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# BLUE PRINT



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## TALKING POLITICS

TRUTH, LIES AND THE END OF DISCOURSE

# EDITOR'S NOTE

## BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

IT'S NO SECRET that the state of American political discourse is rotten. Talk shows bay with invective; everyone speaks, nobody listens. The Web is a frothy jumble, tossing up fresh ideas one minute and vile hatred the next. Politicians don't seek solutions; they defend turf. And the president, well, the president spends a lot of time on Twitter.

In some respects, all of this is more amusing than alarming. The Republic has survived crises worse than rigid politicians and loudmouth pundits.

But discourse is necessary to do the real business of politics, which is solving problems. Issues such as immigration or climate change or nuclear proliferation require conversation and compromise if solutions are to be found. Even smaller and more local questions demand some accommodation: Are the homeless best served by cheaper housing or mental health services? Are there only right and wrong answers to questions about traffic, air pollution and coastal protection, or is there room for honest, principled disagreement? In an atmosphere of vitriol, all sides become defensive, and room for agreement shrinks, sometimes evaporates.

Defective discourse is real, and it is more than just an assault on the

eardrums. How did this happen? And what, if anything, can be done about it?

This is what we explore in this issue of Blueprint. We look at discourse from various angles — research that explores political divisions and encumbrances on meaningful participation; examines bias, real and imagined; and looks at demographics, voting, protest and dissent. We speak with two practitioners of discourse: the speaker of the California Assembly and the chief strategist who guided Barack Obama's successful campaigns for president. And we consider the strength, dispersion and state of political parties in Sacramento and Washington.

Optimists like to say that America is better off when its people focus on what unites our country and not on what divides it. Oddly, one point of agreement is that no one in politics today is happy with the way Americans talk to each other. Can agreement on the depth of this unhappiness — if not, importantly, on who is most responsible — provide a foundation for progress? We'll see.

At least we're still capable of examining patterns and trying to understand problems. This is the work that Blueprint is attempting here.



**JIM NEWTON**  
Editor-in-chief

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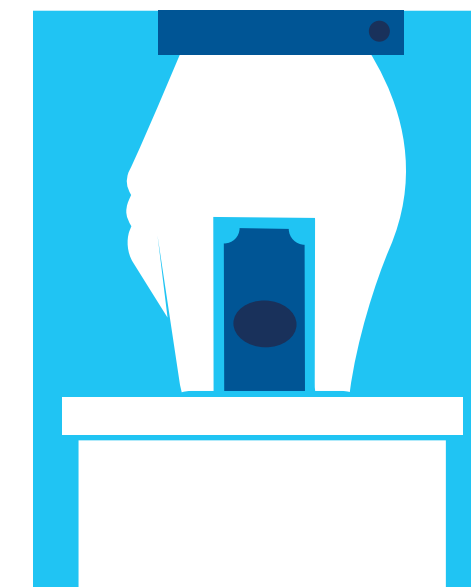
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DEBATES

PUBLIC OPINION  
AND THE  
EDITORIAL PAGE

Editorial pages are easy to attack. They’re often decried as timid or bland. They’re accused of hemming and hawing, of preaching to the converted, of hand-wringing, prevaricating and fence-straddling. Some readers find them ponderous, wonky, preachy or, in an era of corporate ownership and declining readership, simply archaic.

“Eliminate the editorial page,” wrote Timothy Noah at Slate in 2005. “Almost every editorial I’ve ever read in my life has fallen into one of two categories: boring or irresponsible.”

Thankfully, Noah’s advice has gone largely unheeded. Editorial pages shouldn’t be abolished. Despite all the carping (often by those who disagree with whatever they happen to be reading at the moment), the truth is that editorial pages, at their best, represent much of what is most valuable and honest in American journalism. If some are dull or dutiful, well, they needn’t be.

In fact, I would argue that editorial pages are particularly necessary in today’s politically polarized times. Not to say that there isn’t interesting and thoughtful commentary on blogs, Twitter and Facebook, but old-fashioned editorial pages are different: They reflect the considered judgment of a group of specialized journalists dedicated to reasoning out issues. They offer (generally but, of course, not always) sober-headed, fact-based judgment — at a moment when those things are sadly out of fashion. They are known for reasoned, honest, civic debate about the issues of the day — at a time when people are eschewing arguments that challenge their pre-established positions.

And debate matters. If people won’t consider opposing arguments, how can they know if their own positions are correct? If they disregard facts and logic in favor of bluster or posturing or spin or demagoguery, they do themselves, the rest of us and democracy itself a disservice.

Editorial pages are far from perfect, but when they’re working the way they should, they articulate a clear set of principles and values; they are intellectually honest, rigorous in their reasoning and consistent over time. They take on the best arguments of their opponents. They make tough choices and reach strong conclusions on complex public policy dilemmas where — as is so often the case — there is no easy out, no perfect, only less-bad options. Should the United States cut its losses and withdraw from Afghanistan, or should it stay engaged to protect the tenuous rights of Afghan women? Should homeless people be allowed to sleep in tents and sleeping bags on the streets, or should they be forced into shelters? Which of two not-very-impressive candidates should voters support?

At the Los Angeles Times, we have an editorial board of seven writers and two editors that meets three times a week, sometimes with the participation of the paper’s owner or executive editor. We debate issues and institutions and ideas — Supreme Court cases, local housing and transportation policies, diversity at the Academy Awards, the Trump presidency, Middle East diplomacy, the pros and cons of shared e-scooters. After we’ve debated and reached our

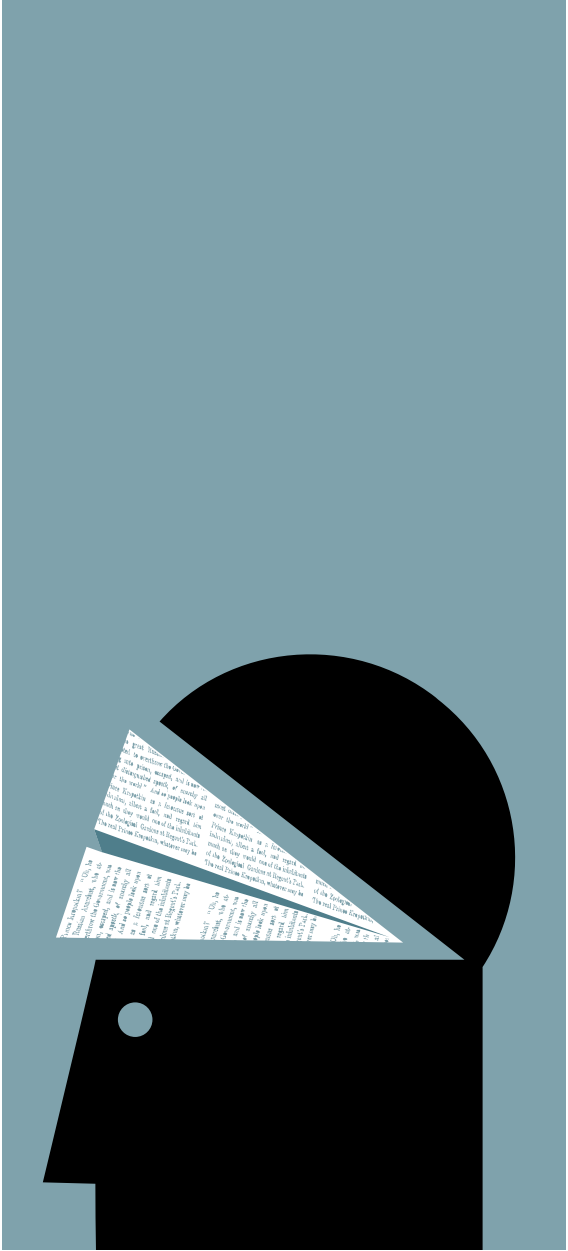
positions (often but not always a consensus), we write. One day it might be the crisis of campus sexual assault; another day it’s the Dodgers’ season, criminal-justice reform, climate change or the rising number of hate crimes.

Often we take on the biggest issues in the country or the world — such as our series of six editorials on President Trump called “Our Dishonest President,” which went viral in 2017 and reached millions and millions of readers. Other times, our focus is local — such as the endorsements we make on city, county and state political races and ballot propositions. The endorsement process begins months before Election Day and involves interviewing candidates, making calls and sending editorial writers out to community events and stump speeches.

Our editorials may not always be right — I’m sure they are not. You may read them and they may make you angry; you may think we got it wrong. It might be that our basic values are different from yours. We don’t expect to persuade everyone every day. Some days we’ll win converts — and some days we won’t. No matter what, I hope we offer fair, rational arguments that are challenging, engaging, thought-provoking and that even skeptics feel they must reckon with.

— **Nicholas Goldberg**

*Goldberg is the Los Angeles Times’ editorial page editor.*



¡HUELGA!  
LOS ANGELES TEACHERS  
STRIKE AND WIN

When the Los Angeles Unified School District confronted threats of a teachers strike earlier this year, district leaders intimated that any walkout would likely be brief, that teachers would cave quickly and realize they had to settle for modest pay increases and nothing else.

Wrong. Instead, the strike achieved more than what most teachers could have imagined. Teachers marched in the rain, and the public responded.

Not only did the teachers win long-overdue salary hikes — 3 percent retroactive to last year and another 3 percent retroactive to the beginning of the current school year — but they also made gains in their effort to reduce class sizes. They negotiated staffing increases for nurses and librarians.

And they raised new doubts about charter schools, which United Teachers Los Angeles and some other teacher unions view as threatening to their hegemony.

In a significant bonus, the UTLA strengthened its morale and bargaining power, positioning the union to move forward against its next objective, the burgeoning but now suddenly embattled charter school movement.

Charter schools, the large majority of which are not unionized, have been the subject of continuing criticism during and since the strike, deepening a divide between the district and its teachers over the future of the charter alternatives to conventional public schools. The new agreement between the UTLA and the district doesn’t do much to limit charters directly, but it requires the district board to consider a resolution regarding a possible cap on charters. This comes as teachers are using their clout nationally to challenge the growth of these schools.

Moreover, the teachers emerged from their strike with well-positioned allies in Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and new California Governor Gavin Newsom. Garcetti helped negotiate the end of the strike, eclipsing his one-time rival, LAUSD chief Austin Beutner, who considered a run for mayor in 2013 but could not match Garcetti’s political strength.

The union’s power was evident from the beginning. A poll by Loyola Marymount University concluded that 80 percent of Los Angeles County residents supported teachers either “strongly” or “somewhat,” and only 18 percent of parents with school-age children opposed the strike. Once the walkout began, students stayed away from school by the hundreds of thousands, costing the district attendance funding and demonstrating broad support for teachers.

In the future, the district may feel the union’s strength even more directly. The LAUSD board has passed a parcel tax proposal to send to district voters; it will almost certainly need union support to win approval. And in the race for an open seat on the board, the heavy favorite is Jackie Goldberg, who nearly won outright in the first round of voting and is running with strong support from the union.

All of this manifests a clean victory for the UTLA and a resounding loss for district officials who thought a strike might turn parents against teachers. Instead, the LAUSD enters the next phase of its long and difficult negotiation with an emboldened union — armed with well-placed allies, demonstrable public support and a new determination to thwart the growth of charter schools.

— **Jim Newton**



PHOTO BY GABRIEL DIAMOND

CODE FOR AMERICA'S JEN PAHLKA

“The two biggest levers for change in our society are technology and government,” said Pahlka. “We need to recognize that and invest in it.”

Take food stamps — in California some 10 million people are eligible but don’t receive those benefits, one of the lowest participation rates in the country. Why? Getting through the online process was a technical and logistical obstacle course of documents, phone interviews, and often mail-based correspondence. None of the three different existing web applications even work on a mobile phone.

“People would say, ‘Well, I got a letter in the mail telling me when my interview is, but the letter came after the date of the interview,’” said Pahlka. “Or it would come in Mandarin, even if you don’t speak Mandarin.”

Code for America created the “digital assister” app GetCalFresh, simplifying the application process to under 10 minutes. It then follows up with custom text messages. Now, county welfare directors push users to GetCalFresh, says Pahlka, and the numbers are on the rise, with some 20,000 new applications completed every month.

