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**Jonathan Groubert:** Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute is brought to you by the members of the John Adams. Why not become a member yourself, or, even better, a patron and enjoy all the extras and benefits. Find out more at <https://www.john-adams.nl/>, <https://www.john-adams.nl/> and click on; become a member.

From Amsterdam, this is Bright Minds. The podcast from the John Adams Institute. A treasure trove of the best and the brightest of American thinking. And this is David Frum. The author, writer for *the Atlantic* and former President George W. Bush's speechwriter. Talking about America's relationship with Russia back in 2020.

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**David Frum:** Russians are always saying: if we don't get our way, if you say we can't use poison gas, that's it World War III. And you think: You know what; Russia is a society with an economy the size of Italy, with a military, a military less capable than Israel's. If you just tell them the rules, they're going to have to listen. There are a lot of policy outcomes other than they get to do whatever they want and World War III.

00:01:11

**Jonathan Groubert:** David Frum almost sounds like he knew Vladimir Putin was up to something. David Jeffrey Frum is a Canadian-American political commentator who is currently a senior editor at *the Atlantic*, as well as an MSNBC contributor and author of *Trumpocalypse*. In *Trumpocalypse*, Frum digs deep into the causes of America's tragic national fragmentation, and he urges the GOP to rethink its future, saying that no two-party system can remain a democracy unless both parties adhere to democratic values, not just one.

His talk at the John Adams is also a testament to how quickly circumstances can change. There was, for example no way for him to know about the January Sixth insurrection, or about the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the time of this talk, this is also a testament to how things stay the same. Like the fact that, even though we know that Trump lost the 2020 election, Trump's voters and the forces that made him politically viable are still with us today, and that is where today's talk starts in September of 2020. We were in the middle of the Corona crisis and just a month and a half from the last presidential election, so this was an online event with David Frum in the US. The Amsterdam side of things was hosted by Tim Wagemakers of the Balie, the location for the event, and the other voice is Tracy Metz, the director of the Adams Institute and the editor of this podcast. Tracy took questions from the online viewers, and we started the show with Tim Wagemakers asking Frum about a quote from his most recent book: *Trumpocalypse*.

00:02:55

**Tim Wagemakers:** To contain and reverse the global movement to illiberal authoritarianism, it will be necessary to do more, much more than eject that movement's mouthpiece president, from the oval office!

00:03:07

**David Frum:** If Donald Trump loses, first the people who supported him and they remain, and the weaknesses in the American political system that he exploited, they remain. And the adverse trends in the world economy, they all remain. I mean we are moving to a world in

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which many people are losing faith in the ideas of trade and integration. On the European Continent, you can see many people losing, becoming impatient with the European project and seeing it as tedious and boring, and not, the poetry is all with those who would destroy, not with those who want to build and create.

And so, we are going to. When this, if we get through 2020 on the two sides of the Atlantic together, that the job of restoring partnerships, restoring trading arrangements, making people understand that democracy is exciting and ennobling. I think one of the things we saw movements like we see in movements like the Black Lives Matter movement and the Bernie Sanders movement is they're kind of impatient with meetings. They think politics is something that happens in the streets. It happens on your feet, it happens to the accompaniment of music and the idea that no, it happens in a committee room. It happens by raising your hand and speaking in turn. That that is politics.

When the first book came out, and it was, right now, we're kind of in a cynical and tired mood in the United States. When the first book came out, we were in a much more energized mood. And so I spoke to a lot of very idealistic young people who, at different campuses, would ask me; What, what could they personally do to make a difference? And my advice to them always was; get involved in something political that seems boring. Go to, get involved with a group that decides whether or not liquor licenses can go in your neighborhood, can be extended until two in the morning, or they must stop at midnight, serve on a jury.

Anything where you must work with people who are different from yourself toward a limited goal and where you develop the habits of political cooperation and what you see in these mass, and I think, I think we all have some sympathy with the ultimate goals of Black Lives Matter. But, but what we see is a movement that increasingly is a movement and not a political activity at all, and the energies of movements are for democratic societies to channel them in productive ways is always very difficult and it requires habits that we value less than people did 30 and 40 years.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** The same time, that's also a second step right? After raising awareness, getting involved, the the, the, the, the things people are fighting for drip into politics and other people start taking it over. It's also a natural process, maybe.

