



**UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE NATIONAL AGENDA 2020
WE ARE THE PEOPLE**

**Julia Ioffe
Domenico Montanaro
“Interference”**

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, University of Delaware.

Julia Ioffe Correspondent for *GQ Magazine*, former staff writer for *The Atlantic*, and former Russian correspondent for *The New Yorker*, Ioffe is a leading authority on Russian-US relations built on in-depth reporting in Russia. Born in Russia, Ioffe graduated from Princeton University and was a participant in Columbia Journalism School’s Knight Foundation Case Studies Initiative. She won a Fulbright Scholarship to return to Russia in 2009 where she was the Moscow correspondent for *The New Yorker Magazine* and *Foreign Policy*. In 2012 she became senior editor for *The New Republic* in Washington, DC then moved to *The Atlantic* to cover politics and world affairs.

Domenico Montanaro Senior political editor/correspondent for *NPR* in Washington, D.C. Before joining *NPR* in 2015 Montanaro was political director and senior producer for politics and law at *PBS NewsHour*. He is a University of Delaware alum.

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DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening and welcome to the tenth annual National Agenda Speaker Series. I'm Dr. Lindsay Hoffman, Director of the series and Associate Director of the Center for Political Communication. This year's theme calls attention to the power of us, the citizens of the United States. We've held three National Agenda without borders events drawing in nearly 600 viewers from nearly 20 states and four countries. Tonight, we're continuing the conversation about the election and national security as we enter the transition phase between election day and inauguration day with Julia Ioffe and a special appearance by NPR's Domenico Montanaro. As always, National Agenda is about demonstrating civil dialogue and engaging with our UD community. Even though we are virtual we will be asking audience members to submit questions. So, just type your question into Chat and it may be selected during our Q and A at the end of this talk. I also want to welcome our partner university, Professor Maya Hutchins and her students at the University of Florida, and our cosponsor at UD, The Biden School of Public Policy. Tonight, Julia Ioffe, a correspondent with *GQ Magazine*, former staff writer at *The Atlantic* and former Russian correspondent for *The New Yorker*, is a leading authority on Russian-US relations. Ioffe's area of expertise built on years of in-depth reporting in Russia acknowledges Russia's threat against American democracy while placing emphasis on the way the media, both right and left, can cut both over and underestimate Russia's strategic coherence and capabilities. Born in Moscow, Ioffe's family moved to America when she was seven years old as refugees. Welcome Julia.

MS. IOFFE: Hi. Thank you for having me.

DR. HOFFMAN: We also welcome a special guest tonight, *NPR's* senior



political editor and a UD alum, Domenico Montanaro. If you read or listen to his reporting you know he's one of the best at condensing complicated events into a digestible format even in the midst of a global pandemic and historic election. That's why we invited him here for a quick segment I'll call "What the Heck is Going On?" [chuckle]? Welcome fellow Blue Hen Domenico. So, thanks to all the people joining us virtually and to all those who served or continue to serve, happy Veteran's Day. And thanks to the hundreds joining us from 17 states including Delaware, Florida and Arizona. We also welcome folks joining us from the UK, the Netherlands, and Mexico. Thanks to all of you for joining us tonight and this season for important conversations. So, let's start with Domenico.

We are in a fast-paced news cycle. What's going on? What do we need to know about the election, the election results about Trump, about Biden right now at 7:35 p.m. on Wednesday, November 11th?

MR. MONTANARO: And I'm sure you put that in there because you never know what it's going to be at, ah, 8:00 or whatever is going to happen next. I mean, I think the first thing that we have to understand and realize is that Biden won. Like, there's no going to be overturning that, you know, Trump is going to try all of the different things that he can try to do but there isn't a whole lot he can do. I mean, the fact is, Biden has, you know, his margins are too high in, ah, across these states. Even though it's a close election, you know, he's up by 14,000 votes in Georgia, he's up by 40,000 plus in Pennsylvania, you know, 35,000 in Nevada, about 15,000 in Arizona and that's probably going to be about where it is. Maybe a little closer, maybe a little farther apart. Wisconsin, Michigan is 146,000 vote margin. Like, this isn't going to change. You know, recounts will change a few hundred votes if you're lucky. Um, there was a study that showed



between 2000 and 2015 from FairVote that of 27 recounts, ah, they changed an average of 282 votes. And, actually, right now what we're seeing is with a little more than half of the counties certified in Wisconsin, ah, Biden actually picked up 157 votes because, ah, one county sort of, you know, messed up their inputs. But there's no widespread fraud. It's not only is there no evidence of widespread fraud, there is no widespread fraud. Just, this is not something that's happen, that's happened over the years. Once in a while you'll have people, sure, who will fill out the wrong ballot. They put the wrong name. They do something surreptitious but it's not in the magnitude and order it would need to be able to overturn this election. So, President Trump has become the first president in the modern television era to not concede and he hasn't done it so far and I think the piece of this that, you know, that shouldn't be surprising from President Trump. What is, I think continues to be a, a thing that is I guess somewhat surprising is how many Republicans are continuing to enable and coddle this idea? You know, it, it's, they are doing it because they want votes, want Trump votes in this Georgia Senate races that are, these Georgia Senate races that are coming up. Ah, that will determine control of the Senate. But, you know, you have to ask if that's worth your integrity.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I'm going to toss it to Julia. You are an expert interviewer. You have, ah, written for, ah, many longform magazines and including *The Atlantic* and *The Republic*, *The New Yorker*, ah, *GQ*. What questions do you have for Domenico tonight?

MR. MONTANARO: [Chuckle.]

MS. IOFFE: So, Domenico, I'm, you know, long time listener, first time caller here –

MR. MONTANARO: [Chuckle.]

MS. IOFFE: Ah, [chuckle] you know, in our , ah, some of our earlier sessions with the students we were talking about the shy Trump voter and –

MR. MONTANARO: Right.

MS. IOFFE: – and what affect he or she may have had on this election. I was wondering, um, was that a phenomenon in this election as well, and if so, um, what was the magnitude of that phenomenon this, this time around and did it, um, sway the election at all?

MR. MONTANARO: Well, clearly the polls were wrong. And where they were wrong or how they were wrong is that they underrepresented republicans. It's not so much that they got Biden's number wrong because Biden's going to wind up with about 51 percent of the vote. Um, you know, that's pretty close to where the polls have had it: 50, 52, 53, 49. That's all fine. Where it, where the problem is, is, is I think, it's not so much the shy Trump voter – I've talked a republican pollster about this over the last couple of days and I talked to the people who do polling for us at Marist – ah, is it a shy phenomenon? I never thought it was. It's more of a nonresponse thing. So, you know, we all know, if you know Trump people and I know them in my life, I know them from going out and reporting, they hate the media. They hate pollsters. There is a virulent, you know, distrust of what we do. They think we have an agenda. Ah, Trump has, you know, seeded that even more. So, the point is, these are all theories at this point but the first one that I've been looking at and asking pollsters about is what do you do to make up for nonresponse among Trump voters, because I think that it's clear that they're just not picking up the phone or when they do pick up the phone they're talking to them. So, I think that makes it really hard. The other piece of

this election that was tough for pollsters, but they keep coming back to statistically, is the massive amount of early vote. They just had no way, no historical precedent to be able to adjust for all of that early vote. So, they; what they found in their samples, the one consistent thing that they keep seeing is that the, the earlier vote sample they have too many people in their sample saying they were going to vote early. And we know that overwhelmingly those early voters went to Biden. So, you know that really poisoned the well and they didn't have, you know, a historical thing to go off of. Now, the shy Trump voter is still a myth. This idea that; where, where there are shy; what, what; people who support Trump there is some consistency for when they're shy. It's usually, you know, women, more college educated women, um, who when they're around friends and in public don't want to say that they're supporting Trump because of the, you know, the, the fervent disapproval of Trump and the pushback that they'd get and they don't want that confrontation. That's totally understandable. But what I asked one republican pollster was, okay, I get that, but does that mean that they're not telling pollsters that they support Trump. And he said, no, he thinks that – because when we found this in our focus group that we did in Arizona we, it was really funny because we had people – people know focus groups beforehand we know which direction people are going to vote, right? The people watching and reporting on it. So, we knew we had three or four Trump supporters in the group. But when the conversation getting to Trump they kept like qualifying support. And they're like I'm not sure who I'm voting for, right? That's not a shy Trump voter saying to pollsters they're not going to vote for them; they're saying they don't want to say it to a group of people that they're voting for him. Now, I just think overall Trump people distrust the media, distrust

pollsters, and didn't want to talk to them. So, I mean –

MS. IOFFE: So, I have a, I have a follow-up question on that. What about polls done by say *Fox News*? They were also doing –

MR. MONTANARO: Right.

