

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

**Guest:** Ronald Brownstein, Senior Editor, The Atlantic  
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### **I: Red America and Blue America (0:15 – 47:07)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm joined today by Ron Brownstein, senior editor at *The Atlantic*, senior political analyst at CNN. In my opinion, one of the best analysts of American politics.

BROWNSTEIN: Thank you, Bill, good to be here.

KRISTOL: A rare combination of detailed, granular understanding of electoral matters and the big historical sweep. So, I've now put a big burden on you here...

BROWNSTEIN: Thank you, thank you. Well, we are living in a big – we are in a big sweep right now, right.

KRISTOL: ...to live up to this introduction.

BROWNSTEIN: Yes.

KRISTOL: So, I think we talked a year ago. Now we're – what? – more than a year and a half out from the election.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Only four or five months till November 2018. What's changed over the last year? We analyzed 2016 a little bit last time. So, where are we now, here in June-July of 2018? 2017 – what are we in? 2018.

BROWNSTEIN: 2018. I feel like every crevice, every fissure that we talked about in 2017 and that we saw in 2016 may be even deeper in 2018. To me, the Trump presidency has said more about the country than about him.

I mean, he has been erratic, volatile, racially divisive, but who would not have expected those things from 2016? In many ways, he has been somewhat at the far end of kind of disruptive from what we thought, but not out of bounds of what we anticipated he would be as president.

I think what's striking is the reaction of the country, really, and the extent to which our divisions are so solidified, so immutable, that even a figure as disruptive as Trump is doing more to intensify than fundamentally realign the basic divides – partisan, geographic, demographic, and generational – that he inherited.

KRISTOL: Do you think these were so deeply – I'm going to ask you now to elaborate on each of those divides. But I was thinking about this: Do you think these were so baked in that it was almost inevitable that he went in that direction? Because it wasn't crazy to think, I don't think, in December or so of 2016 that he could go against type. He wasn't a big ideological conservative on so many issues.

BROWNSTEIN: Right, right.

KRISTOL: He could have gone with infrastructure. He could have gone against the drug companies. There are 18 different ways he could have been a populist who attracted some Democrats, or many Democrats on some issues, and almost betrayed the Republicans. And would that have been possible? Or are the divides just too deep, or just too easy to fall into the divides? Or he had appealed to them too much already?

BROWNSTEIN: Well, the first thing is, I mean, I think Trump has clearly – and I think you would agree – clearly offered the Republicans a kind of devil's bargain, where in essence he is saying, "I will give you many of your long-standing goals. I will cut taxes. I will slash regulation. I will appoint conservative justices. I will turn over all of these regulatory agencies, in essence to the regulated industries." Things that congressional Republicans and Republican voters by and large want. "And in return, you have to take the distinctive elements of Trumpism," which is this kind of insular nationalism on immigration and trade, and skepticism of alliance, and open challenging of the rule of law, and undermining federal law enforcement, and this endless series of openly racially provocative culture fights that he provokes on Twitter and elsewhere.

And, you know, you could imagine this blowing up on either end. You could imagine that either the kind of economic vision tilted toward the top would be so severe that it drives away some of the blue-collar voters drawn toward his cultural populism; or that the racial and cultural populism could be so divisive that it drives away some of the upscale voters who basically like the small-government economic agenda. And there is more of the latter than the former, more of the white-collar than the blue-collar, but there isn't that much of either.

And, you know, at the moment, the thing is kind of shambling forward. It constantly looks like the gasket could blow and the machinery could blow. But the fact is that as this has gone on – and particularly, I think, the tax cut was a turning point, when Republicans saw there was this tangible benefit – that not only Republican elected officials have locked arms around Trump more than I would have anticipated 18 months ago, but more of the typical Republican coalition is willing to say, "You know, I'm not 100% happy about all of this, but I'm sticking with it for the time being."

The price of all of this, though, is that you have intensely mobilized and terrified, really, the other side. And also, there is, I think, a measurable cost among white-collar, center-right adults who may not call themselves Republican but normally vote Republican. And we are seeing more of those, especially women, pull away.

KRISTOL: So, talk – it's a question of whether he could have done it a different way. I guess we just don't know; he'd have to be a different person.

BROWNSTEIN: So, to do it differently, I think that the biggest problem – there are a couple of problems of doing it differently. One, did he really have a vision of what a carving out a piece of each party – Henry Olsen, I thought, the conservative writer, made the argument to me early on: if you really want to do this differently, you have to have a vision of how to attract not only super majorities among working-

class whites, but also make inroads among working-class Hispanics and African-Americans. Because if your only mission is to max out on working-class whites, yes, they're a big group, but they are shrinking. They are shrinking two points as they show on the electorate every four years.

The problem is Trump's vision on how to max out on working-class whites is so rooted in generating fear, I think, of minority voters that it's just hard to imagine how you're going to turn around. Like, is an infrastructure plan going to win a lot of Hispanic working-class voters if you're basically saying that undocumented immigrants from Central America are infesting and invading the country? I mean, to me it was always somewhat implausible.

Plus, Congress is now so parliamentary. I mean, we met in 1986. And when you think about people like Robert Stafford and who the Republicans were – I think about one-third of the Senate Republicans voted against William Bradford Reynolds when Reagan tried to promote him to the No. 3 job in the Justice Department. Nearly 20 Republicans voted against each Carswell and Hainsworth, Nixon's Supreme Court nominees. So, we're not in that world anymore.

KRISTOL: So he couldn't, maybe, have pulled a Nixon. I mean, Nixon would be the example of someone who –

BROWNSTEIN: And Nixon did.

KRISTOL: Did – I mean, he got from 43% to 60% of the vote in four years.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, he did. And he had this kind of strange combination of the Southern strategy appealing, on some levels, to racial resentments. But also governing in a way that incorporated and embodied a lot of Democratic goals, particularly on the regulatory side, the EPA and OSHA and, you know, the Coastal Zone Management Act.

KRISTOL: And made sort of upper-middle-class Republicans...

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: ...happy enough at least.

BROWNSTEIN: Exactly. And I think the Trump thing is – look, to me what makes Trump unique is I don't think there has ever been a president – there have been presidents who you could say were somewhat obtuse or uninterested in the voters outside of their coalition. People felt that way about Obama; people felt that way about Bush. Trump takes that one step further, because I think he views a way of solidifying a hold on his coalition is to be overtly hostile –

KRISTOL: To the other coalition.