00:06:03

**David Frum:** Yes and no, if you are prepared to accept; I will not get my own way. If you say getting some of what I want is good, it's unreasonable. That clearly would.

00:06:14

**Tim Wagemakers:** Learning to appreciate a compromise?

00:06:16

**David Frum:** Unless, if I do not get everything, its betrayal. That's why revolutionary movements so often end up with the Guillotine because they know only two expo. There are only two possibilities: the total creation of a new society or betrayal from within. And since they never create a new society, there must always be betrayal from within.

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00:06:39

**Tim Wagemakers** It's a good moment, maybe if we're at the guillotine right now, to go to slido and see what questions come popping in. Tracy do have a few?

00:06:48

**Tracy Metz:** I have a lot and thank you all for sending them in a lot of really good questions, one of them that I think connects well with this part of our discussion: If Biden is elected, what should his first priority be to reinvigorate American democracy?

00:07:04

**David Frum:** I think his first priorities have to be to deal with the choke points in the American political system that will enable a minority to doom him to failure. Because politics will continue and if we have a weak recovery from coronavirus, if the problems don't get, if there isn't quick improvement, there is an election in 2022 and, and that isn't enough time for the Republican Party to be reconciled to democratic values.

So, Biden needs to do things to make sure that he's able to realize a meaningful program, and some of that will be at the federal level. Reforms to Congress, I would say making sure that there's some urban states like the district of Columbia getting statehood click quickly. For the district of Columbia, a lot of them happen at the local level, because one of the ways that 2020 will be very different from 2008, it will give an opportunity that wasn't there in 2008. And 2020 is also a census, which means that 2021 will be a redistricting year.

What happened to present Obama? So he wins in 2008, becomes President in 2009. He does not deliver results very quickly, and so he loses seats in 2010, and then the Republicans, who gain seats and to achieve at the state-level a dominance they have not had since the 1920's, then proceed to rewrite all of the maps in a way that gives them, through the 2010, massive power at the state-level. In the 2018 election, Republicans got about 45% of the vote in the state of Wisconsin and they got about 65% of the seats, and they owe that success to the maps they drew back in 2011.

Democrats are going have an opportunity, if they win at the state-level in 2020, to draw less gerrymandered maps in 2021 and to make create a more competitive political system. I say this: I remain a registered Republican and I look forward to the day I can return to working within my natural political Party. But we need, we need the Democrats to be successful in this project, because we need Republicans to be forced to confront. They must be a party of the democratic center right. They must seek power by competing for votes, not seek power by preventing people from voting.

00:09:29

**Tim Wagemakers:** Tracy, another question.

00:09:30

**Tracy Metz:** One of the questions that, if I may steal the mic, in this case. One of the questions I really wanted to ask you myself, David, what does it mean to you now to be a Republican in a time when, in the eyes of many, the Republican Party has gone over to the dark side?

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**David Frum:** Well, without being over dramatic about this comparison. I think there have

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been many moments where a political system emerges from authoritarianism. That where, let me answer it with another question: what does it mean to be on the left in Eastern Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall? What does it mean to be on the right in Chile after the departure of Pinochet? That is, that you had these authoritarian leaders who hijacked your values for their own purposes, and you have to find some way to rehabilitate your values while repudiating authoritarian methods.

And just so, just and it's been. It's challenging. An it's been challenging for the German left to, especially in the eastern part of Germany, to make its peace fully with the German Republic, and it's been challenging for the Chilean right to do the same. I think that's sort of what I mean. I mean. I am someone, I am a believer in markets. I'm a believer in private property, I'm sympathetic to the problems of business enterprise. I want to see a generally smaller state sector route than a bigger state sector, I want to see. I'm prepared to trade at any given moment, given the choice between more liberty and more equality. I make the more liberty choice, the things that push you toward the right as we call it in the modern world. That's, that's, where I am, but I'm also a small deed Democrat and I'm and I'm in that broad sense of the term. I'm, I'm, forced to confront someone who believes in the broadest idea of what it means to be a liberal. That is, to be in favor of the free competition of ideas and the horror, the use of force in politics. So we have a Republican Party that needs to be redeemed and made a useful institution again rather than a dangerous one.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** I think that's something I'm going to dive into. Also a bit later. Maybe one more question from Slido: do you have one?