Building on user-centered lessons from the GetCalFresh initiative, Pahlka’s team in 2016 created Clear My Record, a free online tool that guides users through the complicated process of clearing a criminal record for low-level offenses, which can be an impediment to landing a job, getting a loan or even voting. With Clear My Record, people fill out a simple application and connect with public defenders or legal aid resources.

Proposition 64, which legalized marijuana in California, created fertile ground for a San Francisco pilot of an automated version of Clear My Record. The proposition included a provision that allows people with old cannabis convictions to expunge their records, but that takes money, determination and patience. Code for America is working with the San Francisco district attorney’s office on a fully automated version of Clear My Record that uses a learning algorithm to analyze rap sheets for relevant convictions. In April, the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s office announced that it, too, would employ Code for America in its attempt to clear more than 50,000 cannabis records.

“We don’t even have to talk to you,” said Pahlka. “It just comes off your record.” By the end of the year, Pahlka hopes to have expanded to other California counties.

Governor Gavin Newsom’s proposed 2019-20 budget includes funds for an Office of Digital Innovation, an indication of progress to Pahlka. “Will things change for the better?” she asked. “I’m certain that it will. We actually think government services could delight users.”

— **Zachary Slobig**

## A TECH SOLUTION TO CLEARING THE RECORD

Jen Pahlka and her team at Code for America recently moved into a light-filled office five floors above Mission Street in San Francisco, appropriately plopped between the Civic Center and the startups of startups of the San Francisco neighborhood called SOMA, for South of Market Street. On the wall above a conference table in the corner in 3-foot-high lettering is a rallying cry of sorts: No one is coming. It’s up to us.

On the 33rd day of a federal government shutdown, Pahlka sat in a room named National Park Service — all Code for America meeting rooms are named for departments of government — and pondered the state of civic participation. Back in 2013-14 she spent a year in the Obama Administration as the U.S. Deputy Chief Technology Officer and helped to design and launch the United States Digital Service.

“Now more than ever we need people in public service with integrity, empathy and great skills in improving government,” she said, sipping from a mug of tea. “It’s a terrible message of how we value public servants.”

Pahlka launched CFA in 2011 as a one-year fellowship program in the spirit of AmeriCorps or Teach for America, deploying programmers and designers to work with city governments to develop bottom-up, user-centered tech solutions for civic problems — hacking for good. Along with “brigades” of volunteers now in 75 cities, CFA fellows developed an array of solutions — from text bots that tell people where they can find available shelter space during a disaster, to an “adopt a hydrant” app for residents to support local infrastructure.

Everything Code for America creates is made publicly available — open sourced — leaving that code readily adaptable to other contexts and locations.

## FIRST PERSON: VOTERS UP CLOSE

The voter didn’t want to talk.

Could I speak with his wife?

She’s not home, he said.

Voter registration printouts showed he was a Republican but that his wife was a Democrat. It was shortly before last November’s midterm election, and I was a volunteer canvassing in Tustin for Katie Porter, a Democrat running for the House of Representatives.

The man said firmly: I don’t discuss my political views.

He did not open his screen door.

Well, would you give this flyer about Katie Porter to your wife?

He cracked the door slightly and accepted the flyer, reluctantly. But as I turned to leave, he stepped outside. You know, he said, that new tax law is really going to hurt me. I won’t be able to deduct a big chunk of my property taxes anymore.

The legislation, supported by Republicans and approved by Congress in 2017, imposed new limits on state and local taxes eligible for deduction on federal returns. The law hits hardest in states with high property values, like California.

Notably, it was not the man’s thoughts about President Trump that made him break the ice. Or his thoughts about the national economy. Or about Syria. Or North Korea. Or immigration. Not even his thoughts about the wall. What prompted him to speak up was something personal. He wanted to talk about his own tax bill.

Professors, politicians and policymakers like to view elections, and the issues that drive them, from 20,000 feet: The economy. Foreign affairs. The environment. What I learned walking the streets and punching doorbells over several months last year is that real politics happens on the ground, rarely higher than voters are tall. The late House Speaker Tip O’Neill was famous for saying that all politics is local. In fact, it’s granular.

It is not even house by house; it’s person by person. Individual. The Tustin homeowner was registered in one party and had particular concerns. In addition to his taxes, they included the Affordable Care Act and offshore oil drilling. His wife was registered in another party. Had she been at home, she might have voiced some of his interests. But more likely she would have emphasized concerns of her own.

Experts think large: about statistics, demographics, surveys. Voters are more nuanced. Many of their likes and dislikes, especially their frustrations and disappointments, don’t show up in polls. But they become evident on doorsteps, and they are as numerous and different as the places I visited and the people I spoke with.



In Palmdale, my husband, David, and I canvassed for Katie Hill, a Democratic newcomer running for Congress. When we knocked on one door, a woman in her late 60s opened it wearing only a bath towel and a shower cap.

She was racing to a friend’s funeral.

Did she have time to talk?

She did — enough time to share her disgust about Trump and what he was doing to civic values. She said she was eager to vote Democratic, for Katie Hill.

At another home in Palmdale, we were met on the front lawn by an African-American man who was a retired school bus driver. We didn’t have to tell him that it was important to flip the House and constrain the president.

He told us.

In Chino Hills, I trudged up a street one hot Sunday, dripping with sweat. A middle-aged white woman was weeding her rose garden. She put down her trowel.

She said she was furious — and sad — about kids: the ones the Trump administration had separated from their parents at the border.

Especially the toddlers, she added.

This is not who we are as Americans, she added. Then she went back to her roses.

At an apartment complex near UC Irvine, an Asian-American student stood in the doorway of his sparsely furnished unit. He was worried about health insurance when he finished graduate school.

If Republicans continue to destabilize the Affordable Care Act, he said, then he won’t be able to pay his doctor.

Little is more personal than one’s wallet, and pocketbook issues can cut both ways.

What’s your opinion of President Trump? my husband asked a man in Santa Clarita, who appeared to be about 55. He was a Democrat.

I like him a lot, the man said. My 401K has shot up. He has made a fortune for me in just a year.

Among the things I learned as a canvasser were: Never be surprised. Listen more than you talk. Meet people where they are. Issues divide, but values often don’t.

Almost all of the conversations I had were interesting. I tried to persuade people to vote for Democrats. Often that went against their party affiliation. Nonetheless, our discussions were remarkable for their civility.

Often, when I shook hands with voters before I walked back down their front steps, I felt as if we’d had that rarest of experiences:

A mutually respectful talk about politics.

— **Molly Selvin**



# A NEW SPEAKER FOR A CHANGING STATE

## Anthony Rendon Sizes Up Power

WRITTEN BY  
BILL BOYARSKY

ANTHONY RENDON DOES NOT TWEET.

"I don't know how to," said the speaker of the California State Assembly. "I have never sent a tweet in my life. Staff does the tweeting for me."

Indeed, Rendon thinks tweeting is "an experiment that failed. ... The conversations we have [on Twitter] are significantly dumbed down." He might be old-school, but he is not dumbed down.

Rendon met me on a recent Saturday for a conversation at one of his favorite places, Horchateria Rio Luna, a coffee shop at a mall in Paramount, the blue-collar and largely Latino city he represents in Southeast Los Angeles County. Shoppers were heading toward a bargain food market and an auto supply store. Nobody was wearing a tie.

Except Rendon. It accented his blue suit and white shirt. But he doesn't have to impress people; they understand him. Rendon is Latino. He was raised in his Assembly district, and like many of his constituents, he comes from a working-class home. He started out in warehouses, on the overnight shift.

"What you see is what you get," said his cousin, Ed Rendon, who as a union official helped launch him into politics. "He's the same Anthony who played football in the back yard."

The speaker is 51 and, he conceded to me, strictly old-school. He talks softly, in a thoughtful manner that would have been suitable for the academic life he once considered, instead of the political career he chose. "He's a quiet, reserved person," said Assembly Majority Leader Ian Calderon of Whittier, one of his allies.

My conversation with Rendon came at a turning point for the state, the legislature and his career. We ranged across topics that included the roots of his power, his relations with other Assembly members, the impact that the Assembly will have on the state — and his reluctant adjustment to fast-paced social media. We also talked about his life story.

In the legislature, Rendon shares the spotlight with Toni Atkins, the Senate president pro tem. Even more attention will be on Gavin Newsom, the new governor. All are Democrats, as are the majority of Assembly members and state senators. But because of tradition and history, mainly the legacy of two powerful predecessors, Jesse Unruh and Willie Brown, the speakership has a special resonance. In addition to inheriting the Unruh and Brown mantles, Rendon appoints all of the Assembly's committee chairs and, importantly, decides the amount of their administrative funding, the size of their staffs and their office space. It adds up to clout.

Newsom's state of the state message made it clear that he has a strong agenda of his own, an agenda different from that of his predecessor, Gov. Jerry Brown, who served eight years. Unlike Brown, Newsom faces a legislature newly empowered by the voters' decision to extend Assembly and Senate term limits from six years to 12. Expect some power to shift from the new governor to the more experienced legislature. Experience and smarts count in the Capitol.

If Rendon keeps winning re-election, he could remain speaker until 2024, longer than anyone since Willie Brown, who held the position from 1980 to 1995. The extension of term limits also means that Atkins could hold onto her post for just as long.

I asked Rendon how this would work. "Extension of term limits has changed everything," he said.

He recalled how Assemblyman Mike Eng moved from one chairmanship to another in his term-limited six years in the Assembly. "In the six years he was in the legislature, he chaired banking for two, transportation for two and business and professions for two, never getting the chance to immerse himself in a subject," Rendon said. "I think it is impossible to become an expert in any policy area in those short stints."



# “SPEAKERS TEND TO TAKE ALL OF THE OXYGEN OUT OF THE ROOM.”

— California Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon

He compared Eng’s tenure to that anticipated by Assemblyman Jose Medina, who chairs the higher education committee. “When we’re all done, Jose Medina may be higher education chair for 11 years,” Rendon said. “He’ll be an expert. He’ll know the inside and outside of the master plan [for higher education]. He’ll know what has been tried, what hasn’t. Being around for 12 years empowers members, and not just vis-a-vis the third house — the lobbyists — but also with staff. There is more institutional memory.

“In the last five years, it has been the biggest change we’ve had in California politics, and I think it’s been great.”

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Rendon’s journey to prominence began after high school — on a bus.

It took him home after his all-night jobs in warehouses, where he unloaded trucks. That was his reward — or punishment — for a .83 high school grade point average. “The rocking of the bus would put me to sleep,” he said, and he would wake up when the bus stopped. One of its stops was in front of Cypress College, where he watched students head for class.

He decided to become one of them. “I had a sister who was at Whittier College. She put books on my desk.” Subtle persuasion, or not so subtle?

“Subtle,” he said. “One was *The Brothers Karamazov*.”

He enrolled at Cerritos College.

What was his goal?

“I don’t know. I was just trying to get off the bus.

“But I took a course in philosophy. I loved it, loved it, loved it. It seemed like the professor was asking enduring questions. It seems the questions are more relevant now than ever. What is justice? It’s a very relevant question.” The experience changed his life. “For a couple of years, when I was working the graveyard shift, I was sleepwalking, literally and figuratively. When you ask yourself very fundamental questions, I think it evokes a sense of immediacy. It makes it impossible not to think about things. It’s still that way for me.”

From Cerritos College, Rendon went to California State University, Fullerton. “More than anything I had a good liberal arts education,” he said. “I learned about classical music. I learned about literature. I took a course in geography. It was very life-broadening.”

Rendon got a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree at Fullerton, received a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship and earned a Ph.D. in political science from UC Riverside. He did post-doctoral work at Boston University, then became executive director of Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services, interim director of the California League of Conservation Voters and chief operating officer of the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation.

“I worked at MOCA [the Museum of Contemporary Art],” he said, “and I got very interested in art — and in architecture, especially.”

But his work in nonprofits had attracted him to politics. In 2012, he ran for the Assembly and was elected. He became speaker in 2017.

.....

Rendon is quite different from 1960s-era Willie Brown and Jesse Unruh, who were all-powerful.

