

Teneo Insights Webinar: Countdown to the U.S. Election (Part 2)

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Tony Sayegh, Mike Allen, Phil Cox, Orson Porter join Kevin Kajiwara to discuss the upcoming U.S. elections.

Kevin Kajiwara (KK): Good day, everyone. And welcome to today's Teneo Insights Webinar. I'm Kevin Kajiwara, Co-President of Teneo Political Risk Advisory, calling in from New York City today. We are 75 days from the election, and we are in the midst right now of an unprecedented and slightly surreal Democratic National Convention. And while the pandemic continues to plague the country, we are starting to see some relief in some of the summer hotspots. Meanwhile, in the midst of the most profound economic contraction and hit to employment since the Great Depression, the stock market has hit new highs. Now, since our last call, Joe Biden has named Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate. And I have to say that my colleague Orson Porter, who's joining us today, has said from the very beginning that she would be the pick. So, kudos to him.

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Relations with China have continued to deteriorate. A major agreement was reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. And just two days ago, the Senate Intelligence Committee, in bipartisan fashion, essentially affirmed the findings of the Mueller Report regarding Russia's election interference. So today we're going to take another look at the state of the election and following our call of two weeks ago. Today we're going to look at it a little bit more through the Republican lens. However, as with last time, we're going to have a prominent member of the media with us today to keep it all in perspective. And to that end, today I'm joined by Mike Allen.

Mike is one of Washington's most influential and well-connected journalists. He's a Co-Founder of Axios. Mike was also one of the founders of Politico, and the New York Times has called him, "The man the White House wakes up to." They were referring to the Obama administration. It's unclear whether the current White House wakes up to him. But in addition, we're joined by Phil Cox. Phil is the Founder of Guidepost Strategies. He is a longtime partner of Teneo. He's the former Executive Director of the Republican Governors Association, serves on the board of the Senate Leadership Fund, the Mitch McConnell backed Super PAC, and he's a Political Advisor to Vice President Mike Pence.

Got a lot of balls in the air right now, he's running two governor's races and a number of Federal Super PACs. Tony Sayegh is a Managing Director at Teneo, he's advising clients on strategy, communications, public affairs, government relations, and media. Tony served the Trump administration as a Senior Advisor for Strategy and started out there as the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury leading the Office of Public Affairs and as Chief Spokesman to Secretary Mnuchin. And

finally, I'm joined by my colleague Orson Porter.

Orson's the Senior Managing Director who leads Teneo's Government Affairs and Public Affairs teams and heads our office in Washington, DC. Prior to Teneo, Orson was the U.S. Director of Government and Public Affairs for Nike. And he served in the White House as a Special Assistant to President Bill Clinton. So we've got an excellent lineup today and I'd like to invite all of you to get involved in our conversation. You can submit your questions for my guests at any time using the moderator chat button on your screen.

So, let's get started. And Phil, let me start with you. Your colleague a couple of weeks ago, Colm O'Comartun, kind of laid out at that time what the state of play was in the election. We're a few more weeks in and give us your current assessment of the electoral landscape at the moment. Amidst all the noise, what are the signals that you're really picking up out there? Not only for the White House race, although we want to hear about that, but also for Congress and out in the states as well.

Phil Cox (PC): Well thanks, Kevin and great to be with y'all this morning. The first campaign I ran was actually 23 years ago, and the first official interview I ever conducted was with a then up and coming reporter at the Washington Post named Mike Allen. So, it's good to be here with Mike as well. And I can assure you that even though you can't see us this morning, we both had significantly more hair back then. So, I'm glad to be with you this morning. Looking at the Presidential campaign as we approach sort of the final night of the DNC, the President's job approval sits around 43, trails Biden by anywhere between 5 and 8 points nationally.

Two-thirds of the country disapproves of the President's response, administration's response

on COVID and two thirds believe the country is on the wrong track. And I think that right track, wrong track number is an incredibly important indicator. I found it to be the most important indicator of any incumbent's chances for reelection. So, you need to keep an eye on that, but of course, as we take a deeper dive and we look at the eight to 10 battleground states where the race is going to be decided, it is much more competitive, much closer. The President's pathway to victory, he needs to win Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Arizona.

Those are all states that he won in '16. And then he's got to figure out how to win one other state, either Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, or potentially Michigan as the most likely targets. And right now, it's definitely an uphill fight. The President's sort of four must-win states, Florida and Arizona, he trails anywhere between probably 3 and 5 points at this point, based on the numbers I'm looking at. Ohio, North Carolina, effectively tied. He has narrow leads in what are traditionally Republican states, Iowa, Georgia, Texas, little less narrow, but the President's campaign has been spending money in Georgia.