MS. IOFFE: – their polls that also showed Trump far behind.

MR. MONTANARO: Yeah.

MS. IOFFE: Or further behind, um, –

Dm Yeah.

MS. IOFFE: – they don't trust *Fox* pollsters either?

MR. MONTANARO: Well, I mean, I don't know. Trump has sort of made *Fox* part of the lame stream media now, so maybe that's a piece of it. I don't know. Um, you know, I, I think that polls in general have just gotten a bad name from Trump people. This is by no means quantitative what I'm telling you. This is qualitative assessment of really guesses at this point. These, these are hypothesis that have to be studied with some rigor to figure out what actually did go wrong. But there's going to be a reckoning with the polling industry and frankly this time around I put a lot less stock in the polls, in the analysis that I created. Um, I'm glad that my last electoral map really dove into what I felt like was the potential path for President Trump to win. And it came a lot closer than what the polls would show. You know that Pennsylvania was where it was going to come down to. Um, and that there was the path to a 259-259 where Trump would, you know, Trump or Biden would win based on Pennsylvania. The only thing that was, that got thrown off, well not even only, these are important things that were thrown off by that is the diversifying sun belt. And, the fact that Arizona and Georgia, ah, you know, they were both pretty close to what the polls showed,

those two states, ah, basically 50-50 states where Biden came out on top in the end, so far. Um, so those were the two sort of differences. Where we saw the polls way off were in republican states. I mean, just across the board Ohio, Iowa, Missouri, Montana, um, just across the board – Indiana. Indiana was 11 points coming into the election. Um, Montana was within six. Ah, you know, those were blowouts. They were blowouts. They were 20 points or more and I just have to think that that is republicans not talking to pollsters and under sampling of, of republicans. And I really do think data is great, but you can't over rely on data. And I was saying this in 2016. I feel it even more strongly now, that demography is really important. I mean, the reason why democrats are having a hard time in the upper Midwest and Midwest is because all of those states – Ohio, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania – are all majority white non-college voters. So, the voting eligible population is 50 percent or more whites without college degrees. That's Trump's base. And that has flipped away from this lunch pail democratic voter, ah, to, ah, more of a cultural republican voter. Democrats used to get those voters. Now they're getting educated white voters. That's a wholesale change. Republicans used to be the ones who won suburban educated whites. When you're in the middle of a political realignment it's tough to see the forest and I think too many people were looking at the bark on the tree.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, if I can follow-up with you on that, Domenico, before we let you go because I know you have lots of things to do, what do we need to be looking for between now and inauguration day? Like, what normally happens and what do you expect will be different this year?

MR. MONTANARO: Well, a, a lot of things are going to be different. I think that we're still watching for whether or not someone can get to President Trump to take the temperature down, to go out and, either go out and make a concession or just on a paper statement acknowledge that he'll leave on the 20th, ah, or 20, 21st or on, of January. I don't even think that's that important, to be honest. Like, I, I think that there's a national security issue that is important and we saw tonight James Langford, Republican from Oklahoma senator say that if Biden's not getting classified intelligence reports by Friday then he's going to intervene to try to make that happen because the 9/11 Commission did say when they did their report that it's a national security threat. It was a problem for the Bush Administration that the election dragged on, they didn't have a smooth hand-in-glove transition and the country was more at risk than it would have been if there was a smoother transition with cooperation. And when you don't have a smooth transition with cooperation like we're seeing right now, and, you're undercutting what the integrity of the election which is the thing that separates the United States from corrupt countries around the world you're setting up a recipe for a national security disaster. And something that the Russians, the Chinese are perfectly happy with seeing that kind of chaos because it means that a western democracy just doesn't measure up or is just as bad as in authoritarian, ah, you know, country or, ah, you know, one that's a one party rule system. So, that's a big risk but our polarization and the idea of putting the tee shirt on has really made it so difficult for people to get outside of themselves and realize that that's a big potential problem. So, I want to see what happens over the next few weeks. Do Republicans start to get to him, or do they hold this line, ah, that, you know, that they're going to go to court, they're going to let it play out.



Which is fine. You can go to court, um, but that means once you're, you know, you lose then, you know, you move on and accept the results. But that's not something he's given an indication of. I wouldn't bet on him, ah, being gracious about any of this. Um, I would bet on him doing what he did in 2016 and blaming millions and millions of illegal votes and continue out the door doing the same thing. Um, you know, I think that the moves at the Pentagon certainly are raising a lot of eyebrows where you have suddenly people who are loyalists to Trump in some higher level positions – now those aren't positions that are chain of command positions, so my national security reporters tell us, ah – I don't know that much about the Pentagon, to be honest I haven't done that much reporting there -- but, they are saying those are not chain of command positions. So, you know, I think we have to watch that. We have to watch the certifications of votes. Pennsylvania certifies their votes on the 23rd; um, Wisconsin has a very, has the latest certification date, December 1st. There are a bunch of certification dates. This is very normal. Vote counting takes a while. In 2018 there were multiple House races in California that never got called until a few weeks later and it really blunted what was a huge Democratic wave in 2018. Ah, and that's why we've been preaching patience. We've been calling this election season not election day. And, you know, I, I do hope that people remain, ah, patient, see how it's playing out, um, and, you know, stay on top of the lawsuits that Trump has filed, see if they go anywhere. Most of them won't. Um, but, you know, he's going to have his day in court with a lot of those. Ah, and let's see also, I mean, we just hit 10 million Corona virus cases in the United States. Does the lame duck session produce any kind of Corona virus relief package? It was held up by politics; will it pass, ah, this time around. I think those are a few things to watch.



DR. HOFFMAN: Well, thank you so much, Domenico. And welcome back virtually to the University of Delaware, ah, Fightin' Blue Hens –

MR. MONTANARO: I know.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle.]

MR. MONTANARO: We have an alum, we have an alum, who's likely going to be in the White House which is kind of amazing.

DR. HOFFMAN: Delaware is an interesting place to be right now. So –

MR. MONTANARO: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: – thank you so much for being here.

MR. MONTANARO: You're welcome.

DR. HOFFMAN: I'm going to toss it over to Julia now. We're going to talk a little bit about, ah, the election, um, as well as Russian interference, potential Russian interference in the election. So, Julia, 2020 saw over 158 million voters turn out to vote. That amounts to 20 million more Americans than came out in 2016. And more than 71 million voted for President Trump. What brought so many people to vote this year and who were they? What do you know about the voters in 2020?

MS. IOFFE: Oh, I think, ah, you know, I think this is a better question for Domenico, but I think, you know, it's been such a polarizing and heated 4 years. I mean, yeah, I think people who were not interested or following politics at all, ah, before 2016 certainly tuned in and plugged in after 2016. And I think, um, I think a lot of people were mobilized on both sides, I mean, we saw, you know, one extreme example of that was what Stacy Abrams did in, ah, Georgia. You know, after she was burned by, ah, the, by, by Kemp who was then the Secretary of State of Georgia, you know, um, turning away a lot of voters, um,

and purging voter rolls. She decided like that was the way forward and I think that's historically what we've seen as Democrats try to turnout more voters and, ah, Republicans try to, ah, tamp that down. Right? Um, so she turned out 800,000 new voters in Georgia. I mean, that's a massive, massive number. Um, but I think you just saw a really energized electorate on both sides and especially given that this election was framed as an existential struggle again on both sides. You know, vote like your life depends on it because it does was the Democrat, Democratic message. Um, and, on the right it was, the message was they're coming for your home, they're coming for your neighborhood, they're, this is that, like, an existential threat to the American way of life, the Joe Biden is going to bring in socialism. So. It was this is kind of like apocalyptic millenarian messaging that I think, um, motivated a lot of people as did I think, ah, the Corona virus which, ah, helped a lot of states open, you know, open voting, make it more easy. Like, I live in DC. DC just sent out absent, you know, mail in ballots to everybody. You didn't even have to ask for it and you could drop it off, you could mail it in. You know, a lot of other, or a few other states did that. And it did make voting a lot easier than it normally is, I think. Right? Um, usually it's on a Tuesday. A lot of people work. A lot of lower income people you know, ah, you know don't, might not even know what their schedule is, ah, you know, a couple of days in advance let alone be able to take several hours to stand in line, you know, at a crowded election center on Tuesday. And this time you had weeks and weeks to vote and by the time election, actual election day rolled around it was, you know, something like 100 million Americans had already voted. And election day ended up being kind of the end of the election as opposed to, um, as opposed to the actual day when voting happens.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, one thing we know is that young people turned out in particular in great numbers, ah, this year. And a focus group conducted the day after election day by Georgetown University, moderators were surprised at how young people were willing to say I'm not sure my individual vote is swinging an election but I'm doing it because I think I'm going to be the deciding vote by casting my ballot even if it's not the make or break vote, it's at least sending the message that I care. So, what role did young people play in this election?