“My wife is working on a doctorate in education,” he said, “and she was reading a story about Unruh, all the methods he used to centralize power. When I was reflecting on it, I almost felt as though I have done the opposite of everything he did. I have very much tried to decentralize power. I realize that in being a long-term speaker, there’s implicitly a lot of power inherent in that. But I try to farm out as much power as I possibly can to committee chairs.

“People still don’t believe it. Lobbyists will come to me and ask me to do this and that, and I ask them if they have talked to the committee chairs, and they think I’m winking and nodding at them.”

As he shifted power to committee chairs, he reduced the size of his office. “I eliminated 25 to 30 staff members.”

While Brown and Unruh prided themselves on their authorship of major legislation, “I haven’t introduced a bill since I have become speaker.”

Why?

“Speakers tend to take all of the oxygen out of the room,” he said. “A lot of legislative leaders try to get their hands on every big policy area. It puts a target on the bill itself. The other house and other members know that something is in your bill and try to hold it hostage legislatively and leverage it for something they want.”

Instead, he lets committee chairs introduce legislation, whether it is for something local, like improving the Los Angeles River, or for something of major statewide importance, such as the minimum wage.

On one notable occasion, he earned his colleagues’ gratitude by keeping a controversial bill away from the committees. It was legislation, passed by the Senate, which would have created a state system of Medicare for all, or single-payer health care. Although the bill was backed by the tough and influential California Nurses Association, Rendon killed it by never permitting a hearing.

He said the bill was expensive and did not provide for funding, a deficiency overlooked by Senate backers who had rushed it through. In the Assembly, the nurses and others demanded public hearings. This might have whipped up support, but it also would have forced committee members to vote for or against a bill that had little or no chance of passing. “They had intimidated a lot of members of the Senate,” Rendon said. “I thought it was an absolute trap.”

Rendon held the bill.

To take the heat off members?

“Yeah,” he replied. “That was the point. All the venom was directed toward me, and that’s OK.”

Proponents of the bill tried to mount a recall against Rendon, but it went nowhere.

Assemblyman Calderon told me that Rendon’s move showed two sources of his power. First, Calderon said, it illustrated Rendon’s concern for other members. “He takes the tough shots,” Calderon said. Second, Rendon’s battle over the single-payer bill showed how deeply he burrows into complex legislation. “He has substance,” Calderon said, “the capacity to do the work.”

In the social media age, with events moving ever

faster, is substance enough? Can Rendon, with his deliberative style, keep up?

An example is the Capitol’s sexual harassment scandal. For as long as I can remember, lawmakers had been pressuring staff and lobbyists for sex. It was part of the Capitol culture, although it was unspoken. Then the #MeToo Movement made the harassment public. A lobbyist, Adama Iwu, wrote a letter condemning it. More than 140 women signed the letter, including Rendon’s wife, Annie.

Reporter Melanie Mason broke the story in the Los Angeles Times, and the issue exploded. When “we published the story,” said John Myers, the Times’ Sacramento bureau chief, “we could see all the social media light up within seconds.” There was “immediate feedback on whether they [the legislature] had done enough yet. Some said they should have done more.”

Rendon reacted with calmness uncommon in the social media world.

“We had established a committee on sexual harassment before that letter,” he told me. “I remember my wife being asked to sign the letter. I’m glad she signed.” He told KQED that his wife had helped educate him. “Whereas I think I was focused on policy and procedures, she helped bring those to life by telling me real stories that real people had experienced.”

I followed Rendon from Horchateria to the El Hussein Community Center in Bell, a gathering place for the Lebanese community. The atmosphere was grassroots, as old-school as the speaker himself. Rendon’s staff had assembled 26 volunteer lawyers who were offering free advice on matters including employment law, workers compensation, health care and immigration.

Rendon was in no hurry. He stood at the back of the room, watching and talking quietly to an aide.

Issues discussed by these voters, or potential voters, would find their way from Bell to Sacramento. There, Rendon would learn if this service for his constituents and his quiet, collaborative manner — so unlike Unruh’s and Willie Brown’s — was working in the hyperactive age of Twitter. ▀

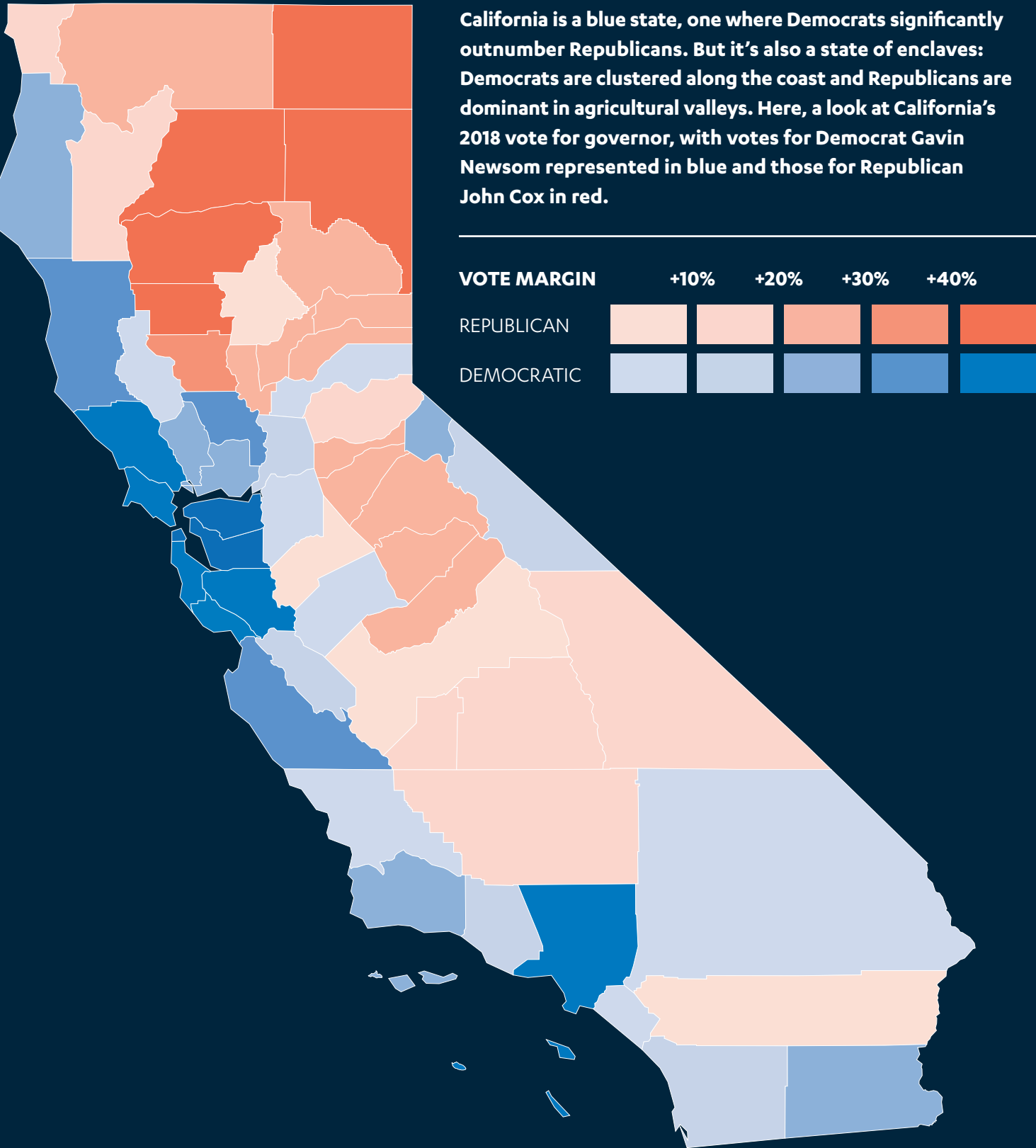
PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE



SPEAKER ANTHONY RENDON IS PRESENTED WITH A LEADERSHIP AWARD FROM THE KHMER PARENT ASSOCIATION, DATED FEB. 23, 2019.

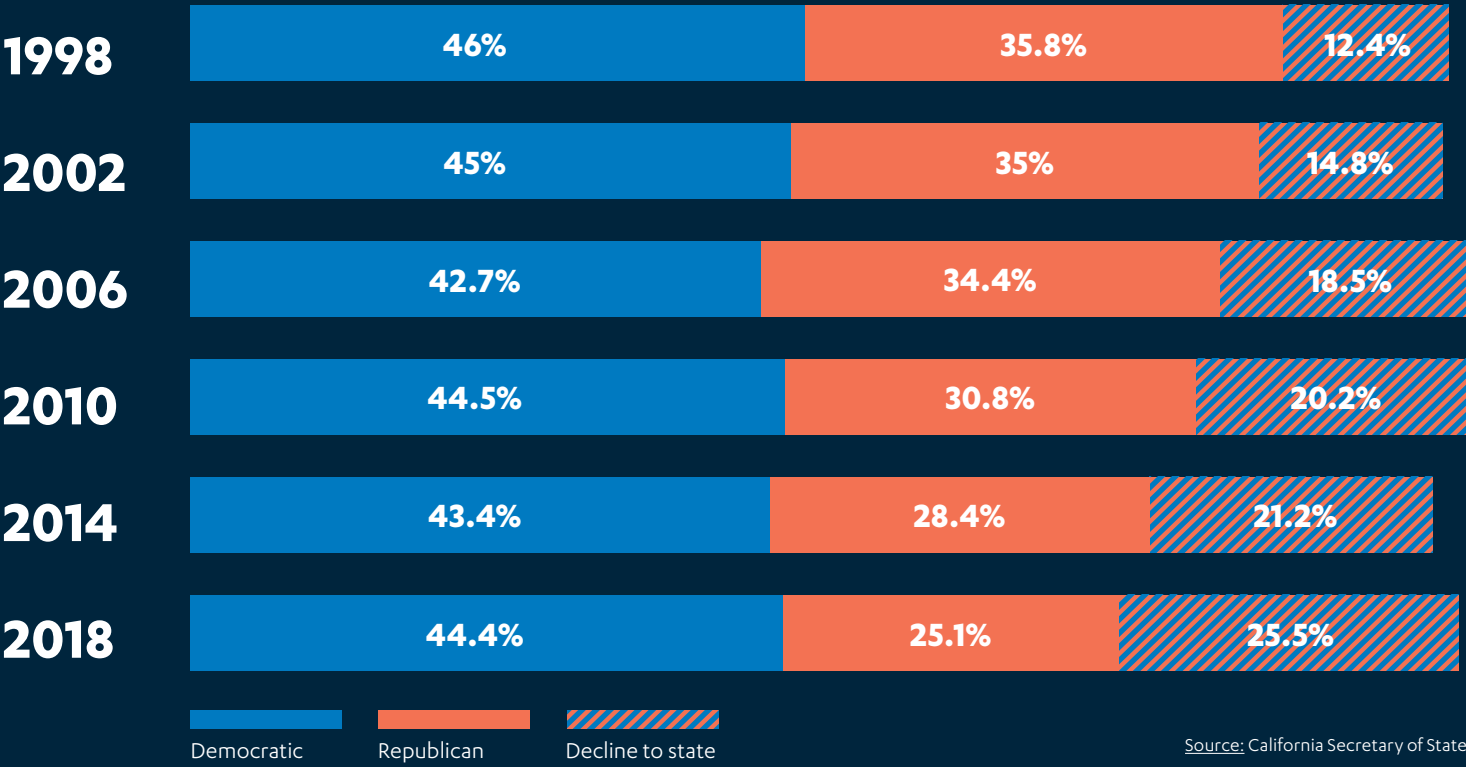
# THE DEEPENING DIVIDE

This is not the most divided period in American history — that distinction belongs to the Civil War — but the signs of division are stark and growing, both nationally and in California. Here, a look at some of the history, issues and geography of our recent divisions.



## California Voter Registration

California's political parties are in the midst of a serious, long-term realignment, with Democrats holding relatively steady at about 45% of registered voters, but "decline to state" voters increasing rapidly at the expense of Republican registration.