That's a pretty good indicator of where the race is. Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, those are states that the campaign is spending a lot of time on. Those are states that have a significant number of non-college educated voters, which the President has been targeting. He's trailing by anywhere between 5 and probably 9 points in those states, but he needs to find one of those to win. And so, we're going to be watching that. Overall, the Democrats continue to kind of expand the map, the Republicans are playing a little bit more defense, so it's an uphill climb, but there's a lot of time left. And the President's focus is really got to be not making this a referendum on his own administration, but engaging Biden in making this a clear choice between two visions of the future.

And so, I hope that we're going to see that, Tony will talk a little bit about that later. My hope is that as a Republican, we're going to see a very clear contrast on policy. Obviously, we need less focus on the coronavirus and more on the economy, where the President is more trusted. So that's a snapshot of the Presidential. On the Senate side, Senate is clearly up for grabs. There's a lot of attention and money flowing. As Kevin, you mentioned, I'm on the Board of McConnell's Super PAC. We're going to see a half a billion dollars or more spent over the last 75 days on Senate races.

Republican major donors view leader McConnell really as a potential last line of defense if we were to lose the Presidential. Republicans obviously now stand at 53-47 in the Senate, they're likely to pick up Alabama putting them at 54. There are three states right now where Republicans trail between 5 and 10 points: in Colorado, Arizona, and Maine. And there are four states that are effectively within the margin: Iowa, Georgia, North Carolina, and Montana. These are all Republican states, but they're hard fought races right now. On the Senate side, you have some senators like Susan Collins, who might be able to build a brand that are somewhat distinct from the national party brand.

But the House races are more directly tied to the Presidential and Republicans would need 18 seats to get the majority. That seems very unlikely in this environment. There are 31 Democrats who are in districts that Trump won in 2016. 13 of those he won by 6 points or more. So, there are some targets of opportunity for Republicans, but the Republican pathway to majority in the House runs through suburban areas with lots of college educated voters, places like Southern California and the Philly suburbs, Detroit, Richmond, Houston, Dallas, those areas. So, it seems very unlikely at this point that we're going to see any change in the House. And then just quickly looking down ticket on the governors.

There are really only two competitive races right now, in Montana and Missouri. Missouri's tied. Montana's tied. Missouri is a Republican lean. Missouri, just to put it in some perspective, and this is a good flavor for what's going on nationally, the President won that state by 19 points four years ago, and now leads by anywhere between two and five. And so that gives you a sense of what the environment looks like. Importantly, on the governor's side is the impact on state legislatures. Republicans have lost 450 state legislative seats since the President was elected, after picking up nearly a thousand in the Obama years.

And so, we're keeping an eye on state legislative chambers in places like Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Arizona that are all within five seats or less. You could see if Biden goes on to win by any margin, you could see those chambers flip as well. So that's a quick snapshot of what's going on nationally, Presidential level, and states, Kevin, with that I'll turn it back over to you.

KK: Yeah, that's fantastic Phil. And thanks, I think that really sets the stage for this conversation and is very helpful. Orson, you follow all of this on a daily basis for our clients at Teneo. Anything you would add to Phil's overview here?

OP: As Phil always does, he delivered once again and did a great overview and has been a great partner to Teneo. The only thing I would add is to always watch the travel. So, the early states, I should say, early vote ballots are going to be sent out in September in Arizona, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin. And the debates won't happen until mid-September, late October. So wisely, the candidates know that for a lot of voters, they will be making decisions relatively soon. So, there is no coincidence that President Trump was in Oshkosh recently or in Minnesota and the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa media market, which I think is going to be really interesting.

As indicated a couple of weeks ago, I was in Wisconsin and what you don't see, and what I thought I would see, was the Democrats last night playing a little respect to Wisconsin in that the convention was canceled. I would have thought that one of the candidates, hopefully Biden will do so, will let the folks of Wisconsin know that they will be back and their vote is essential in this process, but the Democrats have decided, the Biden team has decided not to travel to these states or play hard in these states, as you may see with the Trump administration. So on the early vote, I think it will be really curious to see, as far as the mail-in ballot piece is how the Biden team decides whether or not they're going to actively get on the road in some of these states, particularly like Wisconsin, or to continue to have a virtual campaign.

KK: Got it. Mike Allen, I'd like to turn to you and hear your take on what Phil and Orson have just said. But beyond that, since we're in the midst of the Democratic National Convention, I'd like to hear your take on what you have picked up from the convention so far, and certainly what you expect to hear tonight then from Vice President Biden himself.