BROWNSTEIN: To the other coalition. And I think one of the reasons why he's so popular with so many core conservative constituencies is that he is a wartime president – only the war is against Blue America.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And I think this whole analysis depends on something you've written about an awful lot. And you should walk us through a little bit. So, what are the two coalitions? I mean, what are we really looking at here?

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, I've been writing about American politics since the 1980s, and in some ways the biggest change is that now all of our social and economic divisions align with partisanship in a way they didn't before. I mean, even when I was writing, let's say, in the 90s, Bill Clinton won half the counties in America in each of his two victories. He won a lot of blue-collar voters. He won a lot of rural white voters. He won a lot of culturally conservative voters. And we've kind of evolved beyond that, and we moved to a

point where every – like I like to say, every cherry on the slot machine now lines up: cultural, demographic, and economic.

You have a Democratic coalition that is stronger with younger voters, and a Republican coalition that is stronger with older voters. You've got a Democratic coalition that's increasingly competitive with white-collar whites, and a Republican coalition that's dominant with blue-collar whites. Obviously, you have a huge racial divide in the electorate. Republicans still facing a ceiling at around 20% among the growing share of non-white voters.

You have this incredible geographic divide, where Hillary Clinton won 87 of the 100 largest counties in America. She won them by over 15 million votes. Those 100 counties alone provided over half of all of her votes. Right? But there are another 3,000 counties in America and Trump won about 2,600 of them, which is more than any candidate in either party since Ronald Reagan.

If you look at it economically, you have Democrats centered in these globally connected, Info Age, low-carbon, metro areas. And Republicans are rooted primarily in rural places, where if you look, the data shows that a disproportionate number of the manufacturing jobs, obviously the agriculture jobs, and also the energy production jobs are located.

So, when you add it all up, I believe we now have a coalition of transformation, a Democratic “coalition of transformation” that is rooted in the larger cities, that is younger, more diverse, more white-collar, more secular, more rooted in the global economy, more Info Age.

And a Republican coalition of restoration, “collation of restoration,” that is the opposite. It's older, predominantly white, more religious, more rooted in those traditional industries, and increasingly blue-collar. Just take a couple of the contrasts.

KRISTOL: Give the real numbers, because one could always say, “Look, every party, of course, by definition almost is going to have a different tilt on all these different axes.”

BROWNSTEIN: Right, right. But these are really pronounced tilts. Clinton won 16 of the 20 states where immigrants are the highest share of the population. Trump won 26 of the 30 states where immigrants are the smallest share of the population.

If you look at per-capita carbon emissions, which turns out to be a surprisingly useful kind of gauge of the economic structure of a state because they're lower in the post-industrial states and they're higher in states with energy or manufacturing production, the same kind of thing. I mean, Clinton won I think it was like 18 of the 20 with the lowest. And Trump won all of them with the highest.

Look at religion. You know, today – and part of the reason why the Trump phenomenon, I think, is so intense is because we are continually crossing these demographic milestones. Somewhere around 2005 or so, for the first time in American history, white people without a college degree were no longer a majority of the country. That had been true from Jefferson's yeoman's farmer to the guy on the line at River Rouge. They were always a majority of the country. That stopped being true sometime around 2005, 2006.

Sometime around 2010, white Christians were no longer a majority of the country. White Christians are now down to about 42% of Americans.

KRISTOL: People who say they're Christians.

BROWNSTEIN: People who say they're white and Christian, some Christian religion. And so we're down to about 42%. But think about the divide. Three-quarters of self-identified Republicans also identify as white Christians, which was the share of the country overall in 1984 when Reagan was reelected. Among

Democrats, only one-third are white Christians; one-third are non-white Christians and one-third are secular.

So, you know, no matter how you want to slice it –

KRISTOL: So, a party that's three-quarter white, self-identified Christians.

BROWNSTEIN: Right.

KRISTOL: And a party that's one-third white, self-identified Christians –

BROWNSTEIN: One-third. Yeah, that's a bit of a gap.

KRISTOL: – are going to have a pretty different view of the world, set of priorities.

BROWNSTEIN: Right. And, you know, one of the things that Trump did –

KRISTOL: Say a word about education and gender, too. Because there the gaps are pretty big, too, I think.

BROWNSTEIN: Right. So, you know, we saw by far the biggest gap in this election between college-educated and non-college whites. Now, among minorities education is not that big a divide, a little bit, but not a huge amount. But among whites, the realignment and transformation of American politics really follows what I call, and think I talked about the last time, "the class inversion." Which is that, if you – that's the phrase I use. If you go back from Roosevelt really through Jimmy Carter, the early 1980s, every Democratic – Democrats are the party of people who work with their hands. Republicans are the party of people who wear a suit to work.

And the measure of that was that every Democratic nominee from Adlai Stevenson, which is when we begin to have reliable polling, through essentially Walter Mondale in 1984, every one of them ran better among whites without a college degree than whites with a college degree – usually a lot better, 15, 20, 25 points better – among non-college than college whites.

And, you know, starting in the '60s, for all the reasons that Archie Bunker embodied, or Joe in the movie, Republicans chiseled away at that Democratic advantage among working-class whites until you get to '84 and the Reagan Democrats. And the Republican Party has never looked back. Republicans have been routinely winning 60% or more, roughly around 60% of working-class whites, whites without a college degree. Trump, again, pushed that to the max. He drove that number up to 67%, which was the highest –

KRISTOL: And wasn't it sort of the conventional view that you really can't do more than 60? There's enough Democratic economic interests among union members and so forth.

BROWNSTEIN: There are – exactly.

KRISTOL: That it's never going to go beyond...

BROWNSTEIN: Let me tell you, in the exit poll – people don't talk about this much and certainly the AFL doesn't talk about this much – but in the exit poll – again, who knows how right it is – 58% of non-college whites *in a union household* voted for Trump.

And not only did he dominate among the men, and I think we talked about this last time, I think the single biggest reason he's president is so many working-class white women in the Midwest voted for him. Because he won over 61% according to the exit polls – 61% of working-class white women nationally,

non-college white women, and really dominated among Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, all the states that tipped the election.

So, on the one hand, you've got this Republican Party that has been moving in the direction of an increasing strength among blue-collar whites. Trump pushed that further, and we can talk a little about how much of that looks different now.

But, you know, the reverse started happening, which is that the college whites, who are usually reliably Republican, became more competitive for Democrats under Clinton, under Gore, under Kerry, under Obama. Gore ran four points better among college whites than non-college whites in 2000. Kerry was six. Obama was about seven both times. And what was Clinton? Seventeen, 18 points better.