## What Do People Care About?

Nationally, Republicans and Democrats are drifting farther apart in terms of shared priorities. Below, the top five national political priorities, by party, in a 2019 survey:

\*Social security and immigration were tied, at 68%

Source: Pew Research Center, Public's 2019 Priorities, Jan. 24, 2019

- Top Republican Priorities**
- 1. Terrorism
  - 2. Economy
  - 3. Social Security\*
  - 4. Immigration
  - 5. Military

- Top Democratic Priorities**
- 1. Health Care
  - 2. Education
  - 3. Environment
  - 4. Medicare
  - 5. Poor and Needy



# MONEY. POLITICS. POWER.

## MARTIN GILENS DESCRIBES A NEW DEMOCRACY

MARTIN GILENS IS NOT SURPRISED that some people think he's scary.

He wants to take private money out of political campaigns and use public funding instead; make voter registration automatic and universal; declare Election Day a holiday to give working people more time to vote; designate additional polling places and keep them open longer; let ex-felons vote, perhaps felons, too; maybe even make voting compulsory and fine those who don't cast ballots.

Twenty-eight countries do.

Gilens also wants to abolish primaries; eliminate or neuter the electoral college; choose officeholders in general elections with ranked voting and instant runoffs; or better yet, combine Congress and the presidency into a uniquely American parliament with proportional representation and multimember districts.

All of this to make the United States more democratic.

Gilens doesn't look scary. He is a professor of public policy at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs, mild-mannered, soft-spoken and quick to smile. His proposals are based on research for his latest book, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do about It*, written with Benjamin I. Page, the Gordon Scott Fulcher Professor of Decision Making at Northwestern University.

Gilens laughs about being feared, but he understands why certain people may think that he should be. During an interview in his office, cluttered with books and scholarly papers, he said his work "shines a light on something that rich and powerful people would prefer not to draw attention to — the inequality of political influence in our country. ...

"People with a lot of power," he said, "might find it inconvenient that scholars are studying this issue and bringing the tools of social science research to bear. But most Americans will not find this scary. If anything, they would say, 'It's nice to see some hard evidence of what I have believed all along.'"

Average Americans know about unemployment, flat-line wages, spiraling medical costs and attempts to cut or privatize Social Security. They ride rickety trains. They drive on crumbling streets and cross shaky bridges. They worry about the environment and inattention to climate change. They fear gun violence. Their children attend neglected schools and can't afford college. Meanwhile, their pleas to make taxes more progressive are ignored.

Surveys show they want to change all this, but they don't think they can.

What's most discouraging, Gilens said, is that they are right.

Against the clout of the rich and powerful — many of whom are more interested in downsizing government, limiting social spending and lowering taxes on the wealthy — average Americans don't have much muscle.

The culprit, Gilens said, is too little democracy. Gilens and Page define democracy as "policy responsiveness to ordinary citizens — that is, popular control of government. Or simply 'majority rule.'"

"We should be outraged at the degree to which the wealthy and the powerful have hijacked our political system," Gilens said. "Things have gotten worse over time in an era when we've actually become more affluent as a country. That is unconscionable. It's not that we can't, as a country, provide a secure life for our citizens; it's that we choose not to. And the central reason, I believe, is because political influence is so unequally distributed."

He and Page call it an "explosion of inequality."

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Gilens was born and grew up in Sherman Oaks, earned his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley, then taught political science at Yale, where a fascination with inequality took hold and he began his previous book, *Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*.

He taught at UCLA for three years, then at Princeton for 15 years, where he finished *Affluence & Influence* and began working with Page on *Democracy in America?* It was published in 2017 by the University of Chicago Press.

Gilens returned to UCLA last year to join the Luskin School. His wife, Janet Felton, who also grew up in Los Angeles, teaches at the UCLA Graduate

WRITTEN BY

**RICHARD E. MEYER**



School of Education lab school. With their two children grown and gone, Gilens says, they were happy to come back to “our homeland.”

His concern about inequality has not waned. The title of one of his works in progress is *Campaign Finance and Representational Inequality*.

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The most important reform for America, Gilens said, is taking private money out of politics. “Money profoundly corrupts U.S. politics,” he and Page write in *Democracy in America?* “We’re not talking about bribery,” Gilens said in his interview. Bribery is a quid pro quo exchange of something valuable — often money — for a favor. It is a crime, and it’s comparatively rare. More common, Gilens said, is systemic corruption. “It’s not an envelope of cash.”

He and Page quote Lawrence Lessig, a Harvard ethicist and law professor, as saying that a government institution — Congress, for instance — is systematically corrupted when its members are subject to an “improper or conflicting dependency.” During the most recent election cycle, political parties and their candidates raised and spent — and thus depended upon — more than \$6.9 billion in private campaign contributions.

Average Americans, whom Gilens and Page define as “those in the middle of the income distribution,” cannot afford large political donations. As a consequence, they write, “They have little or no influence over the making of U.S. government policy.” On the other hand, they say, “Wealthy Americans wield a lot of influence. ...

“Political money makes a mockery of the idea of one person, one vote.” In their research, Page and Gilens define affluent Americans as those in the top 20 percent of the money distribution, with annual incomes of at least \$160,000 in 2016. However, they write, “We suspect that much of the influence that we have detected is being wielded by a tiny group within the affluent: the ‘truly wealthy’ — that is, multimillionaires and billionaires who can afford to donate thousands, even millions, of dollars to super powerful political action committees (PACS, or super PACS) that can accept unlimited donations.”

Timing is nearly as important as volume. Early money is crucial; without it, politicians drop out. During the first six months of 2015, almost half of the money backing Republican or Democratic presidential candidates for the 2016 election — \$179 million — came from only 158 families or their companies. The families tried to hide information about their contributions. Gilens and Page credit investigative reporters with finding out that most of the families gave to candidates “who pledged to cut back economic regulations; to cut taxes on high incomes, capital gains and estates; and to shrink entitlement programs” such as Social Security.

Those are not the priorities of average Americans. “Money counts in politics,” Gilens said. “Big money counts most.” Although Democrats have their billionaires, most of those with big money are Republicans. The ones who contribute most, “especially wealthy individuals, multibillion-dollar corporations, and corporate owners and managers, get, in effect, many extra votes to decide which public policies will be enacted ... and which rejected. ...

“It’s more like one dollar, one vote,” Gilens said. “The wealthy few tend to rule. Average citizens lose political power. Democracy declines.”

In *Democracy in America?*, Gilens and Page graph 1,779 important changes in federal policy proposed between 1981 and 2002. It mattered not whether 20 percent or 80 percent of average Americans opposed or favored a change. Regardless, the change happened only 30 percent of the time.

On the other hand, support or opposition from affluent Americans and organized interest groups made a significant difference.

The graph is visual proof of the weakness of ordinary citizens. “The essence of democracy is popular control of government, with each citizen having an equal voice,” Page and Gilens write. Without that, democracy can turn into “tyranny on short notice.”

One commentator, Ezra Klein, editor-at-large and co-founder of Vox, called their research “terrifying.”

Gilens and Page propose:

» Changing the Supreme Court — its justices and its doctrine. Starting with *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976, then with *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *Speech Now v. Federal Election Commission*, both in 2010, the court has loosened restrictions on both private and corporate campaign contributions so significantly that its rulings have become “destructive of democracy,” Gilens and Page write. In 2012, these rulings made it possible for only one-tenth of one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans to provide almost half of the money spent in federal elections. It might require a constitutional amendment, Gilens said, but it is important to end the trend toward more and more campaign funding coming “from fewer and fewer rich people.” As of three years ago, 16 states favored an amendment to overturn *Citizens United*. In 2014, a majority of the U.S. Senate voted in support of such an amendment, which would change the court’s doctrine loosening restrictions on political contributions.

» Requiring full disclosure of all major political contributions. Contributors of \$200 or more to federal candidates and PACs must be reported to the Federal Election Commission, which makes the donors and amounts public. But so-called social welfare organizations need not report who contributes to them, or say how much each donor gives. Page and Gilens call this “stealth politics.” It “enhances the power of private money by making it hard to identify the donors or to work against them,” they write. “Full legal disclosure of home much money is spent, by whom, for which causes or candidates, would help create accountability.” In 2012, Page and Gilens say, “more than \$300 million was spent by groups that did not disclose their donors.”

» Using public money to fund campaigns. Gilens and Page credit Lessig for being a leading proponent of Democracy Vouchers — value cards from the U.S. Treasury worth \$50 to donate to a candidate or candidates. Page and Gilens would add this stipulation: To accept Democracy Vouchers, candidates would have to agree not to take any other money. “If the vouchers were big enough so that all candidates would accept them,” they write, “it could ultimately lead to totally ending the role of private money in elections.” And that, complete public funding, Gilens said, is what he wants most of all.

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After taking private money out of politics, he said, the second most important reform is making it easier for people to vote.

Only about two-thirds of Americans register. The reason is that voters are required to do it personally, Gilens said. It often requires an inconvenient trip to an office and well before the election itself, when politics is not on people’s minds. In many states, whole categories of people — such as ex-felons who have already paid their debt to society — are forbidden to register. “It’s not even obvious,” Gilens said, “why you should lose your right to vote if you’ve been convicted at all. ...”

He and Page propose:

» Making voter registration automatic and universal. Federal, state and local governments should keep accurate and complete lists of people who are eligible to vote, Gilens said in his interview. The only requirement to be listed, he said, should be citizenship. “We might — or might not — want to take one more step,” Page and Gilens say, “and make voting compulsory (perhaps with a small fine for nonparticipation).”

» Adding polling places, lengthening voting hours and declaring Election Day a national holiday. Doing those things would make it easier for

“WE SHOULD BE OUTRAGED AT THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE WEALTHY AND THE POWERFUL HAVE HIJACKED OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM.”

— Martin Gilens

workers to cast their ballots, and the increase in turnout would relieve a significant skew in voters as a whole, who are not representative of the citizenry. “The affluent are much more likely to vote than the poor,” Page and Gilens say, “the old more likely than the young, and whites more likely than members of racial or ethnic minorities.” This is important because research shows that the policy preferences of voters differ in significant ways from the preferences of nonvoters. Historically, surveys show that people who do not vote have been nearly twice as likely to lack health insurance and more likely to favor universal health care, Page and Gilens write. Non-voters also have been more favorable to increasing the minimum wage, organizing unions, providing government job guarantees and giving federal aid to public schools. If all citizens voted at the same rate, Page and Gilens say, both major political parties would be forced to pay more attention to the preferences of lower-income citizens, and “we might end up with ... policies more reflective of what majorities of all Americans want.”

» Abolishing primary elections. Only a small number of atypical voters participate. Primary elections, Page and Gilens say, empower campaign donors, ideological activists and special interest groups.

» Eliminating or neutering the electoral college. “Surveys have regularly shown that large majorities of Americans favor moving to a strictly popular vote system,” Page and Gilens write. “One way to effectively abolish the electoral college without needing a constitutional amendment is for individual states to agree to award all their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote, contingent on enough other states doing the same, so that together they can determine the winner.”

» Choosing officeholders directly in general elections with ranked voting and instant runoffs. With primaries and the electoral college out of the way, put all candidates who collect “a substantial but not excessively burdensome” number of signatures directly onto the general-election ballot. Voters would rank their choices. If a candidate has more than half of the first choices, that candidate

wins. If no candidate has more than half, then the candidate with the fewest first choices is eliminated. Voters who selected the defeated candidate would have their votes added to the total of their next-highest choice. The process continues until one candidate has more than half of all the votes. That candidate wins.

» Or scrapping the U.S. scheme of elections altogether. Substitute, they say, an American version of the parliamentary system of proportional representation used in Great Britain and scores of other nations around the world. Parliaments are not perfect, Page and Gilens write, but they “do well at ensuring that minorities as well as majorities are represented.” The American difference would be to pick more than one representative for each district. “American-style PR [proportional representation], without primary elections and with multiple representatives chosen from each district, would give more voters a voice in their legislature, reduce the ability of party activists and donors to push through candidates who are out of step with their district, enhance the prospects of minor party candidates [and] provide a mechanism by which new ideas can gain traction.”

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Reform is often greeted with fierce opposition. Adversaries have targeted not only these recommendations but also Gilens’ proposal to ease gridlock by eliminating veto points in government institutions — Senate filibusters, for example. Some also resist his call for a ban on gerrymandering and revolving-door policies that permit departing officeholders to become lobbyists.