Mike Allen (MA): Terrific. Thank you, Kevin. Thank you very much for your hospitality, we so admire what Teneo has built. It's one of the cool stories in American business and Phil, Tony, Orson are people who over many years of doing this back to when I had hair, as Phil pointed out, or more hair, at least, are people whose advice and take on the world has always been a great value. In the spirit of Phil's remarks at the top, I was reminded of a quote from the columnist Robert Novak, and a lot of you remember the Prince of Darkness. Bob Novak used to say that in Washington there are two kinds of people: sources and targets. So, we always try to remind people to stay on the right side of history.

So anyway, thanks to all the people on the call that I've learned from over the years. I'm going to tee up one big idea. One thing for you to remember, one personal message to you, and one snapshot where we'll take in Kevin's questions about the Convention. The big idea, the frame, that you for your business planning and you for your political planning should be looking at the world through are these three crises, three crises that this summer we've seen a decade of change in a couple of months. Over the time that you and I have been at this, usually you only know history in the rear-view mirror. Right?

It's very rare that we know that the day we're living will be the subject of books for decades to come, that our children's, children's, children, will talk about the times we're living in. But that's the kind of history we're living. So, the three crises. One, the recession, that you all have a fantastic window into, and everybody can sort of draw their own arc, whether it's a K or a V or a square root or U, or whatever you're seeing at this moment, it's changing everything. Second, the pandemic, which I was talking to Jon Meacham, who tonight is going to be giving a historian's perspective at the Democratic Convention. Be able to scoop in Axios today that they came to Jon Meacham and the Democratic National Party. This was obviously at Joe Biden's personal request.

They came to him and they said, "For tonight's session, could you please describe, articulate, capture the soul of America. Please keep it to less than five minutes." So, it's a little sign of our times. But Meacham was saying, I was asking him, "In this streak of mysteries, the pandemic, how does it compare to say the Civil War, World War II, 9/11?" And the point he made is we don't yet know. If we ever have a normal life, if we get a vaccine and a normal life in a year, it's not as big as World War II and the post war boom. If we don't get a vaccine, it's bigger, the biggest thing that's ever happened to the country.

So that's a second frame for any decision you're making. And then third is this racial reckoning, which has touched all of your businesses, which touched every part of the country. The New York Times actually quantified it using cell phone data, using aerial photos. And it's by far the largest civil movement, the most participants of any in American history, dwarfs the '60s, as far as the number of people who personally participated. So, recession, pandemic, racial reckoning. And then wrapped any one of those, would be the story of the decade.

Instead we have all of them at once, and all of them intertwine. And then as an overlay, as a frame around all of them, we have what Jim VandeHei the Axios CEO and I call the Bloodless Civil War. And that is everything that's animating the politics that Phil and Orson and Tony know so well and is causing people to vote. The good part of it is people are more engaged than ever, but also people are just angrier than ever. I see it in my email. I was on the pregame call. I was just telling the Teneo team that I've been writing a morning newsletter every morning, 365 days a year, Christmas morning from my sister's bonus room, for 14 years. And I've never gotten such angry emails as I do now.

So, all of that is the backdrop. That's the big idea. My personal message for you. And if you remember one thing from what we talk about today. The one thing I will hope you remember is that your colleagues, your teams, your constituents, your stakeholders inside and outside, are dying to hear from you about these topics. The values of a company, of an organization, of an academic institution. All that is now so important, not only to the people who are working for you now, the people you want to retain, but also the people you want to recruit. To get the best talent, and it's such a war for talent because of technology, because of the focus on diversity, all of that has just amped up the war for talent. And your values, how you

express them, how you articulate them, makes such a difference. We see it in the people that we interview.

Like when Phil and Tony and Orson and I were coming up with the game, we wanted to know how much we going to be paid. Right? The people that we're talking with want to know a lot more about your mission. And so, A) for you to know what that is, and B) to communicate it, makes such a difference. I'm just going to pull up a stat that we had in Axios. Sarah Fisher, who covers media trends for us, wrote up some fascinating data from the Edelman Trust Barometer. And people are more likely to believe their employers now, than they are the government or the media. So that's a massive opportunity for you.

The people who work with and for you are dying to hear what you're saying, your insight, your take on the world, how they could think about things. And so that's just a huge opportunity for you. So that's my one thing to remember, and my personal message for you. And then real quick. My last thing is my one snap chat, just to add to and build on everything that Phil and Orson said, which I completely agree with, is if you're looking at the outlook for the present. And if you're looking at what's most likely to come in 2020. And if you look at why Wall Street at the moment seems to be betting on a blue wave, that is Democrats taking the White House, taking the Senate, and of course, keeping the House, as Phil indicated, is where things are headed at this moment.