MS. IOFFE: So, I think a lot. Again, voting was a lot easier for people this year. I think that it's traditionally been very hard for young people to vote; they're still moving around, they're maybe in college, they haven't registered to vote in the new place where they're going to college, or they just you know left college and are moving around to different cities. They don't where, you know, where they're going to put down roots. I think, um, ironically the pandemic and the measures taken for, um, to allow for absentee voting, mail in voting made it easier for a lot of young people. Also, I think just the issues, um, really animated people I think. A lot of, um, you know, we see the younger generation just seems to be more politically engaged than my generation ever was. You know, I remember I was in college when we invaded Iraq and um, you know, no one batted an eye, nobody really cared, and the younger generation just seems to be more active, more engaged. I think, um, the sense I get is that they feel they were, you know, sold a false bill of goods, that you know unlike for other generations where each successive generation has it better than the parent, their parents' generation, um, the younger generation is footing the bill for a lot of what their parents and grandparents did and had. You know, climate change. You know, the bill has kind of coming due on that. Um, political polarization, ah, racial

injustice. You know, all these things are kind of coming to a head as a lot of young people are coming of age. And again, I think there was also, you know, a lot of, a lot of work done to, um, get them to register to vote and to actually get out and vote and cast a ballot.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, um, the *New York Times* reported today that election officials in dozens of states representing both political parties said there was no evidence that fraud or other irregularities played a role in the outcome of the presidential race amounting to a forceful rebuke of President Trump's portrait of a fraudulent election. And I'd like, if Domenico can join us again, to talk about how we also see a poll from YouGov, and *The Economist* came out today to demonstrate that there's not a lot of confidence in the results of the election. Indeed, 86 percent of Trump supporters said that Biden did not legitimately win the election and 73 percent said we'll never know the real outcome of this election. How does this lack of confidence particularly among the president's supporters impact the transition to a Biden White House? I'll put that to you, Domenico.

MR. MONTANARO: Does that mean we're all, does that mean we're allowed to, ah, quote, quote polls again?

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. IOFFE: [Laughter.]

MR. MONTANARO: I [chuckle], I have such, I have poll-t-s-d right now. It's like it's too much. But, but look –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] -s-d. That's good. [Laughter.]

MR. MONTANARO: I –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] –

MR. MONTANARO: [Chuckle] I think that, um, even anecdotally, I mean, yeah, I mean, Trump supporters don't trust the results of the election. Um, I think that that number of the 86 percent's probably, you know, about right. Plus, we're right in the middle of the heat of it and they have a person that they're leading, who their leader is who they listen to telling them that it's fraudulent. So, that's why the peaceful transfer of power is so important in this country and why it's been such an important thing since the mid-19th century or so to have leaders and, you know, have changes in this country where you don't have coups, where you don't have, ah, you know, civil unrest, ah, because you have leaders who take the temperature down. And it's the same thing with mask wearing. If Trump went out there and said definitively everyone should wear a mask, just wear a mask, go, when you go to the store; it's inconvenient, yes, but look I'm wearing one, I'm taking it off to talk but I'm going to put one back on when I leave. Like, this won't be forever, this is just to get... You know, if he did all of that and took the temperature down guarantee you the polls would show more Trump voters, ah, supportive of wearing masks. It's the same thing with, with, with accepting outcome of an election and I think that's the most dangerous thing right now in this country is if you can't agree on a shared set of facts, you can't have a society. And I think that that is a really dangerous place because, yes, we've had politicians of all stripes undermine the media and say the media, you know, I mean go back to Spiro Agnew and watch his, um, you know, television conferences about how much TV has changed, ah, you know, the news and they're just out for ratings and how terrible they are. All that's true but now were so fractured that there is no one voice that people trust and listen to in the media. And it, it, they are, if, it's like everything is confirmation bias. If I believe

something I can find a link for it and therefore you're wrong. And there's such an anti-elitism growing out of the populist right that started with Sarah Palin frankly, ah, that it, it, it has really ripped apart the idea that you're right about something so you should then be humbled, realize you're wrong and change based on the facts. Right? Like, I guess I grew up, I grew up in New York so it's like a, an argumentative – I grew up in New York in an Italian family so it's like an argumentative place but nobody's feelings could be hurt if you were wrong. Like, that was the rule. [Chuckle] you know, like, you could listen to sports radio and you could be all fired up and angry and then if you got proven wrong, you know, you had to sort of walk away, tail between your legs. That doesn't happen anymore. Now, you, you want to be right you can stick to it and somebody's going to tell you you are. And I think that's really dangerous. It's really dangerous for a society if one plus one equals three, ah, for one person and one plus one equals two for another. It's just, you, you can't, you can't maintain a society that way and I, I don't know. My dad's a lot more optimistic than I am. He's an immigrant and has been here for 50 plus years. And still thinks this is the greatest country on earth and you know, you know, that we'll get through this and whatever. But, you know, it's a, it's a, it's a more polarized time even than, you know, the 1960's when he came here and the 1970's after Watergate.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, it's interesting you bring up that optimism thing because Julia, ah, we were talking about our students earlier about being optimistic versus pessimistic. Julia, what are your thoughts on looking at the United States right now and being an optimistic versus a pessimistic immigrant or a refugee coming from the, from Russia?

MS. IOFFE: Yeah, well, you know, when I, ah, moved back to the



States in 2012, um, after living there and reporting from there, um, I got here just in time for the 2012 presidential election, um, and I remember a fellow, you know, Moscow correspondent who had also just moved back messaging me that day and saying isn't weird not to know who's going to win? Like it's so unusual. We're not used to that after elections in Russia. And, I remember, you know, covering Obama's second inauguration and being pretty close up to the stage and, ah, Republican Lamar Alexander, um, from Tennessee giving a short very grudging, ah, ah, speech, like kind of through gritted teeth saying, you know, the thing that really sets this country apart from other countries is the fact that we have a peaceful transfer of power. And, um, again, I had just come from a country that witnessed crazy kind of once in a generation protests over Putin kind of coming back to office that I just, you know, in spite of myself I was standing there crying listening to Lamar Alexander talk about a peaceful transfer of power. He is, believe me, not a very riveting or emotionally kind of grabbing, um, speaker. And I have been thinking about that moment in the last couple of days. You know, Domenico was saying it's dangerous that we can't all agree on what one plus one equals and, um, the fact that we're so polarized. You know, I, what I worry about is, like, I, I understand people trying to take down the temperature and trying to get people to remain calm and saying don't worry, like, the election is clear; Biden did win; he is going to be President come January; most of these suits don't have merits, ah, merit. Yet, probably, but as other people have pointed out, you know, saying that this just an attempted coup and not this coup, attempted coup won't be successful is also not very soothing or calming. Um, it's not just that we can't agree on what one plus one equals. It's that we live in this separate information bubbles and, ah, studies done by the Pew Research Center

have shown this for years and years now that, um, especially, ah, media consumers who identify as conservative or republican are increasingly sealed off in their own, um, informational media bubble where the facts don't align with what the rest of us are reading, and seeing, and, and, ah, hearing. Um, they're talking about different personalities, different scandals, and different – it, it's like they're watching a different, you know, soap with –