So, and in this election the chasm is going to be enormous again, I think, in the midterm. And I think in 2020 as well. Because, I mean, the evidence is that there is a real backlash against Trump and Trumpism among college whites, mostly women but to some extent men. And that his hold and the Republican hold on blue-collar and rural whites looks pretty undiminished to me, with some possible erosion among the women. Blue-collar white men may be even more pro-Trump now than they were on election day.

KRISTOL: You listen to this – so, for someone like me who would like to save the Republican Party from Trump and would like to focus on the issues, in a sense – both the issues and the whole matter of governing obviously, the rule of law, and so forth. The ways in which Trump deviates from, let's just say Reagan Republicanism; and they're pretty big deviations.

BROWNSTEIN: Or a constitutional Republicanism.

KRISTOL: Or constitutionalism. Even the Tea Party constitutionalism –

BROWNSTEIN: A small part.

KRISTOL: – which one thinks of aspects of it was earnest about limiting government, reducing the size of the government, don't play favorites, kind of rule of law, all this certain kind of constitutionalism, originalism, all of that.

So, if it's only focused on that, I say, well, gee, Trump's really transformed the party. And, of course, for me it's distressing how much the party has let itself be transformed. It seems to have let itself be transformed by Trump.

From your point of view, in a way looking at it from the other side, let's say the socioeconomic base of the party as opposed to these issues, it doesn't look quite as much as –

BROWNSTEIN: It looks like an acceleration.

KRISTOL: Yeah, not a transformation.

BROWNSTEIN: An acceleration. But the thing about these kinds of changes in the composition of a party is that they tend to be self-reinforcing. So, I look at like, you know, the Republican primary electorate now is roughly 50/50 college and non-college. That's been the case in the last three primaries.

But the history is that the college side, when the two have split, have usually been able to pick the nominee. You think about Reagan in '80, they didn't really split. You think about W in 2000, they didn't really split. But in '08 they split, and the college side broke for McCain, the non-college side broke for Huckabee, in part because so many college Republicans are also Evangelical Christians. And the college side won. You know, the white, college side of the Republican Party got to pick the nominee.

The same thing happened in 2012 where you had the college side consolidated behind Romney, and the non-college side largely consolidated behind Rick Santorum, which you know is a pretty thin reed in which to have to put all the weight.

KRISTOL: But Santorum and Gingrich together were formidable against Romney.

BROWNSTEIN: Were formidable, right. And the white-collar side won. You get to 2016, you know, the analysis that was done at the end of the primaries, only one-third of college-educated Republicans voted for Trump. In the cumulative analysis of all the exit polls. But half of the non-college Republicans did. So, for the first time, the non-college side picked the nominee.

And the nominee reflected, and I think pretty fairly, the hopes, fears, and priorities of those non-college Republicans: very anti-immigrant, very skeptical of trade, very skeptical of foreign alliance. Really not interested in the Ryan agenda of cutting Medicare and Medicaid; perfectly happy for social welfare programs that they saw as benefitting people like them. They don't like transfer programs, so that they're okay with because they see that as going to "the undeserving poor."

So, basically Trump's victory has required, since his election, the governing Republican Party, which is pretty much ignoring that blue-collar side of the party, to absorb all of that, accept all of that as the price of getting their stuff.

I think sort of what Trump's implicit case to Republicans is, like, "McCain lost. Romney lost. *I* figured out how to pick the lock. I tore down the blue wall." You know, my phrase from 2009. I feel like, "*There it goes*," watching it crumble on election night. "*I* figured out how to tear down the blue wall. None of these other guys did who were kind of effete and, you know, kind of country club. I figured it out. So, sit down and be quiet because if you want to get your judges and your taxes and your regulatory, you got to put up – you might not like this stuff, but this is what gives you the power to do it."

KRISTOL: And people like me can say till we're blue in the face, so to speak, you know, he didn't get many more votes than Romney, and it's the same percentage, and he got lucky on the Electoral College and Comey...

BROWNSTEIN: And there's a real cost to it. The other thing –

KRISTOL: ...but being a winner, I've seen that very much in the last 18 months.

BROWNSTEIN: Washes away a lot.

KRISTOL: Washes away a lot. And he's president, and being president makes a huge difference because parties are accustomed to following the president.

I suppose it's also maybe just a tipping point issue, where, from your argument, you could say that the Republican Party hung onto certain policy positions longer than the electoral base of the party might have suggested.

BROWNSTEIN: The same for the Democrats.

KRISTOL: Yeah, let's get to the Democrats in a minute. But then, you sort of hit a moment – maybe it's one election or a particular person – and everyone looks up and says, "Why do we have that position?" The party doesn't really want to be in the business of international world leadership and nation building. This party isn't so great on free trade and the "enlightened" immigrant position that the Bush-McCain types tried to pursue. This party isn't really there. So, these things happened incrementally in terms of, as

you've been saying, in terms of the elections but maybe in a sort of tipping point way, in terms of one election can really trigger –

BROWNSTEIN: What's the saying? "People go bankrupt little by little and then all at once." I mean, parties change little by little and then all at once when someone calls the bluff.

KRISTOL: And you think this change is sort of for good? Or at least deeper – it couldn't just flip back.

BROWNSTEIN: It's hard to flip back because, if you think about what's happening, both, again, in the elected officials and the electoral coalition, the voters and the voices inside of Congress that you're most likely to lose are the ones who are probably the least onboard with this. So, essentially, in this election – I'm sure we'll talk about this more later.

KRISTOL: No, we can talk about it now. 2018.

BROWNSTEIN: In 2018, it's still an open question to me whether Democrats get to the 218 majority; and we can talk about why I think more likely than not they do. But I don't think it's at all guaranteed.

But what is guaranteed is that Republicans are going to lose a lot of white-collar, inner-suburban seats that they have been holding onto in places that have been voting Democratic increasingly for president. And you have Republicans in the suburbs of Philly and the suburbs of Chicago, the suburbs of Minneapolis, New Jersey, the LA media market, Orange County, and the Steve Knight scene, the exurbs, maybe even the suburbs of Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Omaha, and Kansas City, some combination of those. Denver, the suburbs of Denver. A lot of white-collar suburban seats are at huge risk, if for no other reason than that Trump is facing historic levels of disapproval and backlash among college-educated white women.

I mean, Democrats usually win college white women. So you could say, "Well, does that matter?" Well, Democrats win college white women, but their highest share of the vote among them in a House race according to the exit polls since 1992 is 52%.

KRISTOL: Nationally.

BROWNSTEIN: Nationally. And Clinton won 51% of them. So, she won them, but it wasn't like a blowout. Today, there's a whole flurry of polls out this week as we're talking in state –

KRISTOL: Late June.