Here's why I think both the prediction markets and Wall Street are finally aligned on that, and the conventional wisdom, those things don't always line up. And then I'm going to tell you why it could be wrong. Why it's lined up is, look at the buckets, look at the swing states that Phil mentioned. The President's losing or tied in all of those. And the team will tell you that they're stabilized or improving, but at the moment, they're not where they need to be. This is some

super interesting research that Axios published, based on some exclusive data from NewsWhip, which tracks the whole social media sphere. And that is that if you look at the topics that are dominating the online conversation, and they're the three crises, they're the recession, they're the pandemic, they're the racial reckoning. All of those are difficult for the President. None of those topics at the moment help the President.

The third bucket is demography. You see it in your businesses, the country is getting more diverse and it's getting younger. That's hard for Republicans. They need to find a way to solve that. And then forth, this sort of national polls, which directionally tell you something. But of course, ask Hillary Clinton, they don't tell you the outcome. That's another bucket that's a problem. So that's a deep hole. But what I would tell you about that, and what to remember as we look at that deep hole. One I mentioned to you, and Tony can give us a lot more color on this, but my conversations with the White House and the campaign, indicate that they believe strongly that they've stabilized to improving about a week ago, right before the Convention.

And the president's made a great gamble. He ran for president in a way that he never had, Steve Bannon called it the pirate ship, and he won. And now he's governing in a way that he never has. And the gamble is, but can you win with your people? I think we can agree there hasn't been a lot of effort to add people to it. Is this silent majority that he talked about as recently as yesterday, are they going to show up and vote? And something very important for you to remember, as you think about, as you look at the deep hole, that remember, what I hear when I talk to Trump voters, I'm very intentional about spending a lot of time in America, and of course it's been harder in the last few months, but I made my first flight the other day.

And I went to Chicago, an actual America. And what you hear is you talk to Trump voters, and they say, "You guys still don't get it. You still don't get it. What the president is doing is why we elected him. What he's doing is a feature, not a bug." And I think the coverage very under indexes for that idea. And then just a real quick, my take on the Convention and the others on the call have lived through this, and I would value their opinions very much. I would say that for a casual viewer watching at home, they've gotten a very welcoming, inviting picture of the Democratic Party. The people who planned this convention did a very good job of emphasizing inclusiveness, emphasizing youth, emphasizing diversity, and de-emphasizing issues that could be divisive. And I think it got a little hotter last night, and it'll be even hotter tonight.

But if there's a moment, I would say that for the Convention planners, mission accomplished as far as setting a table for the fall, that makes people willing to listen, open to listening to the Democratic Party. So, Kevin, thank you. And I'd love to serve you in any way as we go into questions.

KK: Well, you have a teed up quite a lot there, and we're going to go down any number of these paths. But I want to stick with the Convention for just one moment here, bring Tony into the conversation. The Republican Convention is coming up. We're three nights into this Democratic one right now. What do you think has been effective? What hasn't? And how is that impacting, from what you could tell us, about the upcoming GOP Convention and what we should expect there?

Tony Sayegh (TS): Kevin, thank you. And it's great to be with everybody. If you don't mind, I'm going to just address a few things that have been said by my very able colleagues ahead of this, and then dive into the Convention. Mike and John Swan and others have this great Axios newsletter every morning that I read

religiously. And basically, after some analysis, there is a section called "Be Smart." So, after they give you all the analysis, they try to break it down and give you some more insight. So, I'll give you the "Be Smart" on a lot of what's been said ahead of me. This conversation could be recorded and played, and this could be 2016 all over again.

The profound underestimation of Donald Trump and his support is one of the things that I still cannot understand when I observe polling data, the media, the analysis of any election that he's involved in. Which is not to say that certainly for most of the summer, the trajectory was difficult and challenging for the President for a whole host of reasons that Mike and Phil and Orson laid out. I think for certain, and this is very important for any political strategists, I think we definitely hit bottom, and you have to hit bottom at some point. I'd rather hit it in July, than in October. And we hit bottom and he's coming back. And even the least generous polls show a very narrowing of this race. But don't overemphasize polls.

In 2016, over 160 public polls were taken of the election. Hillary Clinton was beating Donald Trump in over 150 of those 160+ polls. So, keep in mind that the support for the President largely remains underestimated. And it's not just the silent Trump voter, it's the methodology of a lot of these polls. They're very flawed. So, I'll put that marker there. To the Democratic Convention, I think we all, and I will say this in candor, I sympathize with my colleagues on the other side.

We've gone through the most unconventional convention program and season, I think, in history. For us, for example, this convention a year and a half ago was announced in Charlotte, North Carolina. Then back in the spring, it was changed to Jacksonville. And about six weeks ago, it was canceled in Jacksonville for legitimate concerns over the COVID spread. And now we're kind of forced

into this blended virtual convention. I don't want to criticize my colleagues on the other side, in the respect of how the production looks, because it's difficult to do this stuff when you don't have a centralized venue. And I think we're both trying to do our best. I'll tell you just strategically the key difference.