DR. HOFFMAN: Liberals are doing the same thing though. I mean, it's, it's –

MS. IOFFE: Um, no, because they actually according to a lot of these studies, ah, liberals consume a pretty diverse diet of media. Right? They, so if you look at liberals and like liberal patterns of media consumption, they're, it's very, it's like a, like the chart looks like a, lots of little balls, right? It's like some people say *CNN* is their primary choice, for others it's *NPR* or the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Whereas, if you look at the right side of the spectrum, it's just all *Fox News* with like a few others, right? It's like a very unified media space and it's not just that Donald Trump is telling people that the election isn't, ah, that we may never know who won, and that it was stolen, that Joe Biden didn't really win, it's also that *Fox News*, who apparently is now not loyal enough to Trump, Fox News is repeating this too. I mean, Laura Ingraham yesterday had this like shadowy figure alleging that he, um, saw a, a bunch of election, electoral fraud. We saw yesterday a story in the *Washington Post* that GOP donors were paying ah, money to a man to, for him to come out and say that he participated in voting fraud. Like, this is having an impact and even if Joe Biden is sworn in and even though he won and even though he's eventually going to be president and he's going to get those briefings and he's going to get

the keys to the castle as it were, um, the damage that they're doing is I believe irreparable. Um, you know, I think, you have to remember how Donald Trump got his political start. It was to undermine the legitimacy of Barack Obama and to say that he never could have even been elected president because he wasn't even born here. And nothing, the way he kind of pinched it, um, and I must say by the way that Melania Trump part, actively participated in that hoax to use his language as she is participating in this one, um, you know, there was, and after that point there was absolutely nothing you could say or show to people who believed that, mostly on the right, that would, ah, convince them otherwise. Obama, you know, produced a, a birth certificate and that still wasn't enough because that wasn't the point. The point is our team does not believe that this team gets the ball now and until our team gets the ball we're going to say that the ref is unfair and that the game is rigged and that the field is kind of tilted and um, you know, the planets aren't aligning right, and everybody's biased against us. But when we get the, you know, when we get the ball everything is fine.

DR. HOFFMAN: Is that new? Is that new though or do both parties play that game?

MS. IOFFE: I don't, honestly, I don't see both parties playing that game. I think Democrats do this thing of, you know, we're the nice guys, we're the civilized guys, we play by the rules, um, we're not going to play the dirty games that politics, ah, that Republicans play. I mean, of course, some do but it's not, you know, it's not with the same kind of finesse and zest and scale at which, ah, Republicans are doing it. Um, you know, I also think we have Newt Gingrich to, I think again, politics has always been a contact sport and a bloody one at that especially in America but I think this recent era we can really thank, you know,

Newt Gingrich and Roger Ailes for and Newt Gingrich as we know is very, you know is a close Trump adviser in 2016 and is still very much part of that orbit. You know, he brought this kind of warfare, ah, war, warfare-style politics to the American political system. That's it's all just about winning and losing and teams and anything goes. We're seeing it a little bit, honestly, with the Lincoln Project which has been one of the most fascinating things for me to watch. It's a bunch of, um, Republicans and former Republicans who are producing ads, right, that are just vicious, and they come out with them so fast. You know, when, ah, Trump refused to say anything or to condemn the, um, bounties allegedly that the Kremlin was paying to the Taliban to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan, ah, you know, they produced an ad completely in Russian, in excellent Russian – they found some wonderful film narrator to produce it – I mean these are vicious ads and I'm just like, wow, okay, at least they're, you know, now we see how it works. Um, it's just amazing to see them firing at what was once their own side. But I, and I think a lot of Democrats are also watching them being like, okay, wow, at least they're not firing at us this time, but this is like wow, that's really mean.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and I should point out, ah, that U, University of Delaware is the epicenter of politics. Steve Schmidt [chuckle] is also a UD alum, ah, who ran McCain's campaign and is part of the Lincoln Project. We have Domenico is back joining us and I want to ask both of you, there's a question from one of my students Lauren (sp?). She's been thinking a lot about how American individualism has been contributing to the spread of Corona virus and America's unwillingness to make small sacrifices for the greater good. Ah, Julia, you wrote an article in March, ah, about the same idea and you ended by saying,

“I wish more Americans would understand that our rugged individualism in the face of illness is sometimes just plain selfishness.” What do you think that America individualism, why do you think American individualism varies from other countries individualistic tendencies? So, we can bring Domenico back into the conversation too. That would be great.

MS. IOFFE: Well --

DR. HOFFMAN: Start with Julia.

MS. IOFFE: So, you know, I, I, I'm thinking about that now especially as I'm watching, you know, on my social media feeds all, especially on Instagram for example, all my friends in Moscow partying and going to theaters and rock concerts, um, and having house parties and traveling as if nothing ever happened. And they are, you know, when I try to ask them why they're not wearing masks, why they're not social distancing, why they're doing all these, um, indoor activities that to me just seem unthinkable now after, you know, however, nine months of the pandemic; they say, you know, it, life has to go on; you can't, um, be like half dead half alive because you don't have a life; it's fate. You know, this is a kind of fatalistic approach, right? The end result is, is similar. And the states is just like don't tread on me thing and you won't tell me what to do and I've assessed the risks, and I don't really trust science, and, or experts, and it's something I think, you know, to [indiscernible] about this kind of again distrust of experts and eggheads and people who think they're smarter than me; and like don't you dare tell me what to do. Um, I think the result is similar just like a different starting point but they're both pretty dangerous I think.

DR. HOFFMAN: You have to come and teach, talk to my media in politics class because [chuckle] the things you're talking about are so relevant to my

class. Ah, Domenico, do you have thoughts on American individualism and Corona virus?

MR. MONTANARO: Yeah, I mean [sigh], you know, I think I mentioned a little bit of it earlier where if President Trump would, you know, come forward and give them license to feel like it was okay to do so then they wouldn't, you know, feel like they were so put upon. Um, you know, they don't want to listen to the scientists. Ah, you know, I mean Trump has made Fauci an enemy now, Dr. Fauci. You know, um, and so it, that's, that's where we are. I mean, I, I feel like [sigh] if you, I feel like we do have a strain in this country of that kind of individualism and a feeling of liberty and when, you know, you could argue it's really just people not wanting to be uncomfortable.

MS. IOFFE: Yeah.

MR. MONTANARO: I mean –

MS. IOFFE: Hey, and, and I, I, I just want to say, I don't think individual, individualism is, you know, a priori bad. I think it's, this is like a twisted version of it and when I wrote it back in March I didn't realize that masks would become this potent political symbol, right, of like our team just doesn't wear masks and we're manly men and like courageous women. Ah, we don't wear masks. And it's just like sissy liberals who do, right? That it's just like, it becomes yet another kind of partisan totem that, um, separates you from the other team. The problem is that these are, you know, it results in life and death consequences. Um, you know, talking to one of the scientist doctors at the University of Washington – which is if you recall one of the nation's very first hot spot in Seattle – he said, you know, um, there's a reason that the virus kind of maps, especially after the first wave, maps so neatly onto the electoral map because it's all, it all, it's not really about

testing even anymore. It's about choices. It's about where we go and don't go. Um, you saw, for example, that wedding in Maine where eight people ended up dying who didn't even go to the wedding because the people that went to the wedding spread it around their community. That biker rally in South Dakota that resulted in hundreds of cases of Corona virus, right? And I think people have, like, Domenico said, it's really irresponsible messaging from the top. If Trump just said, like, look just wear masks and go to your bike rally or whatever just wear a mask, it would be a totally different picture but it just becomes this kind of again, this yet another, um, kind of jersey, team jersey that you wear or don't wear.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, I, I wish he had just, like, said everyone wear a, a mask that's a flag, an American flag on your face and just be patriotic about it. Like this is about –

MS. IOFFE: And there, and there are some people who do wear masks that say – I think, Kelly Loeffler the other day was wearing a mask that said Trump. But it's just – personally I don't really understand why he's –

MR. MONTANARO: Julia, I think Julia, you hit on it though. It's this, you know, it's this masculinity, it's this macho attitude. You know, I, I find it totally ironic that Trump plays that now at the end of his songs, you know, that, or events where he's playing Macho Man where we can get into all of the psychology behind the wrong use of that but [laughter] you know, but he's, but he's, you know, he also used to use You Can't Always Get What You Want as his, you know, close song. So –

MS. IOFFE: [Indiscernible] makes sense. [Indiscernible] –

MR. MONTANARO: – reporting or it's just like yeah, just owning everybody

right? Like, you know, own the Libs, like that's the idea. Just like, it just becomes I'm right, you're wrong, you know, thumbs up thumbs down, coliseum, sort of, ah, culture and you know that's, that's not really a way to govern. I mean, the only way that you're going to get anything done in that kind of hyperpolarized environment, which is by the way the only way anything has ever gotten done is to have numbers. I mean, just to have raw political power and numbers. I mean, the Affordable Care Act doesn't get through without the, a Democratic Senate, a Democratic House, and, you know, a 60 of the vote to be able to push it through and beat a, a filibuster which maybe that'll get blown up.