BROWNSTEIN: –late June, in Senate races and House races. And Trump's disapproval among college white women is roughly 60 or more in all of them. And Democrats in many of these races are pushing 60% among college white women. You combine that with even a minor erosion, which there is some erosion among college white men, not anything like this but something. Like Barbara Comstock in Northern Virginia. I don't see how they make that work. Some of the seats in New Jersey, some of the seats in California. So, there are going to be fewer white-collar Republicans.

On the other hand –

KRISTOL: Fewer Congressman representing white-collar districts.

BROWNSTEIN: Right, fewer Republicans representing white-collar districts and fewer white-collar voters in the Republican coalition.

On the other hand, whether you look at the polls or the – and, by the way, this was reflected in the election results in Virginia and Alabama, very dramatic. I mean, Northern Virginia, white-collar, affluent,



diverse – that’s the kind of suburbs we’re talking about. Info Age. Right? Not a lot of people fracking. I mean, there are seats like that. We’ll talk about that. But these are mostly people who work in Info Age jobs in places that are thriving. Northern Virginia, the five big suburban jurisdictions in Northern Virginia: Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Louden, and Prince William, which are tougher because they’re further out. Ralph Northam, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, had a raw-vote margin in those five counties in 2017 that was larger than Obama’s in 2012 in a presidential race. Okay, that’s insane.

KRISTOL: Just to make that even – Ralph Northam is a moderate Democrat from somewhere in the south of the state, who voted for Bush in 2004 and is like old-school Democrat.

BROWNSTEIN: Right. So, the suburban – the backlash against Trump in diverse, white-collar suburbs, particularly but not exclusively among women, is real and it will take out a bunch of seats. Now, whether they get to 24, we’ll talk about that in a minute. I don’t know if takes out 24. It could. Republicans could lose 28, 30 seats like that. But it’s also possible they only lose 18 to 20 like that. Because to get all the way up, you have to start winning in places like the suburbs of Houston and Dallas, which are tougher because more of these white-collar professionals are also Evangelical Christians. So, it could happen. It may happen, but it may not.

And the reason why that’s so critical is because there’s much less evidence of Republican erosion in blue-collar and non-urban seats. If you look at the vote for Roy Moore. Even Roy Moore and Ed Gillespie in Virginia among non-college whites, it was still astronomical: even among the women, it was in the 70s or roughly 70% non-college white women. You look at the vote in rural areas, the margins were as good or better as the turnout. The turnout wasn’t as high as it was in the suburban areas, which is a problem for Republicans when you have a district that combines both. But if you have a place –

KRISTOL: Or a statewide election.

BROWNSTEIN: Statewide election. But if you have a House seat that is essentially a rural, heavily blue-collar district, there is little evidence so far that a lot of them are at risk for Republicans. I mean, Democrats don’t need that many of them and they may be able to pick off a couple here or there. There’s one in Northeast Ohio. There’s one in the central part of California.

KRISTOL: But it helps if they pick off a few. Rahm Emanuel famously did pick off a few in 2006.

BROWNSTEIN: He did pick off a few. He did.

KRISTOL: It’s a little hard to get to the majority just on the –

BROWNSTEIN: Just on the white-collar side. Because if you have to put all of the weight on the white-collar side, you have to win in some places that are harder to win. And you also have to beat some people who are hard to beat.

KRISTOL: Right, candidates matter still, right.

BROWNSTEIN: Mike Coffman [R, Colorado] is in a seat that Democrats should have won by now. And, you know, they’ve run some pretty good candidates, actually. The former Speaker of the State House and others. And he keeps winning. Now, you know – again, I think that much as – in 2010, people like Chet Edwards and Gene Taylor and Rick Boucher and Ike Skelton and John Spratt were all Democrats who represented rural areas, in many cases, in most cases the ones I mentioned since the 1980s. And they had survived the ’94 Clinton backlash; they survived W’s election; they survived the ’02 surge toward Republicans post 9/11. They could not survive 2010 when their voters were deeply exorcised about a president from the other party who was really who was really moving forward on the agenda: the Affordable Care Act, stimulus, cap and trade through the House on climate change. They could not survive that. They all lost. And I think there will be people like that.

And there will be races that weren't on our radar, like in North Carolina. They're going to be a lot of white-collar –

KRISTOL: And there are retirements that affect that ahead of time.

BROWNSTEIN: Right, exactly.

KRISTOL: Which makes some of these seats open seats, which is easier.

BROWNSTEIN: Which is almost impossible to win. It's almost impossible to win an open seat that voted the other way for president.

KRISTOL: You need the incumbency help.

BROWNSTEIN: You the incumbent, yeah. I think there is no – my friend David Wasserman, who works for Charlie Cooke, calculated that there is not a single example of the president's party holding a seat that voted for the other side in a presidential race, going back to 1994 or '92, during a midterm. It just doesn't happen very often.

KRISTOL: Except if it's an incumbent.

BROWNSTEIN: Open seat.

KRISTOL: An open seat, yeah, yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: It just doesn't happen.

But, again, the other side of the equation is this rural thing. And small town – not only rural, small town and rural. It's blue collar. You know, again, it is possible Democrats win five or six or maybe eight, if it goes really well, seats in that terrain and they get over the hump.

But whether they get over the hump or not, I think what you end up with is a Democratic Party that is increasingly hegemonic in blue-collar metros, including the inner suburbs, and a lot of affluent places with a lot of white-collar and diverse voters. And a Republican Party that is really barely dented in its hold on rural, small town, blue-collar America. And the trench between these two – what I call the trench just gets bigger.

And the sense that after the election that we are living in two different countries that now each has a party, all the cherries lining up, arrayed against the other, I just think it's going to be real profound.

By the way, we could see basically the same thing in the Senate, where it's entirely possible that Democrats win Arizona and Nevada, maybe Tennessee, which doesn't quite fit into this. But Arizona and Nevada get really close, and Texas, which are diverse, young states that have big immigrant presence. There are only nine Republicans in the Senate out of the 20 states that have the most immigrants and two of them are Arizona and Nevada. They lose those.

But offsetting that, Republicans could make further gains in kind of the heartland, predominantly white, still majority-Christian states like North Dakota, Indiana, Missouri, and maybe West Virginia. So, again, the Senate could be further trenched – what's the word? *Betrenched?* *Entrenched?* Is our verb. Is there a verb, *detrench?*

KRISTOL: Separated by trenches, yeah. Entrenched and separated.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, entrenched and separated by trenches.