“Overall,” he said, “resistance mostly comes from Republicans because they, probably accurately, believe that they would lose out.” He cited Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell’s opposition to making Election Day a federal holiday. McConnell called it a Democratic “power grab.”

Gilens and Page say that enacting more than a few of their suggestions probably would require a social movement, akin to the civil rights movement or the antiwar movement.

Gilens has a proposal: Call it the Democracy Movement. ►



# RETHINKING COMMUNICATION IN THE ERA OF DONALD TRUMP

IT'S LIKE A TECHNOLOGICAL TIME WARP. In the middle of the room are VHS players and Betamax machines. On the floor are boxes of tapes and video cassettes. Their magnetic imprints contain TV news programs from an age of political communication when there was no Facebook, no Twitter.

Next to a window overlooking UCLA's sculpture garden, Tim Groeling sits in a rolling desk chair conferring with a graduate student. An associate professor of communication studies, Groeling is on sabbatical, but he also is the director of the university's Communication Studies News Archive Digitization Project, and there is plenty of work to be done.

Groeling is 40ish, which means he's conversant with social media. Indeed, he is a leading expert in political communication and new media in the United States. He favors khaki pants, a button-down Oxford shirt and sneakers, and he looks Midwestern, which he is, and boyish. Much of his archiving work is about digitizing news footage you might have seen in Southern California in the

1970s. It contains valuable information about the context of political communication and how it was presented in the news.

He and his students watch Sunday morning interview shows from nearly 50 years ago, when senators and congressmen presented their views on issues of the day. Then Groeling and the students fast-forward to evening newscasts on the same Sundays and on subsequent days to determine which parts of the interviews were selected as being newsworthy.

They are interested in how political messages from members of the House and Senate are framed. Are the messages critical of the sitting president? Does criticism from a member of the president's party get more attention than criticism from someone in the opposing party? How much attention is paid to praise from someone in the opposing party? Is there discipline in party messaging?

Groeling's book, *When Politicians Attack: Party Cohesion in the Media*, is based on such analysis. Published in 2010 by Cambridge

WRITTEN BY  
**JON THURBER**

**“TRUMP SEEMS TO HAVE TURNED [PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION] ON ITS HEAD, WHERE HE IS CONSCIOUSLY CONTROLLING THE MEDIA ON AN ONGOING BASIS AND TRYING TO INSTIGATE CONTROVERSY...”**

— Tim Groeling

University Press, it has won several awards, including the Goldsmith Book Prize from the Shorenstein Center on Media at Harvard in 2011. In the book, Groeling explores political branding, notably the messaging effort surrounding House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s “Contract With America” in 1994. Some saw similarities to the “Just Do It” campaign mounted by Nike shoes.

The book examines the difficulty a political party faces when it tries to set an agenda while it controls both Congress and the White House. When the result is party members attacking one another, he calls it a “circular firing squad.” By extension, Groeling’s book offers a glimpse into

what has changed and what hasn’t during the presidency of Donald J. Trump.

Groeling grew up in Muncie, Indiana, the middle child in a family of three siblings. His father was an engineer in automotive plants, and his mother was an eye technician. “They thought of politics as kind of vaguely horrifying,” Groeling says, and they discouraged him from studying it.

He graduated magna cum laude from DePauw University and studied political communications at UC San Diego, where he earned his Ph.D. His

teaching career began at UCLA, and he has never left. He started as an assistant professor in the Communications Studies Department in 2001 and has served as vice chair of the department and two terms as department chair.

Groeling says he was “geeked up” early. He served internships at the Indiana House of Representatives, the Muncie Star newspaper and on the David Letterman show on NBC, where his claim to fame was creating a computer database for Stupid Pet Tricks.

He and his wife live in Sherman Oaks. They have two daughters, one at home and the other studying statistics at UCSD.

During an interview at the Luskin School of Public Affairs, in the corner room where he works with the VCRs, he spoke about tweeting and the value it offers to a modern president seeking to connect directly with his bases of political support — as well as the challenge it poses for the GOP’s traditional ways of communicating.

“Trump has the unparalleled ability to communicate directly with his core supporters without the news media filtering,” Groeling said. “At any point, anytime he wants, he has the ability to influence the news agenda by what he tweets about, but also to communicate directly with his policymakers unfiltered. And that ability has been uncommon in America’s past.”

During earlier presidencies, Groeling wrote in *When Politicians Attack*, there was the perception “that politicians exercise some control over the news-making process by carefully choosing their words; however, if they hope to hear those words on the news, they must also anticipate and adapt to the preferences and routines of journalists, who have traditionally stood between them and their public.”

This clearly is not Trump’s approach. Does he choose his words carefully? Not particularly. At the same time, Groeling notes in his book, the mainstream media have been increasingly eroded by new media with a partisan bent.

“When I talk about Donald Trump with my students in class, I generally frame it in how presidential communication works,” Groeling said. “And Trump seems to have turned that on its head, where he is consciously controlling the media on an ongoing basis and trying to instigate controversy and outrage to get more coverage of an issue that he cares about, to change the subject in a way that he can control.”

In other administrations, Trump’s negative press and slipping polls would have been enough to send the occupant of the White House crashing to the bottom of public esteem. But that doesn’t seem to be the case with Trump, Groeling said. “People’s [positive] impression of Trump is less vulnerable to change from a single piece of additional information than almost any politician before him, because he had been in not only entertainment and in the public consciousness for decades, but the media during that time period helped him foster his positive image.”

There has been too little attention paid, Groeling said, to how Trump’s rise to power “has fundamentally changed the brand of the Republican Party.

“The Republicans were once the party of free trade. The Democrats were the party of protectionism. The Republicans were, at least for a period of time, the party of the educated elite. The Democrats were the party of the working class. These sort of cultural divisions and sometimes issue packages have changed



COMMUNICATION STUDIES PROFESSOR TIM GROELING WITH HIS COLLECTION OF VIDEOTAPED NEWSCASTS.

PHOTO BY KIRA VANDENBRAND / DAILY BRUN

very dramatically in a short time, in a way that is quite frankly surprising.”

Some Republicans have resisted this, but Trump has seemed somewhat impervious to party criticism. Republicans, Groeling believes, are wary of the damaging power of his Twitter feed. Indeed, Groeling has been surprised at how ineffective criticism of Trump has been within his own party.

Partly, he said, it has been because of coverage. “Every time (former House Speaker Paul Ryan) would say something that was like ‘Trump has said this, we can’t do this,’ it would generate a lot of coverage. But if Ryan would say, ‘Here’s what I want to do in Congress,’ nobody did any coverage of that. And Ryan seemed pretty relieved to be done with Congress. Basically, that was a poisoned chalice for him.”

Democrats may be encountering their own messaging issues, Groeling said. He cited the release of information about Green New Deal economic stimulus programs by New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, along with Massachusetts Sen. Edward J. Markey. “How did this plan get out without the central party boosting it?” Groeling asked. “And what are they going to do now?”

“My impression is that it’s been talked about a lot more by critics than supporters. It’s been this sort of thing that might define the Democratic Party in a way that makes it hard for them to win in 2020.”

Groeling noted Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s willingness to bring the Green New Deal up for a vote. “It’s smart for him to get peo-

ple on the record on this because its release was sloppy and seat-of-the-pants.”

The Green New Deal rollout may be an indicator of bigger battles ahead between Ocasio-Cortez and the party leadership, Groeling said.

He wonders if her move might have been an attempt to seize agenda control.

Trump, he said, has his own way of agenda control.

“He says this really extreme thing that’s 15 miles from what he wants. People get outraged, and then he eventually gives in to something that is closer to what he wants. He’s happy, and everyone seems to be happy with their anger in that situation. It seems to work out pretty well.”

Trump’s messaging style will hold his base, Groeling said.

“He seems to be, for better or ill, relatively authentic in terms of saying or tweeting whatever is at the top of his head and not running it through a lot of people to make it more pleasant.

“So that might actually, I think, feed into his believers viewing him as authentic or viewing him as being more trustworthy than people criticizing him.”

Is Groeling surprised by how his career — from stupid pet tricks to analyzing congressional communications — has turned out?

“I used to have arguments when I was in grad school with people who studied Congress,” he said. “They didn’t want to study congressional communications at all. They were like ‘Why would you study that? It’s cheap talk.’

“That’s actually one of the things that inspired me to write my book. It’s not all equally cheap. That insult actually inspired my career.” ▀





## RACE AND GENDER IN AMERICAN POLITICS

### WOMEN REACT TO POLITICAL SEXISM

WRITTEN BY  
**JEAN MERL**

IT WAS MAY 2016, well into the campaign that won Donald Trump the presidency, when Lorrie Frasure-Yokley made an ambitious proposal to probe the political behavior of Americans more deeply.

Instead of competing with other institutions for grants to produce relatively limited data that researchers keep for their own studies, Frasure-Yokley suggested creating a nationwide, cooperative, cost-sharing survey that includes more than just one or two racial or ethnic groups.

"I knew 2016 was going to be consequential," she said during a recent interview in her tidy, narrow office in Bunche Hall. Pale peach walls and family photos softened the fixtures of academia — books and stacks of papers. "We needed quality data from large samples across several major racial and ethnic groups," she said, "not just a large sample of one group and small samples of other groups."

Frasure-Yokley, an associate professor of political science and African American Studies at UCLA, had been co-principal investigator of the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) of 2008 and 2012, the first multi racial, multi-ethnic, multi lingual post-presidential election studies of racial and political preferences and behavior.

Now she wanted to step things up and greatly broaden the research for the upcoming election.

By enabling participation from professors at colleges and universities around the country, it would be possible to collect much bigger samples of various racial and ethnic groups. It also would open access to high-quality data to everyone, enabling even smaller institutions with fewer resources to contribute to a growing body of research.

"It was a crazy idea," Frasure-Yokley said, with a laugh. "That's not usually the way scholars conduct themselves. But I kept pushing."

Her effort resulted in the ground breaking 2016 CMPS, unique in its size and reach. She served as co-principal investigator, along with Matt Barreto (UCLA), Janelle Wong (University of Maryland) and Edward Vargas (Arizona State University). Eighty-six social scientists at 55 schools contributed to building its collaborative dataset by purchasing questions.

Researchers from larger, better-funded institutions participated, along with scholars from smaller colleges and universities with less income. The survey probed the attitudes of more than 10,000 voters and non-voters about candidates, immigration, policing, equality and experiences with racial discrimination. It contained 394 questions in five languages — English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese — and it took 43 minutes, on average, to complete.

# WOMEN & VOTING

In her study, “Choosing the Velvet Glove: Women Voters, Ambivalent Sexism, and Vote Choice in 2016” Frasure-Yokley presents findings that suggest significant differences in the ways that white women and women of color express any sexist attitudes of their own at the ballot box.

For instance, her study found that white women who held strong, even if ambivalent, sexist views were more likely to support Donald Trump’s candidacy by 17%. (Not all manifestations of sexism are necessarily derogatory. As Trump famously said: “I love women, I respect women. I cherish women.”)

But for women of color, holding sexist views had no significant effect on which presidential candidate they favored. Results such as that led Frasure-Yokley to conclude: “White women politically behave very differently from women of color.”

In less than two years after Trump’s election, data from the survey spawned more than a dozen academic articles and books and a textbook. Data from the 2016 CMPS show a deeper, richer tapestry of political behaviors. One book probed the differences among groups who identify as evangelicals. It showed that white evangelicals exhibit much more conservative attitudes on issues ranging from climate change to tax policies than do their counterparts of color. An article to be published in August measures the degree to which people believe that their own self-interests are linked to those of their racial groups.

Frasure-Yokley’s life is distinguished by firsts. Born and raised on Chicago’s South Side, she was the first member of her family to attend college. After earning a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master’s degree in public policy from the University of Chicago, she received a master’s degree and a doctorate in political science from the University of Maryland at College Park.

She did postdoctoral work at Cornell. It led to her book, *Racial and Ethnic Politics in American Suburbs*, which won two national book awards in 2016. She came to UCLA almost 12 years ago and was the first woman of color to earn tenure and promotion in the Political Science department.