MS. IOFFE: Can I ask you –

MR. MONTANARO: I mean, I –

MS. IOFFE: Can I ask you a follow-up to that? You know, um, we got, you know, a, the Affordable Care Act got pushed through as I understand it from, with a House that was pre- the 2010 redistricting right?

MR. MONTANARO: Yeah.

MS. IOFFE: Like, with the redistricting and the gerrymandering that's happening and more, like, these really grotesque districts –

MR. MONTANARO: Um-hum.

MS. IOFFE: – just sprouting up all over the country, um, is that even going to be possible especially with this, you know, these parallel non-intersecting informational spaces where the other side can bring out 71 million people to vote for this –

MR. MONTANARO: Yeah.

MS. IOFFE: – right? Um, so –

MR. MONTANARO: Well, I think –

MS. IOFFE: – are those numbers even possible anymore?

MR. MONTANARO: I don't, I mean, you know, Democrats first of all missed a huge opportunity in this election because the legislatures that they lost and didn't pick up are going to be the legislatures that draw the districts that we're going to be dealing with for the next decade. So, you know, here we are again in that sense. The other problem is that Democrats, you know, I mean this has been beaten, you know, to a pulp probably, but Democrats assorted themselves into the cities and coasts so it's a lot easier to draw a little circle around, ah, you know, 15 apartment buildings where 25,000 people live as opposed to, you know, a huge area or dividing up blocks easily. You know, there has been a movement for, um, you know, independent commissions in some places, ah, but you know, with federalism people are going to do it how they want, where they want.

MS. IOFFE: Um-hum.

MR. MONTANARO: Ah, so, you know, I, I don't know if that answers your exact question but um, I think –

MS. IOFFE: I guess the answer is no?

MR. MONTANARO: Yeah, I guess not. [Laughter.]

MS. IOFFE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MR. MONTANARO: I don't know, I mean, the thing is sometimes redistricting can backfire. Like, you can take it too far to the point where you stretch things out because there's, there's two ways you, you redistrict and gerrymander really. You pack and you crack. So, you know, a city like Austin, Texas has been cracked. It doesn't have one congressperson who represents Austin.

They've taken like bits of Austin and shouted out to Tyler and, you know, shouted out West. Or, you know, like, that's where they've just diffusing. Sometimes what they do like in North Carolina, which was a district that was racially gerrymandered and, and taken out, looked like a snake going through one piece of, of the, of the state where they basically picked up every black person along the highway and, ah, and surrounding areas and said okay, you've got one district. And, you know, but what can happen is when you stretch it so far if the demography changes you can wind up shooting yourself in the foot and you know you take a risk, you know, where you had a 53-47 district and now all of a sudden it changes a couple points and your 50-50 and you could lose. So, you know, those are some of the, the balancing acts that they are going to have to weigh.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, if I can shift topics a little bit. We had a question from the audience which I think is on point, ah, because we did advertise this discussion as being about Russian interference, um, but the election has kind of taken on a new, ah, attention level. Um, but I'll direct this to, to Julia. Um, there's a lot of evidence that Russia infiltrated the election infrastructure in 2016. What do you know about how Russia was involved in this most, most recent election?

MS. IOFFE: Ah, I don't know how much we know actually. I mean, it just seems like they were doing a, a bit more of the same. But, I think, you know, talking about Russian interference is very much kind of fighting the last war. I think what really changed in this election – well, and the other thing is, I'll, I'll say is that the Russians are trying to be a bit more careful about it and you see, for example, how they're packaging the fact that, ah, Vladimir Putin has yet to

congratulate, ah, Joe Biden. And today, for example, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia said, you know, we're not even going to talk to the Biden transition team; we're not talking to the transition team's anymore until a new president is sworn in in January then we'll talk to them because last time we tried to do this in 2016 you guys made us out to be these kind of spymasters and doing all these nefarious things when actually what we were doing we were just, um, basic diplomatic activities. Ah, I don't know how true that is, but I think it is a, um, a masterful way of kind of spinning the American narrative, um, for their own purposes. Um, I think what's very different, what was very different in this election than in 2016 and in the aftermath of 2016 when we were obsessing over Russian interference and who was a Russian spy or influence peddler or, you know, which Facebook group or ad was actually backed by Russia or paid for in Rubles, or had funny grammar that looked a lot like Russian grammar, um, is that Donald Trump threw it wide open and the fact that there were no real consequences for him for inviting openly on camera inviting Russian interference during the 2016 campaign, ah, and then saying again openly, China, you want to help me out? You know? Ah, Ukraine you want to help me? He was impeached, if you recall um, earlier this year, the outgoing president was impeached for soliciting, for actually for blackmailing the new president of Ukraine to help him, ah, win or provide him with Kompromat or blackmail on, um, Joe Biden so that he could win the election if, you know, if Ukraine wanted to see the aid that we the US taxpayers paid for and our representatives in Congress had allotted. So, and then he was acquitted by the Senate. So, you know, what we found out, you know, *NPR* actually did some great reporting on this in the months leading up to the election. We saw the Colombian government,

you know, interfering and selling ads or broadcasting ads in the Miami area saying that Biden was a socialist. Um, this was the kind of right leaning government of Colombia trying to sway the Latino vote for Trump in the crucial state of Florida. Ah, we saw that the Iranians were meddling in this election. The Chinese were meddling in the election. The Russians were still doing what they were doing but now it was just thrown right open because a) there were no consequences for Trump; and b) I mean, do remember when he [indiscernible] – and so many crazy things have happened in the last four years – but do you remember when he said sitting in the Oval Office, I mean he said it to George Stephanopoulos on camera he said, yeah, you know, when he was asked would you take foreign help to win your election and he said absolutely. And, if you're the leader of a foreign country or the leader of a foreign intelligence service you'd be an idiot not to take him up on that .

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Well, we had to say goodnight to Domenico. Um, unfortunately he had to leave. But it was so nice to have him here. I have a question, a follow-up question on that. What happens after a Trump presidency? Where does he go? Where do his supporters go, and do you think he'll run again in 2024?

MS. IOFFE: I think, I worry actually. Um, again, I think goes to the first question we started with about, you know, the vast majority of republicans believing that he, that Joe Biden is not the real winner of the election and that we may never know who won as if it's just some like unknowable, um, galactic secret. Um, I think he's going to continue playing spoiler both for Democrats and for, um, [laughter] – I just saw someone add to the Chat we hope he'll go to jail. I doubt that. I doubt he'll be going to jail. I doubt a Biden Department of Justice

would want to set that precedent. Um, I don't know that they would maybe get in the way of kind of regional branches going after him, but I think they're probably going to discourage them from, ah, prosecuting Trump or the Trump family because of the precedent it sets. And again, it goes against this kind of, um, let's lower the temperature, let's come together which is a very admirable message but I don't think the, um, people who follow Trump are going to heed that message. I don't think right wing media is going to heed that message. I think, um, Trump still has his Twitter feed which he grew exponentially in the four years that he was, ah, in office. I think he's going to, I mean, he's talked about continuing doing rallies which let, like, forget the fact that they're super spreader events and many, you know, hundreds of infections have been linked to them. He's going to continue having these rallies. He's thinking about running for 2024 and even, even if he doesn't run in 2024 that means he's going to be sticking sticks in the spokes of Republicans wheels. You know, um, all the people who thought they were going to run in 2024 like, um, it's not – what is her name, from the former UN Ambassador – Nikki Halley – you know, if, if the former President and this kind of cult hero of the right is constantly, like, I'm going to run, I'm going to run everybody, people are going to be scared to run. So, I don't think that's going to be really great for, um, I think that that's going to be terrible for Republicans as well. But I also think he's going to continue rallying the troops to continue to delegitimize the Biden presidency and to give, which will also give cover to people like Mitch McConnell, who is not you know the most cooperative guy on earth, and I think that, um, the next four years are not going to be that great. I don't think the Biden administration is going to get a lot done. I think Republicans in Congress are not going to be wanting to cooperate with him

especially when Trump continues to whip up their base, maybe even ah, turning the base against them, threatening to primary them. I mean, they'll see how much power he still has but I don't see him going away any time soon unfortunately.

DR. HOFFMAN: Let's --

MS. IOFFE: [Indiscernible] bode well for our system.