KRISTOL: That's what you're talking about, yeah.

What about the Democrats? In Northam, in Virginia, it strikes me as a Virginia resident, gave them the best of all worlds. He had a super-energized Democratic base, energized by, they claim, maybe with some justice, that Gillespie had a run a gubernatorial campaign that was "Trumpy" and unattractive to the voters he needed to win over in Northern Virginia. But he [Northam] was from Southern Virginia and a little hard to demonize him as just a left-wing lunatic and all this.

BROWNSTEIN: He had an accent. Yeah, and kind of all that stuff.

KRISTOL: So, as we're speaking in late June, there was just last night a primary in New York, which is a safe Democratic seat, which doesn't matter in a way. But Joe Crowley, an old-school Democrat loses to a 28-year-old Latina.

BROWNSTEIN: Latina, Bernie Sanders acolyte.

KRISTOL: Bernie Sanders organizer, yeah. I mean, that sort of cultural trench starts to get wider.

BROWNSTEIN: Yes, it does. Well, a couple of things. First, there is no clear ideological pattern so far in the Democratic primaries. It just isn't happening. Some places the more Sanders-like candidate has won, often to the lament of party leaders. I think California, Irvine, running against Mimi Walters, they nominated a candidate – they picked a left candidate over center. Omaha against Don Bacon, they picked a left candidate over the center.

KRISTOL: Charlottesville, which I think was a winnable seat.

BROWNSTEIN: Charlottesville.

KRISTOL: They picked a very left candidate.

BROWNSTEIN: But it's not consistent. Against John Culberson, the centrist won. They have a lot of centrist candidates winning, too. So that isn't a clear pattern. The clearest pattern is that women are winning. Women are just dominating in Democratic primaries. I mean, they are –

KRISTOL: Which was true, incidentally, just last night. We should have emphasized: A 28-year-old *woman*, who worked for Bernie Sanders.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, exactly. So, the college white women and African-American women are the epicenter of the backlash to Trump, right? Those two groups. So, to me it's not surprising that – and they are nominating so many women. In places where there were competitive races, women and men, women are winning the clear majority of them so far. And to me, there is a natural synergy for that in these white-collar places where it's women who are driving the Democratic opportunity.

And there's a risk to Republicans of an extensive or lasting realignment. Because at a moment when these white-collar white women, who have been like a 52/45 kind of constituency, are looking at the Republican Party of Trump and saying, "I don't feel at home here." The alternative they're seeing in many of these seats are women who look exactly like them. And I think that could be a very annealing or a kind of solidifying factor.

But the challenge for Democrats is whether this surge of female candidates can help them get over the hill with the blue-collar white women where they're not doing nearly as well. I mean, I was looking this morning at some of these state polls, and, you know, generally speaking, Trump's disapproval among

college white women – it was in Arizona, Ohio, and Florida – is somewhere between 55% to 60%. His disapproval among non-college white women in all of these states was only 40%. Among the other gaps that we saw in 2016 that were the biggest ever, at least as I calculated it, or the biggest in recent memory, was the gap between the way college and non-college white women voted. And that was as big as it's ever been. That's a huge gap.

And I think Republicans have lost some ground among college white women, largely around healthcare security, but nothing like what we're seeing on the upscale side. So, does this surge of female candidates help them do that?

KRISTOL: Lost ground among non-college white women.

BROWNSTEIN: Right. Yeah, they've lost less ground among non-college than college. And do women candidates help them with the blue-collar white women? I'm not really sure.

KRISTOL: I'm not sure that's –

BROWNSTEIN: I think it does help with the college white women who kind of see the kind of social point of this and may relate to "breaking the glass ceiling" as kind of parallel to their own life. But, you know, blue-collar white women, like minority women, are a really economically strained group, and making social points kind of falls back on the list in terms of their electoral priorities.

I do think that this election, because it's a House and Senate, because congressional, you know, is hundreds of elections, will not answer the fundamental choice for Democrats, which is what you're getting at. So, I mean, I think if you look at 2020 and the Armageddon we're heading toward –

KRISTOL: Let's go to 2020.

BROWNSTEIN: Because we're heading toward absolute Armageddon as a country. The fundamental choice for Democrats is, I guess I would call it – I never quite phrased it this way – but "reassure" or "mobilize." Is your primary – no nominee can do everything. So, do you pick a nominee whose primary strength is that they will be reassuring to center-right voters who ordinarily vote Republican but find Trump personally and morally repulsive and are thus open to voting for a Democrat? Is your primary goal to kind of harvest the pieces of the usual coalition that had been dislodged and left loose by the battering ram of Trumpism?

Or is your primary goal to mobilize the elements of the Democratic coalition that are not uneasy about him; they are terrified and infuriated.

And if I had to bet today, I would bet pretty confidently that – I suppose it could go the other way – but that both of those perspectives will be represented on the table. The question is which one do you put on the top? That matters a lot.

KRISTOL: And the Democrats I've talked to – now, this could be wrong; we should challenge it – claim that that tension is not as great as the sort of the intra-Republican tension, actually. The Republican base *hates*, in a certain sense, the world of the Republican donors, the world of Mitt Romney and Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan, in so many cultural ways, as well as having genuine economic interests that are different.

The Democratic base isn't exactly where wealthy Democrats are; there are differences among Democratic constituencies. Obviously, African-Americans and Latinos have different lives than upper-middle-class suburban women, white women, and all that. But that it's more of a continuum. You can sort of imagine – one Democrat put it to me this way – you can imagine someone who is reassuring on economic issues, not like "socialize everything" and you still get to be a high-tech IT person in a firm or a

tech entrepreneur or whatever. But very sort of militant on guns, militant on protecting gay rights. So, you sort of can, you know, navigate that, is at least it would be the hope, I suppose, of the Democrats – the way, say, Reagan or George W. Bush navigated that among Republicans. But, of course, they can say that, but, I mean, whether in a real primary if you get –

BROWNSTEIN: Well, that's what happened. Primaries magnify the differences. Historically, and the phrase that I turned in the mid-2000s or, I guess, around 2000 was "the wine track and the beer track." The Democratic Party divided between one candidate who was basically the candidate of white, upscale liberals on the wine track, and a beer-track candidate who was the candidate of blue-collar Democrats and minorities, which at that point were mostly African-Americans. And, you know, that was McCarthy versus Humphrey and Kennedy. And it was –

KRISTOL: Gary Hart versus Mondale.

BROWNSTEIN: Mondale versus Gary Hart, where Hart was the wine track; Mondale was the beer track. Clinton was the beer track; Tsongas was the wine track. Gore was the beer track; Bradley was the wine track. And we see the pattern. The wine track always loses to the beer track.