We're going to actually try to have a convention. It's going to look like a convention. It's going to sound like a convention and it's going to have a lot of the elements of a convention. We're not trying to make an elaborate Zoom call. And that's where I think the Democrats took a big gamble. And whether or not it's successful or not successful, it will be determined. Obviously, the ratings have taken a humongous hit, down 48% from 2016. I think Mike Allen gives a good perspective of how I think the media would probably view the Democrats Convention. But I'll tell you from my view, if you're trying to appeal to the future generations of Americans, if you're trying to cast yourselves as the party of inclusion and innovation and newness, I think their lineup has largely failed.

I mean, Jimmy Carter, Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, Colin Powell, Chuck Hagle, Christie Todd Whitman. I mean, we might as well have had this convention in 1996 or 2000. I think they've largely gone flat. The Obamas have delivered. I think Michelle Obama salvaged the first night, which was a very difficult night for certain. And look, we're going to have our own difficulties to. I think though it's very hard to watch the Democrat Convention and understand what they're for, other than hating Donald Trump. It's not even subtle. And I covered both the Democrat and Republican conventions on Fox News in 2016. It's the exact same playbook as 2016. So, I'll go back to my original point.

Profound underestimation, and I'm shocked how no one has learned a lesson. And Mike, you're exactly right. I mean, Trump voters feel this way. I certainly feel this way. It's just we watch in real time that so many smart people

who've made their careers out of something related to politics, pollsters, media folks, strategists, they still don't get it. And it's not to say it's going to be easy. Certainly not. But let me tell you, and a lot of you on this call, we have to step outside of our personal views for a moment, in order just to assess what's actually likely to happen for potentially business reasons or just understanding what the world's going to look like in 2021. It's very dangerous bet, to bet against Donald Trump getting reelected.

KK: Tony, I want to push back here just a little bit and bring Phil back into the call for a moment on this point about the polls; I know talking to a lot of my friends on the Democratic side that the 2016 scar tissue is very real still. And this is exactly what they're worried about. But Phil, we also hear from the pollsters, and you went through a lot of the polling data in your opening remarks, that the methodology has changed. They have addressed the likely voters' issue and the reluctant Trump responder, etc. How do you square what you laid out at the beginning and this phenomenon that Tony's talking about?

PC: Well, I would say, when I come back and I'm reincarnated, I want to come back as a pollster because there never seems to be any consequence for them getting things wrong. If you're somebody like me who actually is responsible for running campaigns and you continue to lose and get things just massively wrong, you don't get to run campaigns anymore. It doesn't seem to be the same thing with the pollsters. I think they're trying to fix the methodology, Kevin, but to Tony's point, there's a problem. Okay? I don't know about you, but I'm not answering phone calls from numbers that I don't know. And I think there are a lot of people in America that are that way. So, there's just a fundamental issue. I think the campaign professionals seem to always be on the lagging end of technology and picking up new technology.

When we're polling now, we're doing a blend of online where we've got cell phone data and we've got traditional hard lines and we're getting better numbers. We're also, in any campaign, we're not just looking at one poll. We employ multiple pollsters now and multiple sources of data. The other thing that I think is incredibly important is incorporating what I would say, hard ID data, which is what are you getting at doors? What are you getting when you're actually talking to voters? So same way Tony was saying, the President's campaign is actually doing voter contact. They're out there knocking on doors, millions of doors. Millions of doors a week actually at this point. The Biden campaign is not doing that because of the coronavirus. So, I think there's still fundamental flaws built into the system, baked into the system.

The only thing we can do, look at multiple sources of data, make sure that we've got a good blend of where we're getting that data, and try to incorporate actually talking to real voters. Volume, right? And that's how you incorporate that. Orson will know this. I've done the last four statewide races in Wisconsin with Governor Scott Walker, former Governor Scott Walker. And we had it down to a science. We incorporate a lot of that hard ID data, and we knew we nailed all four races, even the ones we lost too, to the number because we're incorporating that data. So, I think we've got to take everything you say with a grain of salt. The easiest thing you can do, Kevin, right now is just look at the averages.

Because if you go to the Real Clear politics page, it's the easiest thing to do. It gives you a general snapshot of where things are. If I compare that to where I'm looking at the internal data for Tom Tillis, North Carolina, it's relatively similar, right? And same with McSally and the other data we're seeing. So, what I would say is this race is going to tighten. Without question, I agree with Tony, we're at a low point and we should not be paying attention

to national polls at all. The only thing that impacts I think is fundraising. And I don't think the President has a fundraising problem. You've really got to drill down deeply in those states that matter, Florida, North Carolina, Arizona, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, etc. Those are the polls you need to be paying attention to.