She has won a Ford Foundation Dissertation and Postdoctoral Fellowship Award from the National Research Council of the National Academies, as well as a Clarence Stone Young Scholars Award from the American Political Science Association’s Urban Politics Section. She also has won a University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy Rising Star alumni award and a 2018 Distinguished Teaching Award from the UCLA Academic Senate.

Frasure-Yokley, 41, lives in Culver City with her husband and their 4-year-old daughter.

As a “first-generation” scholar, she takes a special interest in students who are the first in their families to seek higher education. She teaches a special seminar called “Thriving as a First-Generation College Student.” On her website, she says: “I believe our collective investment in the academic pipeline, particularly for under-represented minorities, women and first-generation scholars, must move beyond the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion toward a commitment of sustained mentorship, as well as access to resources and opportunities.”

Frasure-Yokley told Blueprint that she appreciates



PHOTO COURTESY OF LORRIE FRASURE-YOKLEY

how many of her colleagues at UCLA are first-generation college graduates. “Higher education changes socio-economic status,” she said, “not simply for our students, but the spillover effects can impact communities and generations.”

Some of Frasure-Yokley’s most significant research includes a study published last year in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*. It reflects her interest in how women of different racial backgrounds respond to candidates — in this case, Donald Trump.

Titled “Choosing the Velvet Glove: Women Voters, Ambivalent Sexism, and Vote Choice in 2016,” the study examined how white women and women of color split along racial lines in an important and untested area. Political scientists had been at a loss to explain why 52 percent of white women voted for Trump over Hillary Clinton, the first female nominee of a major party, who had seemed poised to win the presidency.

Only 15 percent of women of color chose Trump.

Using data from an American National Election Study (ANES), Frasure-Yokley examined how sexist attitudes influenced women’s vote choices and the differences between the choices of white women and women of color. She used an established framework of “ambivalent sexism” — a combination of measures of “hostile” sexism (negative stereotypes of women: that they try to gain power by controlling men, for example) and “benevolent” sexism (that they are to be cherished and protected). She also used measures of racial resentment.

“AS THE U.S. BECOMES INCREASINGLY ... DIVERSE, IT IS TIME TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF OUR DATA COLLECTION.”

— Lorrie Frasure-Yokley

Frasure-Yokley found that hostile sexism positively and significantly increased white women’s probability of voting for the Republican candidate, but for women of color, hostile sexism was negative and posed no significant influence on casting a ballot for Trump. She also found that racial resentment appeared to influence the likelihood of voting for Trump among all women surveyed; however, the effect of racial resentment was more than twice as large for white women as it was for women of color, accounting for all other factors.

These findings, Frasure-Yokley wrote, showed a need for broader and deeper probing into the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity in politics.

“As the U.S. becomes increasingly racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse,” she said, “it is time to push the boundaries of our data collection procedures to include large and generalizable samples of racial and ethnic groups and to allow for within-group comparison and analysis of an individual racial group, or comparative analysis across groups.”

Frasure-Yokley wants to do two things as soon as possible.

One is expand the reach of the Collaborative Multi-racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) to 20,000 Americans in 2020, including Asians, African Americans, Latinos, whites, Native Americans, black immigrants and Afro-Caribbeans — in addition to a sampling of Muslims.

Only with a “deep dive,” she said, can scholars fully understand the nation’s political system and the factors that influence it — and increase participation among its citizens.

The second is to use focus groups around the nation to understand the deeper nuances of women’s political influences. What motivates women of various ethnicities to get involved in politics and vote? And what drives their choices once they have ballot in hand?

With a significant number of female candidates in the early running for the Democratic nomination for president, the 2020 campaign could yield a rich trove of information, and Frasure-Yokley wants to tap into as much of it as possible.

“We need to not be so taken aback in 2020,” she said, alluding to Trump’s surprise victory in 2016.

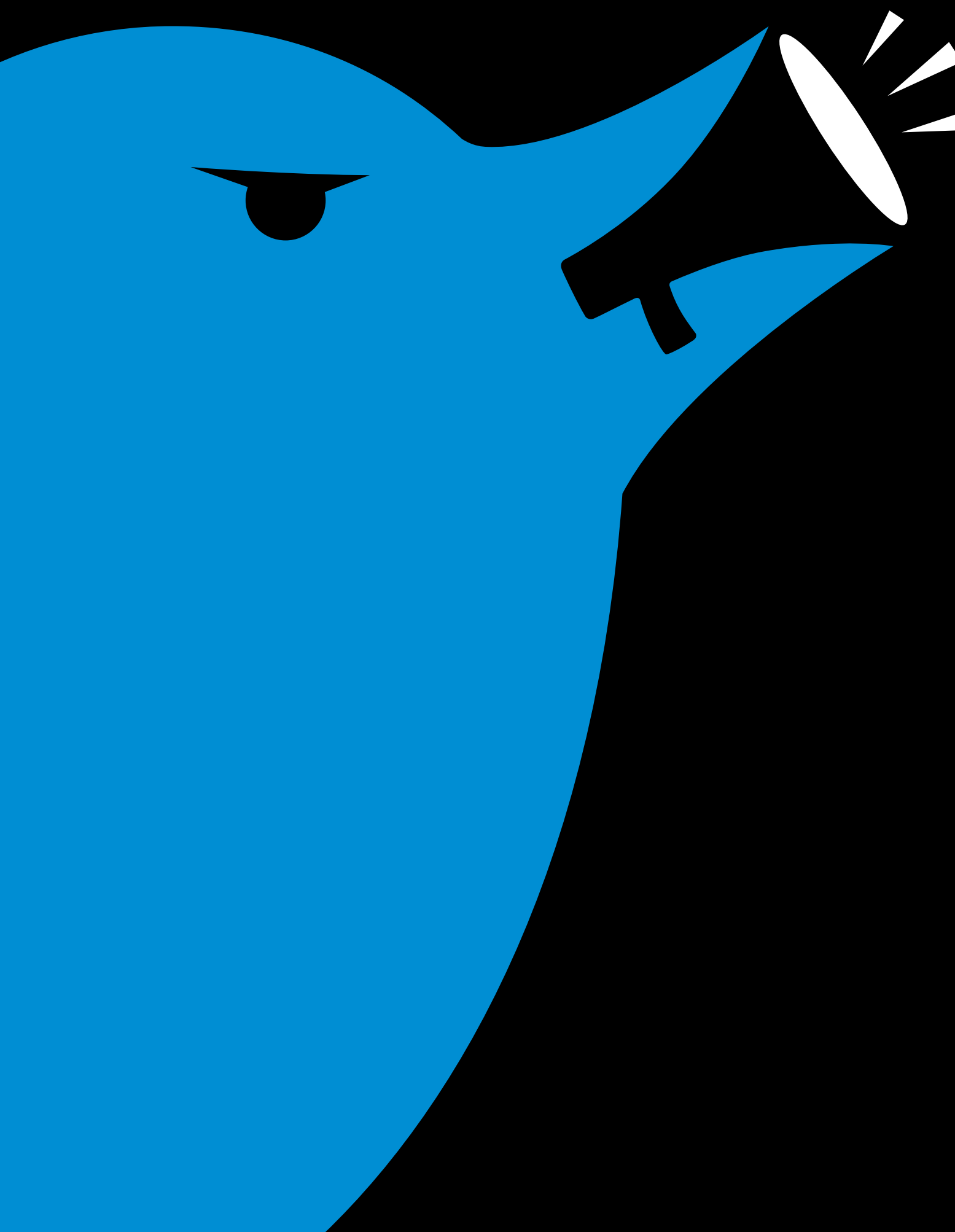
She and her graduate students have already begun with a pilot project in Orange County, which she sees as “a microcosm of groups — Latinos, Asians, whites, blacks.”

Each group is small — about a dozen participants each. “We have to create an environment in which everyone feels comfortable talking honestly with each other,” Frasure-Yokley said. “Our national discourse is broken in a lot of ways.” It won’t be easy, she said, for women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to talk candidly with one another about their views.

“We want to create safe spaces for women to talk about racism and sexism and what factors shape their choices.

“I want to be able to understand how women act on those views, or whether they don’t act on them at all. I want to know more about race’s effect on our vote choices and look more at the differences among women.

“I’m dreaming big here.” ▀



# TWEETING PROTEST

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SHAPES POLITICAL DISSENT

WRITTEN BY  
**LISA FUNG**

BARELY NOTICEABLE ON THE FLOOR of Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld's sixth-floor office sits a black box, about the size of a compact suitcase, tucked under a small conference table next to his stand-up desk. That box, a computer actually, is the core of his research and is quietly collecting 5 million tweets each day, about 1 percent of the world's daily output.

Steinert-Threlkeld, an assistant professor of public policy at UCLA, uses big data, primarily from Twitter, to understand protest dynamics. He uses social media to explore the relationship between online behavior and real-world action offline.

"Originally, I started with how one's social network — not Twitter, not Facebook, but actually your friends — influences your decision to protest," he said. "Since then, I've done work on natural-language processing, and I'm starting to use images that people share on social media to understand protest dynamics."



The study of political protests is not new. But through his computational research, Steinert-Threlkeld has found that observing social media dynamics can provide a higher level of understanding than traditional research methods, such as surveys that rely on people to explain how they feel and act.

The Twitter data Steinert-Threlkeld is collecting can be used for many purposes, but his immediate focus is on two trailblazing projects. The first involves the creation of a giant media database that will pull together multiple data sources: social media data from Twitter and from the Chinese social media site Sina Weibo, radio broadcasts and newspaper reports, as well as local, national and international television newscasts — some going back to the 1970s. In a second research project, Steinert-Threlkeld also is collecting and studying images delivered through social media to better understand protest mobilization. Both projects hope to help illuminate the genesis and growth of political ideas.

Steinert-Threlkeld, along with his research partner Junseock Joo, an assistant professor of communication studies at UCLA and the principal investigator of the database project, and communication professors Tim Groeling (also profiled in this issue of Blueprint) and Francis Steen, received a \$944,182 grant late last year from the National Science Foundation to merge into a single place the text, images, audio and video along with data from China, collected by Jennifer Tan of Stanford, and other data from research partners around the world. Having this “multimodal” information in one dataset will allow researchers to examine how different events are portrayed and communicated across time and platforms.

What they are doing is unique, Joo said, because the multimodal, international project involves integrating several forms of communication unique in academia. “Usually the collection process maintained by academics focuses on

a specific type of media. For instance, researchers focus on social media exclusively but not on the other media types, the traditional mass media,” he said, emphasizing that previous research does not always reflect on how people communicate in the real world. “The news and information flow isn’t just locked within one system; it goes out of the scope of one media type and interacts with other types of media.”

Steinert-Threlkeld opted to focus on Twitter rather than Facebook or other social media platforms because most people on Twitter keep their accounts public, making it a more accessible source for researchers. “I can probably get richer data on Facebook from the public accounts; it’s just that very few are public,” he said, adding that he would have to work through Facebook to get data from private accounts. “I felt that using Facebook to study protests could scare Facebook ... and at any point they could pull the plug.”

About one-half to one-third of the tweets Steinert-Threlkeld collects contain GPS coordinates, and of that number, about 10 percent contain images. Steinert-Threlkeld and Joo are training machine-learning algorithms that identify patterns and categorize these images, allowing them to analyze protesters by gender, race and age.

Through their image study, which measures protests in South Korea, Hong Kong, Venezuela, Russia, Spain and the Women’s March in the U.S., they hope to understand protest dynamics at a level of detail not available through newspapers, the traditional data source for social scientists.

“Newspaper-based datasets will say, ‘Authorities reported 200,000,’ or ‘Estimates ranged from hundreds to thousands.’ Sometimes they’ll give specific numbers, but it’s all third-hand at that point because the newspaper is reporting from an authority figure; the newspaper doesn’t record it itself,” Steinert-Threlkeld said. “Whereas we actually take protest photos and count the number of faces. It’s a direct measure.”

In addition, he and his fellow researchers hope to gain deeper insight into the relationship between the demographics of protesters and bystanders and their decisions to join in an event. Once this data is in hand, researchers will be able to tell more about who takes to the streets, how many gather and what drives them to violence — all of which is information that has intrigued political scientists and historians for years.