Until you got to 2008, where Obama scrambled. He moved African-American voters over from the beer track to the wine track. He basically combined African-Americans and upscale whites, and Clinton had Hispanics, which by then were big constituencies, and blue-collar whites. And it turned out that Obama's thing was like that much bigger. [Makes "tiny" gesture]. I mean, it was almost a tie. And 40 million people voted. It was crazy. It was insane.

And then you get to 2016 and it kind of gets scrambled again. But, by and large, the biggest problem Sanders had is that African-American and Hispanic voters were really not interested in his revolution. They are very practical voters with real needs, much like the blue-collar white women. They kind of got real needs. When you got real needs, you're kind of less interested in making these ideological points.

So, you had this kind of big generational divide, and whites split about evenly. But he never cracked minority voters, who turn out to be a tremendous bulwark for sanity in the Democratic Party, which is an interesting dynamic. As opposed to – they don't get quite on the flights of fancies of some of the white liberals.

Now, again, I cannot sit here in 2018 and say that one strategy is definitely better than the other. I don't think it – to me at least, it's not empirically certain that reassuring center-right whites who don't like Trump is a better strategy than turning out more millennials and minorities who loathe Trump, and college white women. So, I don't know which way it's going to go.

You know, you could easily imagine a ticket that put – I mean, if you had to bet today, you would bet most party leaders would prefer reassure as the nominee, mobilize as the Vice President. So, you know, that gives you Biden and Kamala Harris; Sherrod Brown and Kamala Harris; Chris Murphy and Corey Booker. You know, something like that. But it's not inconceivable that it could flip. I mean, it's not at all inconceivable to me that it could flip.

And if you really wanted to double down, as Clinton did when he picked Gore, I mean, imagine if you just doubled down all the way. I mean, you went new coalition, new coalition. And you say, you know what? I do not think against a Trump, who is not only feeding racial anxieties, but also maybe pulling out of NAFTA and doing all of these other things, that we're really going to win back a lot of blue-collar white voters in the Midwest. And if we're going to win these states, it's because black voters are going to come out in Detroit and millennials are going to come out in Ann Arbor, you know, and Milwaukee and Madison and the equivalent in Wisconsin. That's how we're going to win these states. So, let's have Kamala Harris and –

KRISTOL: Joaquin Castro.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, or Seth Moulton.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: Maybe they might want one white person on the ticket.

KRISTOL: Well, to get the youth.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, someone young. So, maybe they go that way. I think if you look very specifically at the decline in black turnout from '12 to '16, seven points in one election. I think that's the biggest ever recorded. It went from 66% of eligible to 59% of eligible. If there is not an African-American person on the Democratic ticket in 2020, I would be stunned. I really would be.

KRISTOL: That's interesting. Say a word about the millennials, because we didn't, I think, cover them quite as much when we were going through the different groups. I mean, so the gulf among millennials – there's always been generation gaps and there've been whatever, but it's –

BROWNSTEIN: First of all, in 2018 for the first time ever, millennials will exceed Baby Boomers as a share of the eligible voters. And by 2020 there'll be a little bit of a margin and the first post-millennials will be entering the electorate. I think by 2024 the projection is that the millennials and the post-millennials and Generation Z, or whatever they are being called, they're going to be about 45% to 47% of all eligible voters. So, the future is coming. The problem is –

KRISTOL: They vote less.

BROWNSTEIN: They vote less. This is actually – Charles Franklin of Marquette had a very nice chart about this. The history is that their turnout is increasing from election to election at basically the same rate as Gen X and the Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation, but they started at a lower point. So, they're lower at each age than the generations or older, even though they're going up at the same rate. And they also really severely fall off from presidential to midterms.

And in each of the last three – certainly the last two – from '08 to '10 and '12 to '14, millennial turnout was less than half as big in the midterm as it was in the presidential two years earlier. That's worse than it is for older groups. And that's a real threat for Democrats because –

KRISTOL: In 2018.

BROWNSTEIN: In 2018, because one of the clearest costs of Trumpism is, you know, except for non-college white millennials, especially men, he is really, really defining the Republican Party with the millennial generation, as a party of white racial resentment, I think. And you're talking about –

KRISTOL: Or in any case, leaving even aside that characterization, he's certainly defining it as a party of older white people.

BROWNSTEIN: Of older white people, right.

KRISTOL: And a majority of millennials are not –

BROWNSTEIN: No, millennials are about 40% – 40 to 45% non-white. A majority of the next generation will be non-white. You know, among millennial women, Pew and others have put a 45-point Democratic Party ID advantage. And the gender thing, as well.

Interestingly, I think, if I'm remembering this correctly, if you look at white millennials, Romney beat Obama like tiny, narrow, among both college and non-college white millennials. By 2016 –

KRISTOL: Obama destroyed him among, obviously, the–

BROWNSTEIN: The non-white ones. By 2016, Clinton beat Trump by 20 points among the college white millennials and Trump beat her by like 20 points among the non-college white millennials. So, the white population is splitting along the same divide, but the non-white millennials – the problem for Democrats was both turnout and then too many of them splintered off. I mean, corralling them, finding a way to channel the – I don't think revulsion is too strong a word – the revulsion at Trump among non-white millennials into votes for Democrats is a critical mission for both '18 and '20.

And that's why I think someone like or literally Kamala Harris, someone who they think can speak to younger, non-white America in a way that neither Clinton or Tim Kaine was really equipped to do or symbolize is just indispensable for them. Because over 35, even now in the generic ballot, Republicans are very competitive, even for 2018. And Trump has some erosion among seniors who are mostly white and thus mostly – I mean, he won over 60% of whites over 45. I don't think he's quite in a position to do that again, but it isn't going to collapse.

KRISTOL: So, 2018, what happens after? So, I guess we should walk through – Democrats could or couldn't win the House.

BROWNSTEIN: More likely, I think after the chaos on the border, I think that provides such a resonant symbol for Democratic constituencies of what Trump governance gives you that I've got to think, yeah, on balance, they'll probably win the House. But, again, not guaranteed if they can't make a little more inroads in blue-collar places.

KRISTOL: The Senate, slightly the other way on Republicans?

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: More likely to hold it than not, but not –

BROWNSTEIN: Although they could not – they could lose the three – they could lose three seats.

KRISTOL: Right, and then they have to win two back.

BROWNSTEIN: They have to win two back, which doesn't seem that hard in that there are 10 Democrats running in states...