00:11:52

**Tracy Metz:** Yes, this connects with what you were just saying David. One of our audience members asked whether the Republican Party can be salvaged without denouncing the Trump administration?

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**David Frum:** Well, it's going to have to be salvaged because so long as we have the political institutions we do. The United States will be a two-party system and it's so hard to launch a new political party in the United States. I mean we have seen parties go through events that would seem even more discrediting than Donald Trump. I say in the book that the Democrats got themselves on the wrong side of the civil war. The Republicans got themselves on the wrong side of the great depression. Both parties managed to come back because it's easier to change them than to start, start new. I think it will. It won't happen, the process of coming to terms with Donald Trump will happen through generational change. People who were present we'll say we'll get younger people and they will say: well, you know, obviously I wanted nothing to do with that, but I still believe in these principles and that that's how reform will, I hope, come. We need it to happen fast because it's going to be a bumpy ride and the next two to four years post-COVID and if we have a Trump, a party that remains Trumpefied, being one of our two great parties in the United States, we will never achieve democratic stability.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** I think some people want to dive a little bit deeper into something you mentioned, Tracy?

00:13:20

**Tracy Metz:** We have quite a few questions from people who wonder: Is the U.S. on the brink of civil war, will states secede from the union and what is the worst-case scenario if Trump is reelected or claims the election?

00:13:37

**David Frum:** I share the view that we live in a much more peaceful world than people did even 30 years ago. So, I think, I don't envision these kinds of very dramatic, very violent scenarios. I do worry about and I think we are seeing this, low intensity right wing racist violence. The attack on the Christ Church, Christchurch, New Zealand, Mosque, Anders Breivik, the attacks we've seen in the United States. So, this is not a civil war because we're talking about. You know the most terrible of these killers will kill some dozens of people, which is hard. That's hardly, I mean it's,, it's a horrifying catastrophe, but it's not a battle because we don't do that anymore.

But I worry about just that. Just as disturbed young men from Islamic backgrounds can go on the internet and find a starter kit of rationalization and methods and slogans and ideology. And then and then the starter kit says: now go find your own weapon and go find your own target. There's no training, there's no program, there's no organization, but there is a kind of prefabricated tissue of ideas and grievances and justifications and I think we are seeing now, on both sides of the Atlantic, young men from traditional ethnic majority backgrounds self-radicalizing in that same ISIS way and in our country, where it's so easy to get weapons. If you, if you can find a rationalization and grievance, you can find a weapon and then you can find a target. We'll, we'll, see a lot of this.

00:15:23

**Tracy Metz:** You mentioned this today on twitter David. You're an active twitter and enjoy reading your tweets. And you said there was a video of a group of armed men walking the streets, and you said this is not a militia, this is simply a gang.

00:15:41

**David Frum:** All right, (inaudible) we will see men in scraps and fragments of military uniform carrying weapons and, and trying to intimidate their Neighbours, and they will often be described as part of a militia movement. Well, a militia in America is an old, established institution in the United States. It is the armed force of a state government and, and what makes something a militia?

We have the first federal act describing the militia was passed in 1792, and it regulated the relationship between the federal government and the militias, and it identified two crucial elements to make something militia: There must be officers who have control over their troops, and those officers must in turn answer to a political authority. And if you have those two conditions, the other officers discipline the troops and the officers, and then it's a militia. It's and it's distinguished from the regular armed forces because it's, it's, less professional, they maybe not paid, they maybe don't drill all the time. But these people, they are gangs and we have, and this is an increasingly common phenomenon in the United

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States, and many of the individuals in those gangs will, again find their way to prefabricated rationalizations for violence on the internet. Once Trump is gone, I do worry about this as a problem.

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**Tim Wagemakers** But then maybe that was another segment I thought would be interesting to talk about, and that's maybe, and you write in your book also about it, how did we get here? I mean, and, and one of the things in your book I thought it was a really striking sentence. You write about some conservative presidents, you write: Sometimes they have drawn power from deep and dark energies in the American soul.

