

Did Donald Trump *Really* Change Everything?

**Study Group for the Institute of Politics / Fall Semester 2017
IOP Fellow Dan Balz**

Study Group Meets on Wednesdays, 4:15-5:45 p.m., in the FDR Room

President Trump has disrupted American politics as no one in recent memory. But many of the challenges to institutions of government, politics and the media predate his run for the White House. This study group will focus specifically on contemporary issues in politics and journalism, offering both historical context and real-time analysis. Invited guests will include politicians, political professionals and journalists who are on the front lines and who reflect different perspectives and viewpoints.

We are living through what is either a quite abnormal moment in our history or we are living through what may come to be remembered as the beginning of a new normal. America is in the middle of multiple transformations—economic, demographic and technological. Our politics and media reflect those broader forces, resulting in an electorate that is deeply divided.

Partisanship has intensified. The middle seems to have disappeared. Debate has become more antagonistic. Tribal voting has become the norm. This is now a country of warring camps. On one side are those who benefit from or otherwise embrace many of the changes underway. On the other are those who have been left behind, who feel ignored or disrespected by political or cultural elites or who feel that important American values have been undermined.

Much of this predated the candidacy and the presidency of Donald Trump. But the campaign of 2016 and the months since the president took office have added to the pressures on the political system, raising questions about the strength of political institutions, the character of political debate, the role of the news media and perhaps most important, whether there can be a return to a more harmonious and productive political environment.

This study group will seek to examine various aspects of the current state of American politics and journalism through lively and civil discussion and hopefully with a shared goal of pointing toward a path to a better politics.

NOTE: Weekly topics are subject to change, based on shifting schedules of our guests and topical news developments.

Weekly Sessions:

Week 1 – September 20. Did Donald Trump Really Change Everything? Or, Where are we? How did we get here?

The polarization of our politics did not happen overnight. It has been happening for many years. If Donald Trump is the most polarizing president in our lifetimes, Barack Obama was the second most polarizing, George W. Bush the third most and Bill Clinton the fourth most polarizing. We will look at some historical trends in campaign and legislative politics and in voting behavior to provide context for the divisions that now exist. This session also will provide an overview of the study group and highlight the topics and goals for the coming weeks' discussions.

No Guest for this session.

Week 2—September 27. What don't you understand about how President Trump won the election and the people who comprise Trump nation?

Donald Trump is not an accidental president but his victory was a major surprise to much of the country and to many political analysts. This session will seek to provide answers to a series of questions: What were the keys to his victory? How was the strategy set and executed? Who are his supporters and how did he reach them? Why did so many political experts discount the power of his message and the frustrations of his supporters? Has Trump created a new and possibly durable coalition or does his success in the campaign threaten to split the Republican Party irrevocably?

*Confirmed Guest: **Michael Glassner**, Deputy Campaign Manager for Trump's 2016 campaign and now Executive Director of Trump's Campaign Committee.*

Week 3—October 4. This is a White House unlike any other. What is it like to cover President Trump every day?

This session will focus specifically on the very center of power in Washington, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. There's never been a White House quite like this one and reporters assigned to cover the president face challenges significantly different from those of the past. The mainstream media have been a regular target of the president. At times, access to reliable information has been more limited than in other White Houses. Yet this White House also has been one of the leakiest in history, plagued by internal divisions and infighting. How does the Trump White House operate and how do White House reporters try to get inside?

*Confirmed Guest: **Philip Rucker**, White House Bureau Chief for The Washington Post.*

Week 4—October 11. A conversation with Gov. Mitt Romney.

Gov. Romney has broad perspective on the state of our politics and public life. He served as governor of Massachusetts and was the Republican Party's nominee for president in 2012. He was a vocal critic of Candidate Trump during the campaign season but later engaged in conversations with President-elect Trump about becoming Secretary of State in the new administration. He has developed views about the strength of our political institutions, America's place in a dangerous world, the nature of American strength and the state of the Republican Party. He will share with students his thoughts on these and other timely issues.

*Confirmed Guest: **Mitt Romney**, former governor of Massachusetts and 2012 Republican nominee for president.*

Week 5—October 18. How did Democrats become the minority party in Washington and across the country in the states? Is there a road back and who might lead the way?

A few years ago, Democrats, believing that demography is destiny, envisioned a bright future. But Republicans currently control the White House, the House, the Senate, most of the governorships and many more state legislatures than the Democrats. Democrats have lost more ground among white working-class voters at the same time that the Obama coalition appears to have been unique to the 44th president. The party appears to lack a fresh and positive vision and needs a new generation of leaders to step forward. How are Democrats regrouping?

*Confirmed Guest: **Donna Brazile**, former Interim Chair of the Democratic National Committee and Campaign Manager, Gore for President.*

Week 6—October 25. News, fake news and how journalists navigate the fractured media environment of today's 24/7 information flow.

Journalists face multiple challenges in their coverage of Washington. The role for serious and fact-based reporting has come under attack in a time of so-called fake news. The session will examine the fractured media, the rise of non-traditional news sources, the power and influence of social media and the pressures felt by news organizations and the reporters covering the major stories.

*Confirmed Guest: **Dana Bash**, Chief Political Correspondent for CNN.*

Week 7—November 1. Can anybody still grow up to be president? How has running for the highest office changed in the past decade?

Presidential politics is both a great circus and a serious undertaking. Each campaign reflects the anxieties and aspirations of the voters. Candidates who best understand the moment often are the most successful. But Donald Trump proved that traditional strategies and tactics aren't necessarily needed to win the White House. This session will examine what it takes to run for president, how Trump's campaign changed the way we think about seeking the White House and how coverage of presidential politics has changed with the rise of Twitter, Facebook and 24/7 cable and the power of celebrity.

*Confirmed Guest: **Tim Pawlenty**, former Governor of Minnesota and candidate for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination.*

Week 8—November 8. At a time of growing partisanship and polarization, is there any middle ground left in politics? Does it matter?

The middle has collapsed, or so it seems. Partisanship has driven politicians and voters farther left and farther right, yet problems are often solved somewhere in the middle. The final session of the study group will try to look forward, asking whether there is there any room left for a more civil politics. If so, how it might be restored?

*Confirmed Guest: **John Dickerson**, CBS Chief Washington Correspondent, anchor of CBS's "Face the Nation" and author of "Whistlestop: My Favorite Stories from Presidential Campaign History."*

Week 9—November 16. [OPTIONAL SESSION IF NEEDED] Looking back and looking forward. The students speak.

We will use the final session to turn the conversation around and to elicit from students their ideas for restoring confidence in government and to explore their thoughts about what public service means today, based on what they have heard over the previous weeks. This will be the students' opportunity to shape the discussion in what we hope will be a free-wheeling and lively end to the semester.