KRISTOL: But they're incumbents.

BROWNSTEIN: ...that Trump won. And incumbents from the party out of the White House, I believe only two of them have lost in the last 25 years in a midterm.

KRISTOL: But they're incumbents in that the Democrats have incumbents running in the most vulnerable seats, which is a big help to them.

BROWNSTEIN: Right.

KRISTOL: If those were open seats –

BROWNSTEIN: They'd be in a lot of trouble.

KRISTOL: But they're not, in Missouri and North Dakota.

BROWNSTEIN: If you look at the party that doesn't hold the White House – so that would be Republicans in 2014 and 2010, Democrats in 2006 and 2002, Republicans in '98 and '94 – going all the way back over all those elections, from the party that doesn't hold the White House during a midterm election, I believe only two Senate incumbents have lost in the past 25 years.

KRISTOL: Despite waves against the party.

BROWNSTEIN: Despite waves, yeah. And so, yeah –

KRISTOL: That's where Claire McCaskill, Heidi Heitkamp, those people really help the Democrats.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah. I mean, can they avoid any of them losing, given that Trump is still strong in those states? It seems unlikely. But the history is that Republicans can't really count on anything. And then there's a weird thing in Florida where Scott has so much money, Rick Scott, the governor.

KRISTOL: And a two-term governor.

BROWNSTEIN: And he's a formidable candidate. I mean, out of those four, really – and West Virginia seems to be fading a little bit. But out of Indiana, North Dakota, Missouri, and Florida, can Republicans pick up two? And, for that matter, can Democrats get the third one? Can they in the end tip Tennessee? I don't know.

KRISTOL: Some surprise somewhere. Well, anyway, but it's going to be close.

BROWNSTEIN: It's going to be close.

## **II: 2018 and 2020 (47:07– 1:24:19)**

KRISTOL: So, it's after election day. Let's just say –

BROWNSTEIN: Could be 50/50 Senate, and Democrats plus four in the House.

KRISTOL: Right. What happens? What does the country look like? What happens over the next months and year in the runoff to 2020? A lot of people who are in the election business, I find to talk to them, it's 2018 and then they sort of have this – and then the next thing that happens is the primaries beginning in January 2020. There's a year of stuff in between. I mean, I suppose by your analysis, if you've got these two parties that are less like each other – that have less overlap so to speak, more –

BROWNSTEIN: Trench.

KRISTOL: A bigger and deeper trench between them. That's really your point. The trench is both *wider* and *deeper*.

BROWNSTEIN: Yes.

KRISTOL: What happens? I mean, I guess what happens is just warfare on Capitol Hill.

BROWNSTEIN: Well, the safest prediction is that Democrats really subpoena and investigate Trump very heavily in the House. And I think they pass something on healthcare. They don't pass single payer, but I would think even with a narrow majority they could pass an enhanced public option, from back from 2010 that Joe Lieberman personally killed as a Democratic Senator. Said he wouldn't vote for it. In one of the



great little “history doesn’t repeat but it rhymes,” the principal sponsor of it now is Chris Murphy, the Democratic Senator from Connecticut.

I think they can pass something like that, to kind of put a down payment on healthcare.

A more interesting question is could they pass immigration reform out of the House? It depends on which Republicans survive. If Pete Sessions, Will Hurd, Jeff Denham, and David Valadao all survive by the skin of their teeth in heavily Hispanic districts, and Mimi Walters – probably not her. She probably wouldn’t vote for that. But would they vote with Democrats to provide a pathway to – you know, basically reprise the ’06 or ’13 Senate bills, which double-digits Republicans voted for each time?

Beyond that, I don’t know. Minimum wage?

KRISTOL: It depends on what Mueller finds, obviously, in terms of impeachment.

BROWNSTEIN: That is the biggest question. Do they impeach Trump?

KRISTOL: It’s a huge wildcard. The Mueller report is just huge because we don’t know what’s in it.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, we don’t know what’s in it. I mean, I think they will resist impeaching Trump unless Mueller really puts it in their lap because –

KRISTOL: But he could.

BROWNSTEIN: He could.

KRISTOL: If he says, “I think there was arguably obstruction of justice that arguably rises to the level of impeachment. Here’s my 162-page account of everything they did.” I don’t know, what do the Democrats – they have to have hearings.

BROWNSTEIN: Yes, they do.

KRISTOL: They can’t say, “Well, it’s not in our political interest to advance this.” And so, they have hearings and the House Judiciary Committee – I don’t know.

BROWNSTEIN: I don’t know what happens. I mean, I don’t think it is in their political interest to advance it. Because what Trump has done very effectively, he does this all the time, is basically say, “Any attack on me is an attempt to stifle and silence you.”

KRISTOL: Right.

BROWNSTEIN: “This is the elites who don’t want the working people of the country to have a voice. They’ve been running things for so long. They’ve had it comfy and cozy, and here I am letting you in.” And that’s a powerful connection and argument for him.

KRISTOL: Meanwhile in the Senate, if the Republicans hold it, incidentally, there’s probably an even more intense effort to get judges on the courts and everything done and regulations upheld so that even if the House tries to block it and the Senate doesn’t –

BROWNSTEIN: What happens in a 50/50 Senate?

KRISTOL: Pence breaks the tie.

BROWNSTEIN: All the time.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: But I'm trying to remember back, before Jeffords. First of all, I guess Flake and Corker will be gone, but the first question will be is there anybody who, like Jim Jeffords, the Republican Senator in 2001, caucused as – withdrew from the Republican Party, became an Independent, caucused with the Democrats, flipped the 50/50 Senate. That'll be the first question. Will anybody do that? Because I actually think a 50/50 Senate is a very reasonable possibility. You know, Democrats win two or three, Republicans win one or two, and you're at 50/50.

KRISTOL: And I would say just another sort of wildcard to think about: If it's 50/50 or close to it, 51/49, don't Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski get together with Doug Jones of Alabama and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, newly reelected, presumably, and say, "This is nuts. We need to work together. We need to change the rules so that there's more bipartisanship. We can't have the leader by himself stopping a bill that gets reported out of judiciary 14 to 7 like the Mueller Protection Act. Just block as the leader says." So, I want to change this, this, and this. And we're not letting you organize the Senate until you listen to us.

And whereas, on the House side, it's not so clear.

BROWNSTEIN: That would be very different from the way they've approached the first two years of Trump.

KRISTOL: Yes.

BROWNSTEIN: It's always been there. People just talk about Flake-ism, kind of high-minded sentiment followed by ritualistic voting for what Trump wants and needs.