DR. HOFFMAN: Let's think about it, I mean, he won the most votes of any presidential candidate ever except for Joe Biden. So, I mean, it's, there are a huge number of people who still support him.

MS. IOFFE: [Indiscernible.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Um, let's get some questions in the cue for the Q and A. I'm going to wrap up my last questions with you and then we're going to welcome questions from the audience. So, please, if you want to use the Chat function you can enter your questions there. And some of my students are going to be your audience surrogates who will ask you, ask questions of Julia on your behalf. Um, let's get a little bit more personal. Ah, Emma, one of my students asked, she said, I read your piece about your experience with Corona virus and I'm so sorry for all that you've gone through. Would you mind sharing more about your experience getting the Corona virus and what you took away from it?

MS. IOFFE: Um, thank you so much for asking about that. Um, I'm thankfully feeling a lot better. Ah, it was just a very bizarre experience, a) because I never once tested positive and was diagnosed clinically because there was basically every doctor I saw or spoke to said I'm not really sure what else this could be but it was this kind of very long – we talked about this earlier I think with your class – um, it was just weird. It was like nothing I'd ever had before

and I think there was this, it really cured me of this kind of um, this fallacy that I think a lot of us are living with which is like, well, if I'm not going to die, right, if I'm a young healthy person, if I'm not going to die I'm not really that scared of it and why should I curtail my life all that much? Well, you probably won't die of it, that's true, but, um, I feel like two months have just kind of dropped out of my life which is a long time when, especially when you're in it and, like, I think a lot of people have this rollercoaster experience with Covid where you um, you don't feel that bad and then suddenly you crash and then you feel like you're feeling a lot better and you're almost recovered and then you crash again harder. And, um, you're sick for so long that people don't really feel like, you know, even checking up on you anymore because it's kind of boring. And it's not as, you know, and not as acute, right? So, you're in this, like, be, being sick for such a long time, um, and then taking so long to recover again is like no other illness I've ever had and again, it kind of, I mean, belatedly cured me of, you know, of that kind of, um, idea that if I'm not going to die it's not a big deal.

DR. HOFFMAN: Wow. Well, okay, so, usually at this point we jump into the audience Q and A and I'm seeing lots of questions coming in on our Chat. Um, we have some producers on the back end who are monitoring all these questions and assigning them to our students. So, the Q and A is a little different this year obviously. Um, we're reading through your questions in the Chat. There is still time to submit them if you want to submit a question. And for each question chosen one of my students in the National Agenda class will read the question. And so, we're going to start with Angelina (sp?). Angelina, what's our first question from the audience?

ANGELINA: Elaine (sp?) from Florida asks, do you think that the

amount of people who say that they don't think Biden won the election are participating in partisan cheerleading or is the right wing media, Fox, social media groups, and other fringe outlets trapping people into actually believe this?

MS. IOFFE: I think unfortunately it's the latter. Um, and I also don't know that there's even a, I think it's a distinction without a difference. I don't think there is a distinction to be made. You know, at what point does partisan cheerleading if it affects the way you treat the incoming president and see the political system as a whole and the lack of trust you have in it, at what point do, do your intentions or your kind of secret motivations stop mattering. Um, and I think they don't really matter much at all. I think it really undermines trust in the integrity of our institutions which again a lot of the, you know, a lot of the, ah, wonderfully optimistic people have said, you know, but it's okay, the institutions will save us. Well, it's been four years and the, a lot of the institutions have been really badly damaged and institutions aren't magic, ah, magic things that are, you know, they're not like you know those super heroes who can like just shoot out this like magic shield and nothing can go through it. That's not what, an institution is not, in some ways just the people like the norms, the laws, and the people who are in it. And if, you know, all the norms are broken and people are driven out and replaced with loyalists, um, and nobody trusts what they do or say outside of them I don't know, you know, how meaningful they are. So, you know, we keep falling back on this word, you know, this magic word, like it's our safety word but I think at some point, um, if you erode trust in these institutions they're not going to save us anymore.

DR. HOFFMAN: The pessimist as always [chuckle.]

MS. IOFFE: I'm sorry [chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. IOFFE: I would love to be wrong. I hope I am wrong. I would love nothing more than to eat my words. Ah, but so far it's been pretty grim and I, you know –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] –

MS. IOFFE: – [indiscernible] [chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: You made a good point earlier is that, I mean, we can have trust in these institutions but ultimately these institutions are filled with human beings who are flawed and who could make bad [indiscernible] –

MS. IOFFE: And who are vulnerable, and who are vulnerable, who have mortgages, who have children to provide for, um, who have people dependent on them and who maybe don't have lots of other career opportunities. You know, if you're a top DOJ official and you quit in protest I'm sure some white shoe law firm is going to pick you up and pay you handsomely but if you're, you know, somebody lower down in a, a less kind of sexy agency or one that's less kind of in the spotlight and, and you're in an area like in an economically depressed area what, you know, what other options do you have? So, again, you know, people have weak spots and they're not these superhero, they're not superheroes and it's, and institutions aren't a superpower.

DR. HOFFMAN: We're all human. I think, um, sometimes we don't recognize that and we think people are elected to office or elected to, ah, whatever position they're in or selected to be in that position and somehow like you said they're super heroes but they are also still human. They're subject to the same fears and, um, you know –

MS. IOFFE: Weaknesses.

DR. HOFFMAN: Weaknesses, [chuckle] exactly. All right, so, I'm going to move on to our next student questioner who's going to ask a question for our audience. Ah, my student Julie is here to ask a question of you..

JULIE: Pierre Bono (sp?) asks, from your perspective how would you assess Putin and where does he fall on the spectrum of strategic competence?

DR. HOFFMAN: So, we have a Putin question. You are no longer really doing a lot of –

MS. IOFFE: No, that's okay. Um, –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] on Putin but you are an expert so if you can give us some –

MS. IOFFE: Sure. So, I think he is, I think it depends, ah, and it depends who you're comparing him to and, um, you know, if you're measuring him against the figure that, ah, many of my colleagues in the media drew of him in 2017, 2018, no, he is not that brilliant strategist who makes, um, detailed and elaborate plans and then has the capacity to execute them flawlessly. He is not that person. And, ah, in fact, lots of phenomenal reporting has been done including, ah, by my friend Michael Schwartz at the *New York Times* about how some of, and, and by *Bellingcat* – this wonderful, um, body of investigative journalists in Europe – about, you know, how with that kind of strategy and the nefarious [indiscernible] are undermined by the incompetence like, ah, GRU officers on their way to execute a mission leaving taxi receipts behind that have the point of origin as the GRU headquarters. So, um, there's that. But then if you're talking, if you're comparing him against Trump then, yeah, he is a master strategist, ah, of Machiavellian and Kissingerian (sp?) proportions. Um, I think he

was doing laps around our outgoing president and it shows, um, in our foreign policy.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. We've got lots of questions coming in so let's keep cycling through. My students are going to ask the questions for our audience. Next up is Eleni (sp?). Eleni, what's our audience question?

ELENI: Jim Parks asks, do you think it's possible that Trump will resign, and Pence will pardon him, and does Ford's pardon makes a precedent for this year?

MS. IOFFE: No, I don't think that's going to happen. I think [chuckle], um, I think he is not going to resign. Um, so many people have been expecting him to resign for four years, you know. Um, early on people were saying: oh, look he doesn't like this job, he hates the White House, he didn't expect it to be this hard, he's going to resign. Here we are. Um, oh, he doesn't want to be impeached, he's going to resign. Here we are. I think, um, I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist. I don't want to diagnose him, but it does seem that Donald Trump has a personality that is very similar to a narcissistic personality and he talks about it all the time. He doesn't want to be the loser. Ah, when his oldest son, Donald Trump, Jr. was born and his first wife Ivana wanted to name him Donald after his father, Donald Trump said, no we can't name him that because what if he's a loser. Um, so I don't think – yeah, it's a wonderful story – so –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. IOFFE: – yeah. Um, I, I think a resignation of any, um, any kind would be a capitulation and an, you know, labeling of himself as a loser and I don't think he can survive that. I mean, he can't even take losing an election. I don't, like, I don't know how we're going to get him out of the White House to be

honest. So, I don't think resignation is on the, is on the table unfortunately.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. All right. Well let's move on. We've got –

MS. IOFFE: [Indiscernible] is just like a ray of sunshine here.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.] You are. You know, it's, it's okay I think to offer a pessimistic viewpoint of things that are happening. I think as we talked about earlier, you know, I'm the eternal optimist so in some ways I really enjoy speaking with someone who's like, actually this could go really south from here on out. Um, I think we can have a little dose of both. So, I –

