similar kind of methodologies all of it is available online and you can really kind of spend some, spend some time with.

DR. HOFFMAN: And, I think I'll, I'll, I'll point out too it, as a professor of political communication that, that polls make an easy news story for a lot of journalists and the horserace isn't always the most important part of the story about what's happening with a Fetterman versus Oz for example to bring up the example from earlier. And that journalists are under deadlines and they need to get stories out and sometimes they'll report on this kind of horserace between two people in a race because it's the newest thing about the story. So, we don't



always get a great crudité story [chuckle] like the Fetterman one – you guys can look that up if you don't know what I'm talking about – but, but I think we have to kind of take those kinds of polls and those sorts of news stories with a little bit of caution and not just jump in and oh, he's one point higher than he was yesterday. So, I, I want to thank our speakers but before I do I have just a couple of brief announcements as we wrap up here. I want to finally remind folks that we are continuing our tradition of doing an audio and now video essay. We're asking students and people in the University of Delaware community to connect and submit a video or audio recording about our theme which is "Politics by the Numbers," and, and what it means to you to, what have you been, why are you more than a number? You know, we're talking about polls. Why are you more than a Gen Z-er under a particular age in Delaware as a white or male student for example. Why are you more than that? Share a message with our community. We are accepting videos and audio messages through December 9<sup>th</sup>. There is also a competition. We offer awards, cash prizes for, for some of these essays and then we publish them in the spring to, for the University of Delaware to hear, like you were saying, qualitative perspectives, or, or real voices beyond just those numbers that we see in the polls. So I think there's a real value in what you said tonight in that we need to hear the numbers and know like okay what's the bigger picture? What do people, young people think about? But then what are some of those stories that, that resonate. And then I also want to, want to remind folks that some other students in my class are engaging in, around campus, on, in these Free Intelligent Conversations. We had some of these over dinner this evening. Similar to your question on what does a good day look like? These questions come from a non-profit organization that's



intended to help people connect with each other across differences. It doesn't really matter what your party is, or who you voted for but, you know, what's something that moved you today, or what is a childhood memory that really resonates with you? These are the kind of conversations that I think we're all sort of like learning, relearning to have post Covid and in a very polarized world. I keep sort of joking we're learning how to have conversations like in kindergarten [chuckle.] We're relearning how to have, to talk to each other kindly. And then, I just want to say again to, to both of our speakers this wraps up our 12<sup>th</sup> year of National Agenda. Thank you to everyone for being at our events this year. Look forward to our 13<sup>th</sup> year next fall. My DM's are open if you want to follow me at TheDocHoff if you're interested in submitting ideas for speakers or for themes for future years. We're always looking for input from students and from the community. With that I want to give a big Blue Hen thank you to John Della Volpe and Jing-Jing Shen.

AUDIENCE: [Applause.]

MR. DELLA VOLPE: Thank you.

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