And you say that in response to some people claiming, in the book racism and authoritarianism, we're always present within American conservatism.

Is it in that sense that what's happening right now, what we're seeing is a legacy also of the presidents that came before him and also a president maybe, you served. Is there some truth to that?

Because I thought it was really a deep sentence that they have drawn from these deep and dark energies.

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**David Frum:** But I think I go on to say in that same paragraph that, while they drew from these energies, they also tried to control the energies and the difference between Ronald and George W Bush. I'll tell a story about President Bush. I remember being in conversation with him with a staffer and one of our staffers who is a very sophisticated, modern person and, you know, went on to a very successful career. But his father was kind of an oddball who lived in the Hills with, and President Bush was very funny. He asked his staffer: so you're dad, his own generator, does he keep stock up on canned goods? And like he, just he completely knew the type. But he obviously thought of it as like that's not one of my supporters, I have zero time for that.

But I say we have to do two things. We have to keep two truths in mind, and Americans tend to say, they explain everything in American society by reference to something else in American society, as I said, we see Donald Trump and therefore we will look backwards into the American past and look at Reagan and George W Bush and Richard Nixon. And I'm always trying to press Americans to be less parochial in their political thinking and say: okay, yes, I'm, I'm not telling you you're completely wrong that this has historical continuity. But it is notable that there are similar movements in Poland and Hungary, in Eastern Germany, in France, in Great Britain, they are not drawing from the history of Republican Party. So, I encourage you to look across borders and across, look, look laterally. At the experiences of many different advanced countries whose politics are so similar to one another emphasize that more and that the uniqueness of the American experience emphasized it less. Because I think with this, these authoritarian nationalist movements, we are all very much in the same boat and I think we will, that the solution to these problems is going to. We're all in the same boat too. It's going to require more international cooperation, both at the basic level of police work.

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We have to make sure that, you know, the man who shot up the mosque was an Australian-born person who did his weapons training in Europe and then decided to carry out his murder in New Zealand because he found the police there less sophisticated than in Australia. And that these people are moving across borders. So the police have to move working across at the same time. If we going to get our economies moving again post-COVID we, we are going to need more trade and more international organization. I mean it is. It is a horrible thing to me that in this COVID crisis, how I mean, you've seen even in Europe a breakdown of cooperation when you have borders rise and France and Germany refused to share medical supplies with Italy, never mind the absence of cooperation between the United States and the European Union and the British off on their own adventure. And what we ought to have learned from the past, from this experience, if, if we didn't know it already was, this world's problems are too big for any one government, even the government of the United States.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** But maybe, because I think that's, that's, a really excellent analysis of not emphasizing America's uniqueness all the time to explain things that are going on in the entire world. At the same time, we've all seen that America in the past decades was such an important world power, maybe world leader, that of course they were also in a situation to spread certain. How do you say it? What's happening in America also affects other countries. So, at the same time you can also say that, for example, if you talk about free markets, if you talk about trade for decades that was shaped by American, stands towards that.

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**David Frum:** Well, that's going to have to change, I mean when I was in the Bush administration, as you mentioned, and that was not even now. That's not quite 20 years ago, depending on who's doing the math, the American economy then was about seven times the size of the Chinese economy. When we went into the last global financial crisis in 2008, the American economy was three times the size of the Chinese economy. Today, depending on who's counting the Chinese economy is about three quarters the size of the United States may be a little more and maybe a little less. And before I am able to finish, probably my last book, the Chinese economy will overtake the United States economy sometime, perhaps as soon as, as this coming decade.

So, we no longer live in a world in which the United States, now the United States, will remain the richest country on the, American, will remain richer than China. But the idea, the United States will be able to impose its will on the world. And that's one of the ways that Donald Trump is such a backward looking figure, because his big idea has been: he will bark orders and everybody else will obey, and he didn't understand, when America could bark orders like that, the presidents were wise enough not to try, and one, maybe one of the reasons we have Donald Trump is because we are realizing we've lost our power to bark orders, and so we got a barker at exactly the moment when the barker became most obsolete.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** But that's like the emperor without any clothes on, right?