MS. IOFFE: I do have say that, like, in my life I'm an eternal optimist. Like, I don't, um, I, I don't get super pessimistic about my life and what's around me and I, I think that is kind of a, um, product of my privilege. But I do think, um, and I think optimism plays a really important role because if you have a country full of pessimists then you get Russia and then nothing can ever get done and, and also like compared to, ah, Americans, Russians think I'm an eternal optimist and just ridiculous, right? So, like talking to my Russian friends who, you know, would complain about a job or a relationship, I'm like, well get out, get a new job, find a new boyfriend, right? And they were like what are you talking about? Everything's going to be terrible forever and, um, I should just resign myself to my fate. Whereas, Americans have this kind of can-do optimism and I think that's really, really important and this country would not be built or be what it is without it. But I think we are in a period of time where I don't even think it's pessimism, I think it's realism and I think it's not about just, you know, inventing kind of worse case scenarios, it's about looking reality in the face, looking at what Trump and his team are capable of, and what they're likely to do and being prepared as opposed to kind of being blindsided and shocked and upset every

time.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Well, and I think it's important to recognize that, you know, our history in the United States and of course in many other countries is like it's not all puppies and rainbows [chuckle], like, we, we do approach hard times. I think a lot of my college students right now are sort of like dumbfounded by what we're experiencing and I myself am too. I mean, I'm a, a Gen-Xer, Xennial – whatever you want to call it – and it's not something we've really experienced before.

MS. IOFFE: No.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um, but I think it's important for us to kind of recognize like things can go south quickly –

MS. IOFFE: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – and badly. And so, like what are your suggestions for young people about what they should do to kind of deal with this sort of angst and the stress during this time?

MS. IOFFE: Um, if I'm honest, I admire the younger generation kind of coming up behind us so much I wish that I were part of that generation. You know, I, seeing how politically engaged they are, how active they are, how just plugged in and how – I mean this word has gotten a, you know, has gotten batted around and been badly damaged – but how woke they are. Um, you know, they make me feel like an old fogey that has to kind of keep catching up and evolving my understanding. I think they're just, they're already on the right path and I think they're probably more realistic than our generation was in terms of what the world and this country can offer them and what their prospects are. In terms of my advice, I would say, um, learn to be flexible and tough and, um, think outside

the box in terms of what your, ah, career might look like or what your life might look like and understand that it might not be the cookie cutter life or even what you imagined for yourself and kind of roll with it and don't dwell on how things could have been or should have been.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right, that's great. Let's move to our next, ah, student questioner, Mayzie (sp?). What's your question from the audience?

MAYZIE: This question is from Sharon at [indiscernible] and she wants to know given that Trump openly admitted that he would accept foreign help in the election what are your thoughts about how dangerous he might be during this transition of time or after he is out of office with whatever knowledge of security issues he may have?

MS. IOFFE: So, ah, the *Washington Post* the other day did, had a great story about this, about how, um, national security officials and experts are worried that, um, he might reveal classified information, um, at will and I think he will [chuckle] 100 percent do that. We saw him do it while, um, in the Oval, in the Oval Office. I mean literally in the Oval Office he had, ah, I think it was 27, May 2017 shortly after he fired Jim Comey he had the Russian Foreign Minister and the Russian Ambassador in the, in the Oval House, um, and he shared with them intelligence that wasn't even American intelligence, it was Israeli intelligence that he didn't have Israeli permission to share. Um, I think the Israelis understand, you know, who is the senior partner in the relationship and didn't say anything, but I think a lot of, it freaked a lot of people out. And, the president is the ultimate determine, ah, determiner, determinant, um, of who, of what information is classified and non-classified. So, if he says it then it's unclassified. Like, he can do that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

MS. IOFFE: I don't know that the; and that's, that's the law, right? He can just un-classify (sp?), declassify it as he wishes. When he's a former president I don't, I don't know. Um, it would be ironic given how his administration has cracked down on leaks of classified information, ah, across agencies. I know in the CIA, um, they have really been cracking down. People are getting polygraph tests, lie detector tests all the time. They're using all kinds of new data, um, and data processing tools to figure out who has been talking to journalists and when. Ah, we know the Obama administration went after leakers a lot, but this administration has been really aggressive. So, it would be ironic to see Trump start leaking information [chuckle], ah, or declassifying information after he leaves office given how tough his administration has been on leaks.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Interesting. All right well let's move on to my student Winston who has got another question from the audience. We've got lots of them pouring in.

WINSTON: Jay asks, can Russia get better democratically after Putin?

MS. IOFFE: Ah, sure. I don't, I, I don't know. We don't know what's going to happen after Putin. We don't know what's going to happen before after Putin, right? Um, Putin may die tomorrow, or he might die 10 or 15 years from now. He seems like a pretty healthy guy. So, we don't know what Russia's going to look like socially, economically, culturally by then. It is a, also not a monolithic country. It's a huge country, 11 time zones. Um, it too is evolving so I don't know. Um, what I will say is that, you know, this is joke among some of my foreign correspondent friends, was that, um, we now have over the last 100 years – well at the time it was 100 years – of basically, ah, personality-centered

bureaucratic autocracies, that that's kind of the, the model on which, like that Russia keeps reproducing, right? That czarist regime was a personality-based, ah, autocratic bureaucracy. So was the Soviet Union, and so was the Putin-era and as a friend joked you now have enough for a Time Style Section piece because it's a trend with three. So, um, you know, I keep thinking about what Putin's former, ah, political adviser once told me – this was back in 2013 which was, you know, 30 years ago – ah, he said, I believe that when this system falls it'll fall in a day and the system that replaces it will be nearly identical to the outgoing one. So, but, you know, who knows. I think, um, what anyone who has covered Russia for any length of time knows like don't predict anything [chuckle].

DR. HOFFMAN: Can you say the same thing about the United States? Like are we at the same place where it's like you can't predict anything?

MS. IOFFE: Well, this is, [sigh], this is what I hate about this moment is that I really feel like I'm calling on my, you know, Russian analytical skills a little too much for my own liking. You know, this shuttling back and forth between, um, just sheer horror and hilarity, right, because things are either so absurd or so horrible both at the same time. Ah, the fact that you can't predict what the next, ah, news item is going to be. I mean, your introduction of Domenico [chuckle] or like your first question to him about, you know, what is at 7:35 p.m. on this Wednesday evening speaks to that too. That unpredictability and volatility. Um, the fact that we have two large sections of the country living in non-intersecting informational spheres that talk to each other. Ah, the fact that it, you know, gets in the way of people's personal relationships. You know, I just, these are not, um, the, ah, the, the specter that is George Soros, you know, as a, um, center of conspiracy theories from the right wing. These are not, these are

things that I thought I'd left behind when I, you know, packed my bags and moved back to the States in 2012 and I really wish that I, that I weren't seeing them here today but.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I, I'll take this moment to plug a series that I hadn't planned on plugging but we are starting tomorrow over the next few weeks at the University of Delaware we're going to be doing, ah, ah, conversations called "Let's Talk: Key Conversations for Today" and it's about getting students to learn how to speak across ideological differences. Um, and you mentioned some of that civil dialogue earlier and sort of that, that, that is kind of a loaded term particularly in some, ah, African American communities that, you know, we, why should we be civil when the other side is not being civil. Um, but, before I jump to the next question from Angelina, um, from our audience, what are some of your suggestions for how to talk to people who you disagree with especially as we come up on the holidays and [indiscernible] the interacting with folks that in their families that don't agree with them?