“There have been many people who are doing similar work on text data but not with images,” Joo said. “This is on the frontier — it’s cutting-edge work.”

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For someone who spends most of his time immersed in Twitter data, Steinert-Threlkeld is only a casual user of the social networking service created in 2006.

“I started around 2008. Twitter was new and exciting then,” he said. “I



was 22, and it was a cool new thing. A lot of my early posts were like, ‘I’m at this coffee shop’ or, you know, not professional. Social.”

Today his account boasts just over 300 tweets, but the majority deal with academic topics.

It’s not hard to believe Steinert-Threlkeld, then, when he says he fell into this area of research by happenstance. “Honestly, I thought I was going to study Turkish political development,” he said. “I was really interested in Turkey, but UC San Diego was the only school I applied to that didn’t offer a Turkish language [course], and that’s where I ended up. So that was out the window.”

With his mop of curly hair, Harry Potter-style glasses and relaxed attire, Steinert-Threlkeld could easily blend in with the students on campus. “Oh, that’s because I shaved last night,” he said, laughing. “I have to teach today.”

Thoughtful and earnest, the married 32-year-old professor often pauses, considering his words before speaking, like a statesman dealing with the media. Raised by a mother and father who started their careers in journalism, he grew up in Texas before moving to Connecticut as a teen with his parents and younger brother.

As an undergraduate, he studied anthropology and economics at Washington University in St. Louis, then worked for two years in Minneapolis as a systems integration analyst at the management consulting firm Accenture.

He dabbled a bit with computers and computer programming but didn’t start working with data collection in earnest until he went to graduate school for his Ph.D. It was there he met James Fowler, a political science professor and Guggenheim fellow whom many consider one of the top experts in social networks.

“He had weekly meetings with students, a seminar-type thing,” Steinert-Threlkeld said. “It was really grad students and sometimes guest professors presenting their own work.”

Then he picked up *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood*, the James Gleick bestseller that examines the history of information and how it has shaped the world. “I was reading the book in 2013 and starting to think about dissertation ideas, and I realized that I should use big data,” he said. “If every generation grows in the amount of data it deals with, I should work on being on that frontier.”

He eventually settled on the 2010 Arab Spring, which fortuitously ended just before he began his dissertation research. Steinert-Threlkeld was intrigued by how protesters during the pro-democracy uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa were using social media. Using text data collected from 13.8 million tweets, filtered by hashtags and geolocators, he was able to determine patterns in crowd behavior.

Surprisingly, he found that participants on the periphery of a protest often had more of an impact than organizers. “People are more likely to protest when they learn about an event from people who are like them, such as their friends,” he said. That’s particularly true in authoritarian settings because authoritarian governments are notoriously intolerant of antigovernmental organizations.

By contrast, in a more open society, “you’re more likely to see organizations and leaders mattering because they’re allowed to exist in the first place. There’s less fear of repression, so you’re less reliant on the safety in numbers you get from talking to your friends,” he said. “You’re more likely to go alone in a democracy, so you’re more likely to listen to the central leader or organizer than in an autocracy.”

In the brief time since he completed his dissertation, the impact of social media on protests has changed. This means, he said, that in an era of “fake news,” bots and trolls, researchers need to think carefully about collecting unbiased data through social media, while also respecting individual privacy laws.

“During the Arab Spring, there’s a lot of good evidence that the leaders didn’t pay attention to social media or thought of it as a small thing,” said Steinert-Threlkeld, who also studied the 2013-14 Euromaidan uprising in the Ukraine. “Today, governments realize that social media is a politically important space and are more likely to act repressively.”

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Steinert-Threlkeld stands at his desk, demonstrating how the computer recognizes images pulled from Twitter and automatically files them by category. He clicks on a folder, looking for fire. “These are pretty good,” he said, peering at thumbnails. “It recognizes torches, it gets candles. ... There are many variables at play that I want to start looking at that I haven’t done in the past. But I’m hoping in the next year or two I can start.”

There’s much more he wants to do. For example, he’d like to explore what makes people decide to participate in protests in the United States. Are dissenters more liberal? Better educated? Are they concentrated in certain parts of the country? “If you live in a precinct where many people voted for Hillary Clinton, maybe you’re more likely to go protest. Or education level might matter more because you think you can make a difference on the political system.”

Restlessly imagining more possibilities, he ticks off a number of other potential uses for the data he’s collecting. Perhaps a deep dive into the duration of protests — why a protest may last longer in California than in Texas. Did that change after the midterms? Maybe bringing in city-level information will raise more questions.

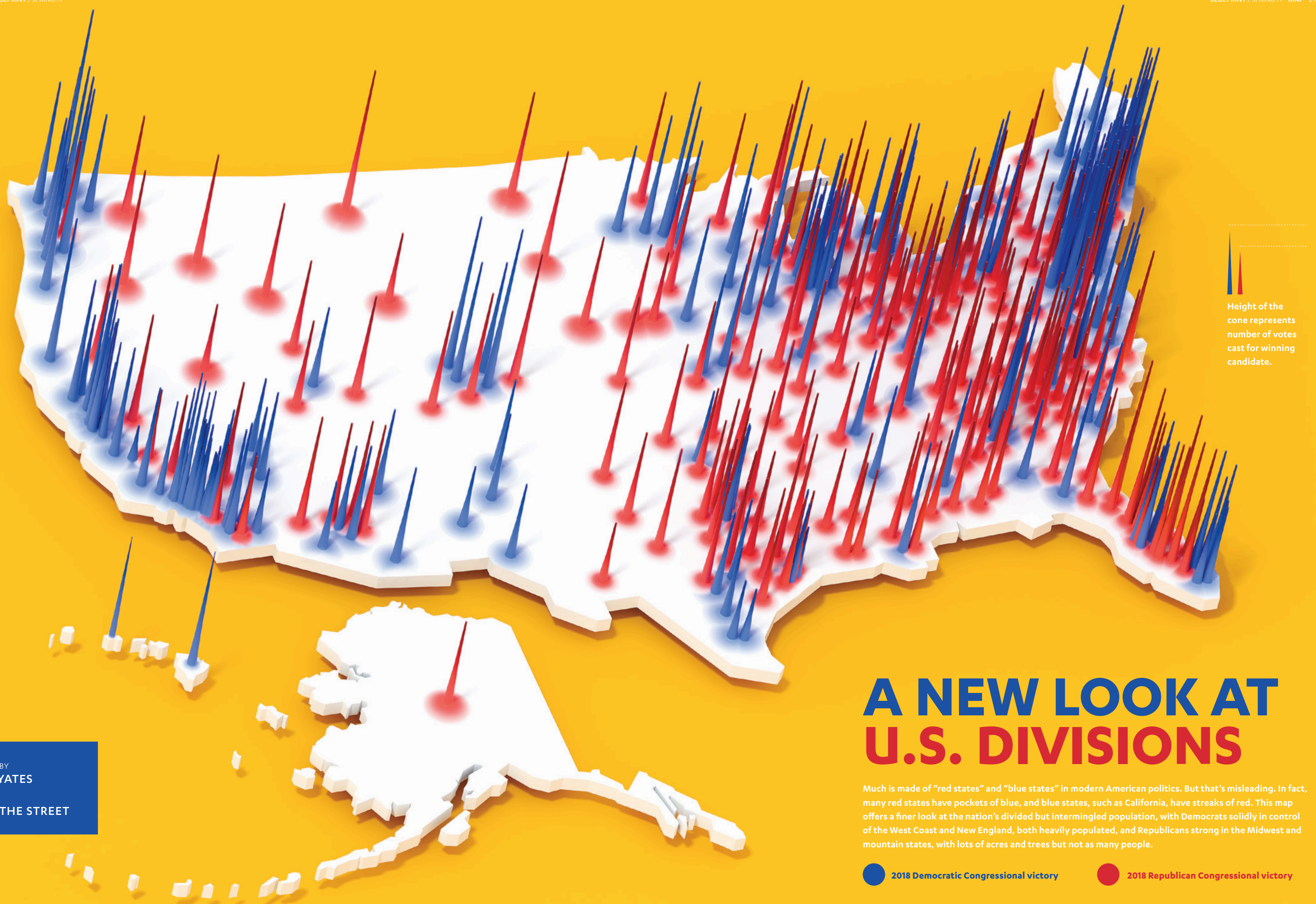
“Yesterday and today, I was trying to figure out how to work with Census data and other datasets,” he said, noting with a laugh that the complexities of his interests are “making me pull out my hair.”

Few social scientists are attempting this type of research, whether in academia or the private sector. “I guess it’s not as widespread as I thought it would be at this point,” he said, “which either means I’m onto something or onto nothing.” ▀

“PEOPLE  
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FROM  
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WHO ARE  
LIKE THEM.”

— Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld





RESEARCH BY  
**NONA YATES**

MAP BY  
**DOWN THE STREET**



# “BELIEVER”

DAVID AXELROD CONSIDERS  
AMERICA'S ANGST

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER WALKER

INTERVIEW BY  
JIM NEWTON

DAVID AXELROD ONCE WAS A JOURNALIST. He began his career as an 18-year-old political writer for the Hyde Park Herald in Illinois before moving to an internship and then the night desk at the Chicago Tribune. In 1979, he covered the improbable mayoral campaign of Jane Byrne. When she won, he began covering City Hall and wrote a political column. His unhappiness with the direction of journalism, accelerated by a corporate-driven change of leadership at the Tribune, led him to jump to politics, where he was successful at a state and local level before the triumph that drew him to national attention, guiding the 2008 presidential campaign of U.S. Senator Barack Obama from Illinois to the White House. Axelrod joined Obama as a special adviser on the White House staff and later wrote a memoir, *Believer*, which chronicled his life in politics and was widely and warmly praised.

Axelrod and Blueprint editor-in-chief Jim Newton first met during the 2008 campaign. Axelrod accompanied Obama to the candidate's editorial board interview with the Los Angeles Times, where Newton was editor of the editorial pages. The Times endorsed Obama that year, the first time it had ever backed a Democrat for president. Axelrod and Newton got together again recently, this time in Axelrod's Chicago office. Surrounded by Axelrod's political and baseball memorabilia, they discussed political discourse, Donald Trump, the 2020 campaign and the state of American politics.

**Blueprint:** *We're here to talk about the current political discourse and dialogue...*

**David Axelrod:** It's splendid [laughter].

**BP:** *You started as a journalist. What drew you to journalism, and what drew you away?*

**DA:** You always think you have some independent self-determination. But my mother, who was a journalist ... always said she gave my sister and me names that she felt would look good in bylines. That would have been reason enough for me not to become a journalist.

But really, my interest in politics attracted me to news. And my interest in politics was what brought me to Chicago, the University of Chicago. When I got here in 1972, even though this was one of the most vibrant political towns in the country — the first Mayor Daley was here, the black independent political movement was growing, we had the Democratic convention here, and so on — I couldn't find anyone who wanted to talk about anything that happened after the year 1800. So I started writing in part to satisfy my curiosity about politics. ...

**BP:** *And then, in 1983 or '84, you left to go into politics?*

**DA:** Yes, there was a change of management at the Tribune. A lot of the people who were my mentors left. There was a kind of cultural change at the Tribune. ... It became much more of a business. ...

I really quit journalism because I loved it so much. I wasn't going to be able to do it the way I was trained to do it, the way I wanted to do it. And I think a great journalist is basically an iconoclast, and the Tribune was becoming a more corporate type of environment. I didn't think I could navigate that or wanted to. ...

The thing I really have been all my life is a storyteller. That was what I did as a journalist. And I think if you're really thinking about politics the right way, you're thinking about it as the story that you're trying to tell. For my candidates and the people I worked for, I really tried to understand the essence of who they were and tell a story about who they were, where they were going and where they saw the country going.

**BP:** *This country's history is full of moments of vicious political discourse — we had a civil war, after all. But there is something about this era that feels qualitatively different...*

**DA:** It's not true that it's never been worse in Washington. It is true that the modern communications environment amplifies things in a way that makes you feel as if it could never have been worse.