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**David Frum:** I think, well, maybe, like you said emperor, maybe like the way that the Roman empire got weaker, the roman-emperors had ever more elaborate etiquette: you know, when they were all-powerful, they were simple people who dressed like anybody else. When, when, as their empire deteriorated, they would wear these absurd costumes. So, I just think, if we're going to have a world of trade and democratic agreement, we are going to have to have partnership and alliances. Where an American, American leadership is going to have to be self-conscious about the need for cooperation in a way that Donald Trump defies.

00:23:44

**Tim Wagemakers:** Tracy, are there any other questions?

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**Tracy Metz:** Absolutely, you were addressing the relative strength of the Chinese economy. There have been several questions about the role of Russia in this election. One of our audience members who send it a question is worried that Biden, if he wins, will retaliate against Russia. And that that might start another world war. Can you address the issue of Russia's role in these elections?

00:24:13

**David Frum:** Russia had, I think, an important and maybe even decisive role in 2016. I think in 2020 they're likely to be less effective. They're most important, the most important thing that they did in 2016 was to contribute to the deterioration in African American turnout. The Russians their most sophisticated propaganda message or messages aimed at stoking the disillusionment and alienation of younger black voters, especially younger Black men. The system is rigged. It's all hopeless. You should stay home, and so we saw. Black turnout has been rising in every election since the 1960's.

Obviously because of the Obama election. That drove an historic spike in black voter turnout, and it reached it reached what everyone thought was a peak in 2008, and then in 2012 it rose even higher than in 2008. That's on the reasons that Mitt Romney was surprised by the election that his model was based on 2008. That's a record for black turnout. it can't be any higher than that in 2012, support for President Obama is deteriorating every other group in the population. You just do the arithmetic, he's not being disrespectful, but you just do the arithmetic. He can't win. Except Black America turned out in even greater numbers in 2012 than in 2008.

In fact, 2012 was the first election in American history where a black person was more likely to come vote than a white person was. So obviously there was going to be some relaxation from that in 2016. But the decline was much bigger, and you would. It fell not only back, it fell back below 2008 levels and it fell furthest in the Midwest. And it fell of all. And it fell furthest of the states in which it fell deepest were Wisconsin and Michigan.

And if black turnout in those two states had been anything like its historic norm, Hillary Clinton wud have won, would have won Michigan by a million votes at least. So, the Russians are important there. But this point about this is a piece of junk from RT and Sputnik. The Russians are always saying: if we don't get our way, if you say we can't use poison gas, that's



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it World War three. You know what Russia is: a society with an economy the size of Italy, with militarily, military less capable than Israel's you know, if you just tell them the rules, they're going to have to listen and, and that is they have. There are a lot of policy outcomes other than; they get to do whatever they want in World War three.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** So next question maybe?

00:27:02

**Tracy Metz:** There have been also several questions about the U.S. election system. Is it possible to finally make the move away from the electoral college and towards a majority vote?

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**David Frum:** Well, I think we should be doing in the towns and cities at the state-level, some experiments. I mean there is a project, for example some states, to experiment with ranked choice voting. I would be interested to see how that comes out. I mean, we do have these laboratories of democracy where we need to try things and, and one of the advantages of the federal system, you get to experiment with ideas at the state-level see if they produce positive results and then, if they work, adopt those ideas nationally. It's hard to see how you get rid of the Electoral College.

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**Tracy Metz:** That would mean changing the constitution?

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**David Frum:** Right, but there are ways you can mitigate the Electoral College. For example, electoral votes are distributed according to the total number of congressional seats plus the two Senate seats. So, California, I think, is 56 vote something. It's got 54. So if we were to make, for example, the House of Representatives bigger, and if we are to say, instead of 435 in the House of Representatives we went to 635, we would write the balance. We would, just by doing that we would shrink the power of some of the less populated states and remember the real evil of the electoral College. Is, it's bad that it favors the underpopulated states, but the real evil is the way it tends to make, to nullify the votes of people who live in states that are politically one-sided. So states like California, which now votes two to one democratic. Neither Republicans nor Democrats put much effort into California. Because why should they? Because the outcome is preordained, where they put a lot of outcome effort into Florida, which is a big state but which is a closely divided one. So we need to think about, about how we make our elections more contested. But the reforms I'm most immediately interested in making the district of Columbia a state, to make, to bring more urban quality into the into the Senate. You probably got two senators of color. Bang, right away from that and to make the Senate work more effectively. But expanding the House could go far to weakening the ill effects of the Electoral College.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** But also, you're right to adopt a modern voting rights act.