MS. IOFFE: Ah, I think my top advice would be just stay calm. Ah, these are really emotional subjects for myself too. Um, just remember that a personal conversation is not Twitter, it's not Facebook. Just stay calm; your, and remember that you're talking to a person that, and a person that you might really care about, and ah, don't demonize them when they're sitting right in front of you. So, stay calm. Stick to facts. Stick to, um, how you feel and what you see and what the facts are as opposed to demonizing the other person and calling them names which will shut your discussion down immediately. But, um, you know, I've had this experience talking to, ah, friends and family who, for example, in Russia who don't agree, didn't agree with me about Trump, who didn't agree with

me about the Black Lives Matter movement, um, about gay rights. I mean, all sorts of things. And, I think the only way you get anywhere with people you care about but don't agree with, which I think can be a hard circle to square emotionally and psychologically, is to, to not talk down to them and to not get emotional and not to name call and to try to understand where they're coming from. And I think, um, personally as a journalist this is the thing I always do when I interview people, it is, um, the only way I find works in interviewing people is empathy. Is to, ah, it doesn't mean you agree with them, it doesn't mean you condone their beliefs. It means that you are trying for this moment to understand where they're coming from and what has shaped their beliefs and to kind of put yourself in their shoes a little bit. It just makes you a better debater with them, um, because, you know, calling them fascist or, ah, socialist or whatever, you know, is not going to get you anywhere. In fact, it's going to set you further back.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum, um-hum. Good advice. Ah, I want to address one of the comments we've gotten which is, this was billed as a conversation about Russian interference and I just want to say that given the tumultuous election we've had a lot of other things to talk about, um, over the past week. So, let's take another question from the audience and I'm going to turn to my student Angelina.

ANGELINA: So, Jay wants to know, what can we expect for US-Russian relations going forward?

MS. IOFFE: So, I think that, um, I mean, they're at a nadir right? I think it's just going to be about clearing what's off the plate like the most proximate issues and that issue right now is, um, an arms control agreement. And I think both sides are going to try really hard to get that done because it's a win for both

sides. Um, and there's really not much else that they can really talk about. Counterterrorism seems to be not really an issue that they cooperate on anymore; space, maybe, you know we kind of needed the Russians to launch our astronaut, our astronauts into space but now we have Space-X doing it. Um, but again these are, you can name them on, you can count them on one hand the areas with which, on which we cooperate with Russia and talk to them about. After, you know, the out, after 2016 and the fallout there and the fact that Russia has become such a toxic part of our domestic politics, it' become this third rail, I think there's not a lot of room for an incoming administration, ah, to do anything with Russia and that's on our side. On the other side, you're dealing with Putin who is the same old Putin, same as he ever was, who sees things in a zero-sum way; that if something is a loss for you it's a win for him. He doesn't really believe in win-win situations. He wants to keep knocking the US down more pegs because it makes him, and Russia look better. So, there's not really, not, not, not that much we need from each other, a); and b), we're coming at it from such different perspectives and, um, there's so much baggage on the American side and so much, um, I mean, there's now suspicion and hostility on both sides but I think it's hard to get something done with Putin because he doesn't want to give you, you know, a win or a victory because he, he feels it would kind of, um, diminish him in some way or Russia in some way. So, and I, and I don't think this incoming administration is predisposed to try to find any common ground with Russia. So, I think it's just going to be more of this kind of tepid cold war stuff with them and maybe we'll get an arms control agreement out of it and um, like some more verbiage about counterterrorism cooperation with little substance there. But I don't think there's going to be much of a change frankly.

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum. Interesting. All right, we have time for one or two more questions so I'm going to toss it to my student Julie.

JULIE: UD alumna Connie Cox asks; Khrushchev gave a secret speech in 1956 or so denouncing Stalin and his cultive personality. Do you think someone in the near future will denounce Trump's cultive personality?

MS. IOFFE: Ah, [sigh] that's a really interesting framing for the question especially for a Soviet history dork like myself. Um, I don't think so because the, you know, the frameworks are so different. The secret speech was happening in a totalitarian Stalinist system where Stalin's – this was three years after Stalin's death but his heirs were still basically carrying on with some tweaks and amendments, still basically carrying on as Stalinist policy and Stalin had been in power for three decades. He had become synonymous with the state. Even when he spoke about Stalin he said, I'm not Stalin, he said. His son, um, his younger son who was this kind of drunkard playboy party boy, um, kept trying to use his father's, well his own last name to try to get privileges and he was basically smacked down by his father and said you have to stop doing this. And his son said, but I'm Stalin. He said you're not Stalin, and I'm not Stalin. Stalin is the state. So, this was seen as a very, um, you know, jaw dropping event because it was basically the state acknowledging some of its mistakes. Ah, and again a totalitarian state, a one-party state. Here we have, you know, people denouncing Trump's cultive personality every day, ah, even within the Republican party you had, um, I don't know if you guys remember, Arizona Senator Jeff Flake going to the, ah, Senate floor and getting verklempt and talking about how Trump is ruining the country and the party. You have Mitt Romney, ah, challenging him. Some other Republicans. Even if they end up

voting with the president they still challenge him. Um, it's just such a different system. You know, we are still a democracy, we are, um, hobbling and a little bit broken but it's still a contentious two-party system and it's just wouldn't be possible.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. I think we have time for one more question so Eleni, do you have a question from our audience?

ELENI: This question asks, what makes the US distinct from other civilized nations where this may not be as great of an issue in the sociopolitical context of which we speak?

MS. IOFFE: Sorry, what is the this there? Do we know?

ELENI: Um, I'm assuming it's just in regards to the US in general amidst like current politics and like world politics.

MS. IOFFE: Yeah. So, I think what had set us apart before was, um, our institutions, our, the kind of norms we had. Ah, I think now in the last four or five years we've realized that norms aren't enforceable and that a lot of laws aren't even enforceable, um, and that they're not self-enforcing. So, if you saw, for example, how many times, ah, members of the Trump administration violated the Hatch Act with absolutely zero consequence, um, that tells you a lot, right? We, our message to other countries and other societies is be more like us and have independent institutions and have, um, rule of law. It's really important, right? Um, well it turns out, rule of law is, you know, what does that mean if you don't enforce every law uniformly? Um, what does it mean to have independent institutions if you, for example, like the State Department or the Department of Justice if you, in the case of the State Department completely gut it, or in the case of the Department of Justice, um, drive many career prosecutors to quit



because you've so politicized law enforcement or you have, um, you know – I've, I've encountered this personally as a journalist – where you have your, ah, you know, investigatory agents and your prosecutors leaking to journalists because they're afraid that when you, they'd bring a case, ah, inside the DOJ that it's going to get swatted, ah, swatted down or kind of buried because it goes against, ah, the interests of the Trump administration. And they're so worried that they're talking to journalists who are normally, you know, um, anathema to them. Um, I do still think that, ah, you know, Domenico talked about his dad. I know my immigrant dad is watching and he is also very optimistic – Hi Dad – about, um, about this country and the things that make it different and special from other countries in the world and I do share his optimism. But I think we've also seen in the last two years that, for example, if we look at Europe or Canada that there's other ways of doing – or New Zealand – that there's other ways of doing things. That our way isn't necessarily the best way and um, you can get better outcomes, for example, in public health or even democracy if you have for example a parliamentary system where it's collaborative, where like they, ah, the incentivists (sp?) who find some kind of, ah, collaborative solution or a coalition as opposed to a two-party system that's designed to be essentially adversarial where, you know, somebody at, like in a zero-sum, game. Um, I don't know, maybe we're, maybe this will – um, Domenico talked about some soul-searching and, you know, accountability, um, maybe this will trigger eventually a new era of American politics where we reevaluate how we do things and think about doing them a little bit differently.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and I think you're right, that, um, you know, the history of American politics its, every era has been very different. Um, you know,



we have conducted politics and campaigns and, ah, presidential campaigns differently over the course of the 240 plus years that we've been a democracy. And I think that we're in a transition period and we need to look at this as like, okay, who do we want to be, who do we, what do we want to look like as a nation? So, I want to thank you Julia. This has been so pleasant to talk to you. Um, I enjoy your perspective and ordinarily this is when everyone would say [clapping] thank you –

MS. IOFFE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: – give you a big round of applause. Um, unfortunately we have, everybody's on mute [chuckle], on silent but I want to thank you so much. And I hope maybe when things are back to normal I can bring you to the University of Delaware campus. You can visit in person.

MS. IOFFE: I would absolutely love that, um, and I'm going to hold you to that.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay [chuckle].

MS. IOFFE: So, thank you so much for having me. This has been really fun and –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible.]

MS. IOFFE: – a really nice bright spot in all this dreary election coverage.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you, Julia. So, I want to thank everyone for being here tonight and for this entire series. I hope you; I hope you've gotten some incite from the variety of perspectives that we featured. We have one final event next week where we'll be discussing, ah, well, whatever the state of politics is at that point with *CSPAN's* Steve Scully and *PBS NewsHour's* Yamiche Alcindor.



Ah, you can find previous programs plus lots of resources at cpc.udel.edu.

Please join us for “Election Aftermath” one week from tonight on November 18th at 7:30. Thank you so much for joining us and goodnight.

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