KK: So you've heard all of this and I just want to pick up also on what both you and Tony were talking about with regards to the conventions and what do you see here? I mean, is any of this at this point about changing any minds or is this about both sides getting their supporters out to vote and effectively, however you do this, discouraging others from going out to vote? I mean, I can't pass up the opportunity here, considering your Co-Founder of Axios, to bring up a couple of the recent interviews that have played over and over and over again.

And I guess my question is, do these things actually make any difference? So, I'm talking of course about John Swan's interview, which was a pretty extraordinary one with the President a few weeks ago. And that came on the heels, of course, of another extraordinary interview with Chris Wallace at Fox. What did these kinds of interviews accomplish? What does the White House take from them? What does the President himself take from them? I mean, do they make any difference?

MA: Yeah. Thank you. It's a fun topic. And I'm glad you thought of that. Before we do that, I'm going to make a quick friendly amendment to Phil's point about polls. And taking his point about averages, which I agree with. The one other thing and I learned the hard way as a younger reporter. And that is the other thing to look at is the direction of the polls. So, my insight when I covered the 2004 re-election race between President George W. Bush and John Kerry, who, by the way, Tony, you

forgot him on your list of classic hits from this convention. But George W. Bush was running against John Kerry in the first post 9/11 election, it's hard to remember this now, but at the time on election day, we thought it was close and people thought it was really kind of a toss-up.

And George W. Bush wound up winning convincingly. And I went back to look at my thought process and the real time data. And what it turned out was that the polls mostly look tied, but if you looked at it, George W. Bush was ahead in every poll within the margin of error. So, they weren't really tied. And so, what I took away from that, that I would urge you to think about as you look at polls, whether it's a Senate race or the Presidential race, is any given poll might be wrong, probably is wrong, but every poll isn't wrong. And so, when polls are telling you a consistent story, either about direction or about what people are thinking of or how people are talking, that's something worth paying attention to.

On the interviews. So, my colleague, Jonathan Swan, who is a great American success story, he was at the top of his game in Australia. He worked for the Sydney Morning Herald, came to America before the 2016 election, and instantly knows more about American politics than anyone in his generation and most people watching in Washington, period. The power of the interview with President Trump, and I will say, Kevin asked why the White House does it. And Tony will give you the actual answer. I will give you my perception and he can sort of correct it. My perception is that we know the President likes to be making the case for himself. We know that the President thinks he's his own best spokesman. And the President, and this is the salesperson in him, this is the art of the deal of him.

He honestly believes that if he sits there person to person, that he's going to make the sale, he's going to make the case. And as exhibit

A, I would present to you, it's been reported. I don't know that this exact number is right, but the basic fact is right. Bob Woodward has a book coming out September 15th. His last book was called Fear About Trump. This book is called Rage, and Rage is coming out September 15th. And it's been reported, Jimmy Gangela at CNN was the first one. He said this, that the President did 17 interviews with Bob Woodward. Now, I know that the President, from my own reporting, I know that the President has spent a ton of time with Woodward, including a personal one on one time at Mar-a-Lago.

And so, that's someone who believes that they are going to make their case, make the sale. So that's why the President does it. But the power of the Chris Wallace interviews, and Jonathan Swan, both like two of the great journalists of our time, two things. And these are both concepts that will serve you in your own businesses and in your own preparation. One is like the power of preparation that Jonathan, before he does an interview, like locks himself away, watches game film of the person who he's going to interview and approaches it almost like a lawyer preparing a case.

But the second one, and this is the one that will really serve you in your life and business and organizations is authenticity. I think Tony will tell you that Jonathan, in that interview, is exactly the way he would be if he was sitting across from you, having a macchiato. And that is so powerful, that translates to people because it's so rare that we experience true authenticity from one of our leaders, whether it's in our company or organization or public life. Tony, I'm going to let you rebut.

KK: You try to rebut, we've got a lot to get through still, and we've got only 15 minutes left. So, maybe a quick rebuttal, then I want to turn to Orson with another question.

TS: I will say both Jonathan Swan and Donald Trump are very authentic. And I think the authenticity of the President is a large part of his quotient of success. Kevin, I'll yield back my time.

KK: Thanks. And actually, that tees up my question perfectly in a way, this notion of authenticity. And my question for you Orson is the upcoming debate cycle and what role you expect, if any, they will play? Because the President proved back in 2016 to be a very confounding disruptor to his debate partners, right? Both in the primary debates and obviously as well with Hillary Clinton. So, what do you anticipate upcoming on that front?