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**David Frum:** Yes. Well, so we. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which is still in effect but its most important provision, was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013 and, and what the

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Supreme court did, what they said in 2013 was not crazy. By the way, the Supreme Court said the Voting Rights Act said that, those states and cities that have histories that have printed 65 histories of racial discrimination, they get special scrutiny from the Department of Justice. What that meant in 2013 was that the state of Hawaii, which had a history of racial privilege in voting, that got special scrutiny, and the state of Wisconsin, which is the worst actor north of the Mason-Dixon line. It didn't get special scrutiny, and the Supreme Court said that's irrational. And the Supreme Court, I think, was right about that.

So, I think a modern Voting Rights Act has to begin by saying; the problem with the measures that were struck down in 2013 was they gave special scrutiny according to your behavior in the in the years before 1965. So, a modern Voting Rights act is one that says we need to look. We are going to need to look at, have some system of review that is not based on history but is based on current practice. Are there? Are you gerrymandering? Do you consistently make it more difficult to have voting rights, voting and poorer neighborhoods in minority neighborhoods in the majority? You need some kind of objective tests based on the here and now that would trigger action by the Department of Justice, not the history lesson that was struck down in 2013.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** Because actually that's another theme I'd like to address. Maybe because you're, you're, talking. If I listen to you, you say it's, it's, no use to speculate about the future. I don't do predictions. We should be careful with looking back and saying; this is where it all started. Since this uniqueness of America, we're seeing global friend trends. So we need to look at right now. And one of the things if you talk about the institution is journalism, right? And actually, today Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal, who is a friend of the John Adams Institute, journalist. He wrote a piece about how American journalism is well in trouble, since they don't know how to deal with this President. And one of the things that some people said was: you should stop covering America as a democracy, because if you do that you do the wrong things. You cover every press conference, you, you cover everything the President says because in general essence, you think governments are in good faith. What you should do is; you should gather everything as a sandwich. Say the disclaimer. He's probably not true. Trump said this and doctors disputed that. How do you see this roll of journalism? Because, because, it was quite a telling piece, I think how this discussion is going on in America.

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**David Frum:** We have no BBC, and even our most powerful elite institutions like the New York Times have very limited range, very limited reach compared to their counterparts in Europe. The beginning of wisdom about journalism in the United States, is to understand that the most important media companies, the United States, are not the New York Times, not CNN, not even Fox news. The most important media company United States by far is Facebook, and the next most important media company in the United States is YouTube and probably Reddit is somewhere up there and a podcaster named Joe Rogan is more important than CNN. And just so when we talk about being in the now, we need to, so much of our media criticism is based on the media habits of older, better educated and more affluent people who grew up in different media culture than the one of today.

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So I don't think the problem is that, there's much to criticize in the way cable news covers anything and CNN in particular, you know, we all consume it and it has the problem but is both simultaneously trying to be moderate in its positioning but super sensationalist in its method. Actually it is of the networks. It is by far the more sensational than Fox news you will find, like more, because CNN depends so much on keeping you watching for two more minutes.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** And Fox doesn't?

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**David Frum:** Not as much because Fox, this is maybe more, but Fox tends to be in. If you get the cheapest cable package you get CNN, you have to pay a little bit more to get the package that has Fox. Typically, not in every town, but we had different regions, but typically Fox. If you, if your cable company buys Fox and you take the second package, whether you ever watch Fox or not, they get two dollars a year from you. They don't really need to keep you watching. They worry about their regular watchers and selling advertisements. But CNN is in a different business. So, they, they depend enormously on their airport travel. They just need to get eyeballs and so they tend to be the most. And if you watch them you will see that they are always saying, you know, coming up the boy trapped in the Well. We will have the story, but the boy trapped in the well at the 55 minute mark. But they don't tell you it's going like just into this desperate effort to keep in the movement.