**BP:** *Given that, is there something different about what we're living through in our lifetime than what came before?*

**DA:** I think there are a few things. Almost all of it is driven by technological change, the technological change that has revolutionized our economy in a way that has created enormous opportunity for people who are well-positioned to take advantage of it and has created enormous disruption and anxiety among everybody else.

I was with a bunch of financiers in New York the other day, and they were celebrating the fact that this new economy creates all these opportunities, but the opportunities that are being created are not necessarily ones that can be taken advantage of by the people who have lost their chance and their opportunity. That's one element of it.

Technology also has changed the way we communicate and the way we get information in ways that have been more pernicious than we'd hoped when the dawning of the Internet Age arrived. We thought the Internet would be a way of breaking down walls and creating more connection and sense of community. It has certainly given access, broad access, to people around the world to all kinds of information, and that's positive. But rather





SINCE SERVING IN THE OBAMA WHITE HOUSE, DAVID AXELROD HAS MADE THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO'S INSTITUTE OF POLITICS HIS HOME. HERE, AXELROD IN HIS OFFICE (LEFT) AND HOSTING A LECTURE AT THE INSTITUTE IN JANUARY (RIGHT).



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER WALKER

than breaking down walls, it's really creating the opportunity for siloing, so that we can create a virtual-reality world in which our ideas are affirmed but not necessarily informed. Everybody inside that silo shares your point of view, and everyone outside the silo is considered alien: troglodytes, radicals.

**BP: It has made demonization much easier.**

**DA:** Yes. And that has been taken advantage of for commercial use and for political use, some by candidates and, as we've learned, some by malign foreign entities and countries. And then the modern news environment has been impacted not just by this, but the siloing also has been promoted by cable television. I often think about whether, as we go through this period and there are inevitable comparisons to Watergate, I wonder whether Richard Nixon would have resigned if he had Fox News, if he had Breitbart, if he had the ability to rally people through the various tools that are now available.

**BP: I wonder, too, whether he would have been capable of convincing himself that he wasn't in much trouble. In the case of Trump, I wonder whether that affirmation environment allows him to exaggerate his own sense of support.**

**DA:** I do [think so]. I think that Trump lives in his own virtual reality silo.

Objectively, he's getting hammered on this shutdown and the wall, for all his efforts, is no more popular than it was a month or two or three ago, but within his silo he's getting a lot of attaboys.

He's also a prisoner of his own silo. It's very hard for him to move now. This siloing has created a sense of discord and lack of communication that didn't exist before.

There's one other element. We grew up in a politics that was still being shaped by people who had served together in World War II. It's almost a cliché to talk about the relationship between a Bob Dole and a Dan Inouye, but you had people from different parts of the country, different cultures, but who served together, shoulder to shoulder, and that created more of an opportunity to relate to each other. One of my hopes, frankly, for the future, is that we now are increasingly getting these Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans in Congress — 20 of them this year. Perhaps that will help.

It really is the modern media environment that has created this. And discord sells. There is commercial value to it. Breaking news, the big fight. Trump has a kind of feral genius for this. He understands the modern media environment very well. If he doesn't like the story line, he can light himself on fire or light someone else on fire, and he can command the news cycle or many news cycles with one tweet.

There is not a lot of room for perspective or reflection. Everything is immediate. And the proportionality is often out of scale to what it would have been in the past or what it should be.

**BP: To what end? He does seem to have, as you say, an almost feral capacity to change the subject. But he almost always seems to be changing the subject to something that is even more damaging to him. What, then, does he get from all this?**

**DA:** I don't think he sees it that way. To understand Donald Trump, one has to go to this: His father reportedly told him there are two kinds of people in the world. There are killers, and there are losers. And you have to be a killer. The subtext of this is that whatever you need to do to get what you want in this jungle is justified. There are no rules. There are no norms. There are no institutions. There are no laws that you need to worry about or respect. There is only winning and losing. That is the philosophy that he has organized his life by. That's how he ran his businesses. That's how he got elected, and that's how he's running his presidency. That's also how he is developing policy and representing America in the world.

Sometimes when I watch him, it's like I'm watching a Paddy Chayefsky play. It's another version of "Network." It's all about ratings. He's all about ratings.

The paradox is the one that you raise, which is that he is rating well among the people he rates well with: Republicans, conservatives. But he has shown no ability to grow beyond it. He never reaches across.

**BP: In that context, what would make his presidency a "win"? Is it just re-election?**

**DA:** His being the center of attention. Commanding the moment day to day is what he lives for. There may be pecuniary measures that he applies to it. I think re-election probably is a big one for him. But it is about him. It's always about him.

**BP: One aspect of discourse that seems a little beyond just media or technology is the question of truthfulness. Even in periods of great discord in the past, there was a sense that candidates and elected officials were required to tell the truth, that anything straying from this was a clear demerit. And that just does not seem to be the case at the moment.**

**DA:** At the core of that is the idea that truth is subjective. That's Trump's theory, the idea that there is no objective truth. There is no actual truth. There are only versions of the truth. And what we are engaged in is a battle over my version of the truth versus your version of the truth.

**BP: As someone who grew up in journalism, I suspect you regard that with some skepticism.**

**DA:** It's horrifying and deeply cynical. It's also abetted by some of the media outlets that support him. What is really challenging from the perspective of a modern journalist is that simply by pursuing facts, simply by pursuing objective truths, you get tagged as partisan.

Trump had this famous exchange with Lesley Stahl that she reported on in the fall of 2017. She asked him why he was so hard on the news media, and he said, because when you write bad things about me, I don't want people to believe you. [Note: Trump's actual quote: "You know why I do it? I do it to discredit you all and demean you all so when you write negative stories about me, no one will believe you."] He's pretty transparent about his goals. ...

**BP: That certainly seems to work within his base. If you look at the numbers, you see a fairly steady increase, for instance, among those who say there is a crisis at the southern border. Still, I don't know what that gets him.**

**DA:** It gets him the compliance of Republicans in Congress, for one thing. A large number of members, ... including the leaders, understand that we

don't need a 2,000-mile wall on the border. But they also know if they were to oppose the president and he turned on them, there would be very real consequences among their base. They've seen what happened to Republicans who dissented. Most of them are now on the speaking circuit. They're not in Congress.

I think many of them [who are still in Congress] will look back at this moment with a lot of regret, but right now, they're just trying to survive.

**BP: What are some of the perils of government shutdowns for Democrats — and for Trump?**

**DA:** I think the peril [for Democrats] is that shutdowns increasingly look, in the minds of voters, like just another Washington gridlock, with partisan self-interest defeating any kind of purpose or principle. That is the biggest danger. In a lot of these swing districts that Democrats won — and you have a passel of them in California — voters sent these Democrats to Congress in the hope that they would be problem solvers. So the danger is that they look cravenly political in the usual sort of "Washington" way.

The exposure for Trump is much greater. ... Remember, he got elected in part because people were sick of the gridlock in Washington. He basically said: "I'm going to make it work. I will solve these problems." Now, he looks like he is mired in — in fact, contributing to — the same morass. He doesn't look particularly effective. He looks very political.

The bigger thing that happened here is that [Speaker of the House Nancy] Pelosi has sent this very, very strong signal: "There's a new sheriff in town. You don't run everything. We are not going to be overrun by you. If you want to get things done, you have to come through us." In a sense, she's brought Trump to heel. ... She will be a strong nemesis to him. If he had illusions about her, they've been dispelled.

She's established rules of engagement in a big way.

**BP: Looking ahead to the presidential campaign, this is in one sense a great opportunity for Democrats: Trump is a singularly vulnerable president, at least by the numbers. On the other hand, I hear some apprehension that if a Democrat were to lose this race, it would force us to ponder what it says about this country that Trump could be elected, not just in a fluke election but even after serving four years.**

**DA:** I believe very deeply in the process of democracy. I wrote a book called *Believer*, and it was not about any person. It was about this. I very much accept that when a party wins an election for president, that president is going to take the lead on policy. You may not like the policy decisions, and you can battle over those, but I respect that.

But what has been true of every president in my lifetime, save potentially for Nixon and now Trump, is the notion that presidents are trustees of that democracy. They are presidents of the whole country. What we've seen is a president who is willing to sunder all of our institutions and norms and flout our laws for his own purposes. That is very dangerous.

The real consequence of a Trump re-election, if he continues down this road, is how much hammering can our institutions take? This is a trial of democracy. ...

One of the appeals of Trump was to say: "I don't give a damn about all of these encumbrances. You hire me, and I will take care of it." To the extent that he fails, he's going to blame the institutions and blame the norms and blame the rules. It becomes a thing that feeds on itself. This is a trial of democracy and how and whether democracy survives in an age that's being rapidly shaped by technology. ...

**BP: Does the democratic process help the electorate pick out the qualities that actually make a good president?**

**DA:** In that you are tested in many different ways, and often under pressure, it is a good test. ...

But Trump is sui generis. ... The Trump thing requires a lot of deep thought. ►

**"IT'S NOT TRUE THAT IT'S NEVER BEEN WORSE IN WASHINGTON. IT IS TRUE THAT THE MODERN COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT AMPLIFIES THINGS IN A WAY THAT MAKES YOU FEEL AS IF IT COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WORSE."**

# CLOSING NOTE: THE OTHER SIDE OF DISCORD



CONTEMPORARY DIVISION IN AMERICA TAKES MANY FORMS. There are red states and blue, of course, with liberals clustered along the nation’s coastlines — especially in California — and conservatives spread out across the middle of the country (though, as this issue’s map vividly illustrates, the overlap of red and blue, and the concentrations of each, are more complex than state-by-state).

There are believers and non-believers, and believers of competing faiths. We tend to think of religious divisions as those among faiths, but fervent believers sometimes have more in common across denominations than those who may share a religious order but with different degrees of orthodoxy.

There are differences between men and women, and then divisions among men and among women. The young and old often carry different interests and ideals, while changing demographics inexorably are transforming us from a nation run by white men into a polyglot, multilingual society — a change that is both exhilarating and, for some, threatening. Asked to name

the five most important issues facing American society today, Democrats and Republicans agreed on none.

Change and division are natural sources of conflict, and modern media love conflict. What’s most curious about today’s media is that they are both a cause and a result of division. Is Fox (or MSNBC) successful because it capitalizes on division? Or is division deeper because of Fox (or MSNBC)? Meanwhile, cable television is fast becoming yesterday’s medium. Having replaced much of network television’s influence, cable is now being eclipsed by one form of social media after another. Technology is not for the timid.

The effects of all this on discourse are often discouraging and sometimes surprising. As Tim Groeling’s research is demonstrating, news selection often is framed around discord, contributing to the same divisions it is chronicling. Lorrie Frasure-Yokley is fine-tuning the examination of divisions that once were papered over by assumptions: She has demonstrated, for instance, significant differences between the politics of women of color and those of white women, suggesting that demographers who examine the politics of “women” may be headed for confusion. Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld dives through impossibly deep reservoirs of social media posts to divine what it is that generates dissent; he is discovering, among other things, that what draws a young person to a rally in an authoritarian country and in a liberal democracy are often different, both in terms of the motivation and the leadership of dissent.

The research of these scholars provides insight into the hows and whys of political division. Then there is the work of Martin Gilens. He is examining inequality of political influence, and he identifies the culprit as a decline in democracy. He goes a step farther and proposes reforms that dare to reconsider long-held norms in American society, challenging rules, for instance, about who votes and how. To some, that makes him scary; to others, it makes him overdue.

These are big and important ideas for Americans to consider. Division has led to discord, which is increasing division. Division has led to paralysis, and paralysis has sharpened discord. Wallowing in this descending spiral doesn’t help. Studying and remedying it does.

Importantly, the solutions to these intertwined pathologies are not found simply in lowered voices or a commitment to nice words. As the work in his issue makes clear, this country’s divisions are real, not just rhetorical. Solutions do not demand politeness, though sometimes that would be welcome. What is required? A commitment to honest inquiry and genuine reform.

— Jim Newton



A PUBLICATION OF THE  
UCLA LUSKIN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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### SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Lisa Horowitz, the chief copy editor for Blueprint, whose sharp eye makes this magazine what it is. — Jim Newton

DO YOU HAVE  
SOMETHING TO SAY?

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