OP: I mean, I think it's another news cycle that the candidates can figure out unique ways to build their narrative. And then more importantly, pre-debate, post-debate, use it as springboards to really target in on the states that matter and find ways to blend in those states, those visits, and to the debate itself. Debates are the 'gotcha' moment and debate is what makes news for the most part. I think voters have made their decision. They're cheering for their candidates. Very rarely in my political life have I seen a candidate completely go down in flames from a debate. And I have seen many candidates who have won a debate handedly and gone on to lose the election two or three weeks later.

So, I think the debates are great TV. I think what the candidates wisely are going to do is use the debate to share their messages in different ways. And I think that's what you're seeing the Democrats do with the virtual convention, in that you had, as Tony said, the greatest hits, but you also had President Obama last night who used the convention not to give a political speech, it felt more like a State of the Union speech that he was trying to get a message, not only in the U.S. but throughout that this is a time that we need to

take serious. So, I wouldn't put too much stock in what happens in these debates. I'm sure there will be some newsworthy moments. It's what happens before and after the debates that count most.

PC: And Kevin, I'll just build on that real quick. I mean, I think one of the things that we haven't talked about is the tremendous polarization in the electorate, which just continues to get even more polarized year after year after year, and the corollary of that is the shrinking pool of truly persuadable voters. And so, these conventions and the debates are more about motivating the folks who are already with you. You know, President Trump, even at his lowest point, still hangs on to 40 to 43% of the electorate.

Those folks aren't going anywhere. They are rock solid with him. And one of the reasons why he won in '16 is because Hillary Clinton had an unbelievable inability to motivate Democratic voters. So that's something to keep an eye on. A lot of what the parties are doing in the last 75 days, is really about turnout. We saw that in the DNC this week, we're going to see it at the RNC next week, really focused on getting their folks to the polls.

TS: I just want to quickly weigh in here. You asked a good question before, and it ties into the conversation we're having now. What is the opportunity for both sides in terms of getting any sort of growth target, swinging people to their side? And I think Phil's right. It is a very narrow pool, but it exists. Let's not pretend it doesn't. There are people who we want to, as a party and obviously supporters of the President, want to attract. I think our mandate to those people who right now are very conflicted is to come up with ways to give them permission to vote for Donald Trump. They don't like him. They don't like what he says, but they kind of like what he does, and they're really not buying into the idea that the radical left should be running the country.

But they need permission. They need to be given a reason to feel okay about themselves if they vote for Donald Trump, and that's kind of the challenge for our side. For the Democrat side, I think one of the flaws -and I'll slightly disagree with my colleague, Orson on this one point -is that I do think debates matter, I think especially this year, because there is a perception that the entire campaign strategy for the Democrats is hiding their candidate. And COVID certainly is a legitimate part of that reason, but he can't hide forever. And the debates are really going to be the first opportunity to evaluate both of these candidates' side by side, because Joe Biden isn't campaigning the way Donald Trump is.

The President this week was in Minnesota. He's going to Pennsylvania today. He was in Arizona. He is in Iowa. He's in Wisconsin. Joe Biden's in Delaware, and he's stayed in Delaware pretty much this entire campaign season. So, I do think the debate will illustrate, and you call it disruption, Kevin, which is right. I mean, it's a good word, but disruption is kind of in the eye of the beholder. So, you hear disruption, you don't like Trump, you kind of roll your eyes. He's Rodney Dangerfield in Caddyshack II, or rather Caddyshack. You hear disruption and you're a Trump supporter or someone inclined to support the President, and you're like, "Good, because DC's failed us for half a century. And the first time I've seen anything happen that helps me is when this guy has been President disrupting the order, including his own party, by the way."

So, when you have Joe Biden's 47 years, nearly half a century, are you going to change things in year 48 of your public service? What have you waited for, for 47 years? So, I'm just saying, that's why debates are important. I want to make sure people understand the critical nature of the base, particularly in this election cycle.

KK: Well, I think we can certainly debate whether there has been 50 years of failure out of Washington, considering the state of the world, world peace, growth of people out of poverty, etc. But I want to turn here for the last couple of minutes, because Phil brought up a very important word, which is turnout. Because a lot of the fight over the last few weeks has certainly centered on mail-in voting, and not withstanding some backing down in the last couple of days by the Postmaster General, it's certainly been discussed a lot by the Democrats at the convention. So, it's a big issue, and I guess my question for you guys is how you see it.