But for all that it's not as important at all as the way that Facebook manipulates those who are less sophisticated. I mean, the fact is that people who are watching cable news are by far the best informed people, by far the most politically mobilized, most attached to the political system. They, they, if they are absorbing their cable news package, is biased. It's because the consumer wants that bias, understands the bias, is paying money for the bias or given in? Facebook is engaged in a much more dealing much, people are much more disconnected and their disinformation. It's not just political by the way. You know that Facebook, you would say: what is the single most important consequence of the existence of Facebook? It's the return of measles and other preventable diseases. Because in 1995, if you were an anti-vaxxer you didn't know any one who didn't think you were crazy, whereas in 2020 and you are an anti-vaxxer or you can build a community of people who think you're not crazy.

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**Tim Wagemakers:** But actually, that's also something you write about in your book, because you get this sort of new, strange, interesting coalition that sort of breakthrough, while the boundaries we used to set for ourselves from Democrats, Republicans, left-right it's a whole different kind of forces that are up there, right?

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**David Frum:** Well, you see this in the reaction of the pandemic, and I have this question in the book. We have the people who are opposed to modern medicine, who doubt science on the pandemic. Are they left-wing or right wing? I assume it's true in the Netherlands here that when you, when you meet these people, they have, many of them have patterns that look right or backgrounds that look right wing. Others have backgrounds that look left-wing

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but in this new world what they agree about is that the pandemic is a fake, that Bill Gates wants to put a microchip in your body.

In the same way, I mean we have. We've had a revival of conspiratorial antisemitism. Is that left-wing or is that right wing? It appeals to people on both sides. And meanwhile, in the era of Trump and Brexit, you discover John Major and Tony Blair. What do they disagree about? I mean once upon a time, they are the deepest political enemies and today, probably on the most important issues facing Great Britain, John Major and Tony Blair probably agree about everything.

00:37:32

**Tim Wagemakers:** So our way of analysis is also to change maybe. There are different questions, I guess.

00:37:37

**Tracy Metz:** There are indeed a number of people are wondering. We saw again today that Trump refuses to say whether he'll accept the outcome of the elections, Roger Stone said you should declare martial law right away. What would, could possibly happen if he does indeed not accept the outcome: constitutional limbo, martial law. What are the scenarios?

00:37:59

**David Fume:** Well, with Donald Trump there's always the combination of his political pathology and his psychological pathology. So, what you're hearing when he talks about not, except, it's also, he can't, he cannot psychically cope with not being the dominant, all-powerful winner, so he doesn't have a plan B. You know, President Obama, going into the 2012 election, ordered part of his administration to focus on: Should he lose a transition plan to Mitt Romney, that there were people. There was a group of people whose job it was to prepare for the possibility that President Obama would lose and would have to transition power.

Because the way a psychologically normal politician thinks is; I hope I win, I believe I deserve to win, I think I probably will win, but nothing in life is certain and you have to be prepared for every eventuality. And I don't want to look, and if I lose I don't want to look irresponsible and selfish and like I didn't I only cared about me and not the country. So, Donald Trump doesn't have that. But he's also trying, he depends on emotion, this dark emotional energy. So, he's trying to stoke it because he knows that his people are intimidating, that they are the people who go to polling stations with guns and stand. We saw some of this in 2016 and will see more of it 2020. Stand with guns and try to frighten away women who are coming with children and maybe deter them from voting or create a general mood of uncertainty and chaos that will allow Donald Trump to hold on to power in some way.

I don't know. I don't think he's got a plan. He never has plans, but he's got habits and impulses and if the vote is close, I think we could be into some very dangerous situations. We could also see a part of the country decide that, even if Biden wins and takes the oath and assumes power, that somehow they are no longer connect, the whole system is no longer legitimate. And so, you know, we, we had this in the 15 years after the civil war. You know the people in the western movies, the Jesse James and Billy Kid, and people like that. They were veterans of the Confederate Army who would go, decided the government had

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no standing in their eyes, and so they moved out beyond the reach of, of, society and they then attacked trains. They were both political terrorists and bandits, and that's a common pattern right. You robbed the train to disrupt the US mail because you hate the United States and you also make a dishonest dollar for yourself at the same time, and, and we may see some of that, Donald Trump sort of preparing the way for that.