And let me just tee up two other points here, and I want to let you guys have at it for the last few minutes here, which is the issues of what might happen on election night and in the aftermath if we don't get a definitive call on election night. I assume the Republican side has got its legal army ready to deploy, and I guess in some cases it already has. We've heard the Democrats have as well, but I'd like to hear from you guys what they're preparing for. And Mike, what is the media preparing for here after the scars of Florida in 2000, and of course the 2016 election as well, in terms of how they're going to cover this?

MA: In the spirit of smart brevity, I'm going to answer with two sentences. First, very important that we help people understand that this is now election season, not election day. And the way to think about it now is that election day, November 3rd, is the last day to vote. And then how quickly that gets counted is going to determine how much uncertainty there is in the country. And second, just something funny, a funny text that I got that gives the Republican view of the postal thing. When the Postmaster General said that he wasn't going to make any more changes, this Republican texted me and said, "Is the postal hoax already over?"

I was starting to enjoy it.” So anyway, that’s a little smile to go.

PC: So, I’ll just weigh in here. I just came through a very hard-fought primary in Utah a few weeks ago where my candidate ended up beating Jon Huntsman, which no one in DC thought was going to happen. And they had a four-week period of voting, and it took at least a week to sort of certify. So that’s Utah, it’s a well-managed state. There isn’t a lot of evidence of voting fraud, but it’s a unique time we’re living in, and again, states are different. States like Washington State and Oregon, they’ve been doing vote by mail for a long time. They’ve got the processes, procedures in place.

They can handle it. New states, I think this is a lot of the point the President’s making and others, the county registrars who are really responsible for this stuff, they’re completely unprepared in these states. So, if we do end up having sort of universal vote by mail in states across the country, I think you could literally see a scenario where we have an election season and the election season’s going to last probably until late November, December until we actually have a certified winner, and that is not good for our democracy.

KK: So, let me ask you guys something here. Obviously, Tony laid out a scenario where the President wins a second term. For the benefit of our listeners, obviously most of them representing major American corporations, what does a Trump Administration 2.0 look like? Is this past the prelude? In other words, are the policy preferences and initiatives and the direction of this administration likely to continue in the second administration, or would you see any major deviations or new directions or new emphasis? And the second question is, if we have the democratic sweep, what kind of reckoning do you think the Republican Party will have to have in the aftermath of that, if any?

TS: Okay. So, let’s talk about the Trump Administration 2.0, and I’ll just say obviously the big focus is going to be on Operation Warp Speed and making sure a safe, reliable vaccine for COVID is established, number one. Number two is bringing back this economy. And I think even the most ungenerous view of the Trump administration, and even if we would take for fact all the polling data that everyone cites suggesting he’s going to lose, even in those polls, people still trust him on the economy more and more. And I think you’re going to see a big emphasis on the comeback, making sure America comes back and is positioned to recover from COVID holistically, so on the public health side, on the public safety side, and on the economic side. So that will be, I think, one of the key versions.

I will say this one thing to everybody on the call, and obviously having worked in the administration in several roles. I can’t tell you how many times in my political life I’ve had friends who’ve said to me, “I just wish somebody was elected who wasn’t like an extremist on either side. They just wanted to solve problems.” I’ll tell you, I think Donald Trump’s complete DNA is that. He wants to solve problems. We’ve gotten completely, I think, sidetracked by a lot of the vitriol about maybe some of his personal kind of views or how he communicates via Twitter, and things about him. What’s been missed is this man got Middle East peace for the first time in 20 some odd years.

This man did tax reform for the first time in 31 years. He got criminal justice reform done. He’s done things that have taken other leaders’ kind of decades to try to do in a very short amount of time, and it’s largely because he just wants to solve the problem. He’s not necessarily tethered to the ideology behind it. He really is more interested in, how do you get this done? So, I always said in a second Trump term, if there could just be kind of a suspension of personal animus toward him, whether it’s

Republicans or Democrats in Congress, a lot can get done, because he wants to get a lot done.

KK: Well, we are up against the bottom of the hour. I'm going to take a moment here to just say that one of the elements of the pandemic is that it's been global, and that has impacted every country in the world. And as a result, we've been able to see how different countries have performed against each other. And it is just simply a fact that we've had more people die. We've had more cases, and we've had a bigger economic hit than our many of our wealthy global competitors. So, I'm not really sure that we can easily say that problem solving has been an overwhelming success. And I think it is far too premature to suggest that we have had Middle East peace achieved in any meaningful way by the latest news, but we'll see.

But there was a lot of moving parts in this election. We're going to come back after the Labor Day break and address this further as we get through the election season, as Mike put it, and through the debates. So, I want to thank Mike Allen, and Phil, and Tony, and Orson for their comments and thoughts. Obviously, a lot going on. We'll be back. Hope everybody has a great end of summer. We will be back after the Labor Day break, so thanks very much. Have a great weekend. See you next time.



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