00:40:45

**Tim Wagemakers:** But at the same time, if that happens, then you say he might not win the popular vote. But we have the risk, and that was quite a harsh sentence. We have the risk of losing the connection of the people who voted for him to the political system in America. If you say that, then it sounds to me as a total nitwit on the subject. It sounds to me as if that may be even a bigger risk or, even more worse than him becoming President again. It sounds like a catch 22.

00:41:17

**David Fume:** Well, we have to solve one problem at a time. And it's, it's, like that game, Jenga, where you have to take away the sticks, (inaudible), me too, and the James Bond movie, where they have to cut one wire after another to diffuse a bomb. You can't cut all the wires at once. It's one at a time, and then the expertise is knowing which wire is the one to cut last.

00:41:42

**Tim Wagemakers:** Yeah!

00:41:43

**Tim Wagemakers:** But so so and so bringing about a more normal, political, more normal government. That's task one. But then we have to find some way. I mean 63 million people voted for Donald Trump and they're not moving anywhere and, and while they are getting older, they are going to be with us for some time and we have to find some way to reconcile as many of them as possible.

00:42:11

**Tim Wagemakers:** What would be the first step?

00:42:13

**David Fume:** Well I. That's the last third of the book I think we need. First, the first step is to make sure, the most important step is to make sure the government works better for people. I mean, one of the reasons that Americans are so alienated from government is they don't see results for them. So, I talk in the book about a couple of, a series of projects that I think could bind the citizens closer to the government. And some come from what we would conventionally call the left-hand side and some come from what we call, call the right-hand side. So I'm very impressed by the way that people in other countries feel bound to their state by their health insurance system, that you know what does it mean to be British? What does it mean to be Canadian? That the health insurance system is an important part of that self definition. No American would talk that way, but people, you know the famous line of John F. Kennedy, ask what you can do for your country. I think we need to do a little bit of asking now of what the country can do for people. And so if people felt, what does it mean to be an American? Well, among other thing it means I get this card. That means if I get sick,

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somebody takes care of me that what it means to be British, that's what it means to be Canadian. I think that's what it means to be Dutch,.

00:43:25

**Tim Wagemakers:** And it should be what it means to be American.

00:43:27

**David Fume:** I get, I get some concrete material benefits that other people don't get. Not because I'm better and they're worse., like no, I don't think Dutch people think they're better because only Dutch people get the benefits of the Dutch health system and Belgians don't it just means that's what it means to belong to this political community. But at the same time I think we have to reinforce our political community by having less mass migration and those two things, the health provision, more health provision, and less immigration, go together. But we have to look at a series of things to bind the people more closely to the state and to give them a feeling of ownership and responsibility and protectiveness, and to see the state is something that works for them, not against.

00:44:12

**Tim Wagemakers:** Thank you so much.

00:44:13

**David Fume:** Thank you.

00:44:15

**Jonathan Groubert:** The American author and *Atlantic* writer David frum. Speaking at a special John Adams online event right before the 2020 American election. The hosts were Tim Wagemakers of Balie Cultural Center and Tracy Metz, the director of the John Adams In and the editor of this very podcast. Did you know that you can go to our website, <https://www.john-adams.nl/videos/>, where there is a link to the video of this extraordinary event. We also have a newsletter you can sign up for. And, as always a veritable treasure trove of great American thinkers and speakers at <https://www.john-adams.nl/>. And while you're there. become a member of the John Adams. Not only will you support what we do here at the broadcast. You're going to discount the future live event. In the meantime, you should go to wherever you get your broadcasts and review this show. This will help get the word out. We can keep on sharing the very best of American thinkers, with you, free of charge, that's it for this week show. Our theme song is called LA Prensa by the Parlando's, our editor is Tracy Metz. From Amsterdam, this was Bright Minds, the podcast from the John Adams Institute. I'm Jonathan Groubert, thank you for listening.