KRISTOL: And there's a lot of, I think, loyalty to McConnell among the Republican Senators, so maybe they don't quite jump ship in that way. But, I don't know, one could imagine –

BROWNSTEIN: And in the House, you're saying in the House...

KRISTOL: Well, I think there is a question mark of whether Nancy Pelosi is Speaker, right?

BROWNSTEIN: I don't know. The Democrats have a big majority. If the bottom falls out and they get to 240 something, yeah maybe. But it's almost a syllogism that if they have a narrow majority, the people who won that majority will be people who promised not to vote for her for Speaker.

KRISTOL: And they can't just reverse? Or they can't vote against her in the conference. She wins the conference vote 140 to 80, and then on the floor, they say, "Well, the conference decided, so I'm going to vote for –"

BROWNSTEIN: How many political advisors would advise you that your first vote in a district that's a marginal district by definition –

KRISTOL: Where you said 150 times, "I will not vote for Nancy Pelosi."

BROWNSTEIN: I don't see it. Plus, what's the value of it? I mean, it's like – you know, the Democratic Party is the party of younger, diverse America and they have this geriatric leadership in both the House and the Senate, and for that matter, they have a pretty grey-tilting top of the presidential field. You know, Warren, Sanders, Biden are probably the best known three. At some point, they have to make the generational leap.

And whatever else you believe about what House Republicans have done, and certainly what Paul Ryan has done in the last few years, he represented that leap from Boehner. I mean, they took a big – I want to say, what, about 15 years between them or something like that?

KRISTOL: Yeah, at least. I want to get back to Ryan in a second. I think he's such an interesting phenomenon.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, he will be the tragic figure of the Trump Era, I think.

KRISTOL: With Crowley losing last night, as we speak here in late June, in Queens to a 28-year-old, it's not clear who the heir to Pelosi is. And maybe that's a good thing for the Democrats in that they have an actual race and they elect some 45-year-old Speaker. And it's a little different than it was. And maybe they wipe out Hoyer from the leadership too and maybe even Clyburn and suddenly it's, you know –

It could be the people who think, well, there'll be an election and then Washington will look exactly the way it looks today, plus or minus in terms of the seats, but the same leadership with people we know well. We've seen them work, or not work, together. It could be very different.

BROWNSTEIN: It could be very different.

KRISTOL: And soon. And Ryan will be gone. So, the House you could have actually – which means that all that control they had in both parties really over their members and the ability to enforce discipline on the Republican side and not bring things to the floor. The majority of the majority is needed. I'm not so sure that holds, I mean, in a new situation in the House.

BROWNSTEIN: As I said, I mean, look at immigration. I mean, it depends who survives among the Republicans. A part of the issue is how badly are the white-collar, metro Republicans expunged in this election? Always the risk in this kind of thing is that all the ones who might have voted with you as a Democrat you'll beat. But if some of those survive, and you get more of a checkerboard kind of election where some of the blue-collar Republicans lose but not all of the white-collar Republicans lose. Yeah, I think a returned Jeff Denham would vote for comprehensive immigration reform.

KRISTOL: And remember, the gang of 2013 bill began in the Senate, died in the House. They got 68, I think, votes in the Senate.

BROWNSTEIN: The first one did, the '06 one. This one got like 62. Only 13 Republicans voted for another in '13.

KRISTOL: And final passes.

BROWNSTEIN: I could see that being something the House could – but, yeah, I –

KRISTOL: The Senate could go first. I mean Cory Gardner looking at the results could decide, "Gee, Colorado, I should be for this." And he votes for it. I think he voted for it last time, probably.

BROWNSTEIN: He voted for the Grassley Bill, which would have – Cory Gardner and David Perdue will be the 2020 Republicans in diverse states. Gardner, I think, it's not going to be easy for him in Colorado in a presidential year. Perdue, obviously is a stronger situation. But any presidential year, Georgia is getting to the point where if a Democrat wanted to invest in it, they could make it really close. Again, the variable there is how many of those white-collar suburbanites are willing to break away from Trump and the Republicans? Less than in Colorado and New Jersey and Virginia, but more than in Georgia 10 years ago maybe.

And, by the way, kind a the little thing to kind of put on your scorecard for November, what share of college whites does Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic nominee in Texas, win against Ted Cruz? Probably doesn't beat Ted Cruz, but maybe keeps it really close, and if he gets into the 40s among college whites and you project that out with a presidential, not an off-year, Hispanic turnout, all of a sudden 2020, Texas is not some place you can ignore as a Republican.

Again, not that Democrats will be the favorite, but once you start getting into the 40s among college whites, which I think is the risk to the Republican Party under Trump everywhere, that Democrats will get into the 40s among college whites even in the Southern states. There's a math to put together at that point if you can generate more Hispanic turnout.

And, plus, you erode the usual respectable Republican performance with Hispanics in Texas, which is usually pretty good. Again, is Trump putting that at risk? You'd have to think so. Not necessarily a lot of evidence of it yet, but you'd have to think so, sooner or later.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and it seems to be implicit in your argument throughout this that if Republicans are the party of older people, whiter people, and less well-educated people, those are three declining categories in the general population. So, ultimately, Trump – I mean, I do think this is simple but probably true, Trump drew an inside straight, lost the popular vote by 2.8 million or something?

BROWNSTEIN: He lost by a lot. He lost it by more than W won it in '04.

KRISTOL: Yeah. He draws the inside straight on the Electoral College. I mean, with a slightly less favorable electorate, as an incumbent who can't be just running on promises but actually has antagonized some Harley-Davidson workers in Wisconsin and some farmers in Iowa and so forth because of tariffs. I mean, if people right now, "Trump's powerful. He's independent. Look how tricky his recovery is to mobilize his base." But it all feels to me – it's not so obvious how Trump wins, actually, in 2020.

BROWNSTEIN: Well, the question is – and this goes beyond Trump – is whether partisan change outweighs demographic change. And the risk to Democrats is that there is a treadmill. And the treadmill, as I call it, is that as the white share of the population declines, as the non-college white share of the population declines, as the white Christian share of the population declines, a bigger portion of that shrinking group basically views the Republican Party as their champion. And so, the Republican share of the vote goes up even as the group's share of the total electorate goes down, and you end up roughly in the same place.

You know, if the blue-collar white, the non-college white share of the electorate, whether you use the exit poll or the census, is pretty much declining two points every four years. But if Republicans move from 61 to 67 and possibly move even higher in '20, you still net out the same number, roughly the same number of votes or maybe even more votes from that group.

So, how far can that process extend? To what extent is the movement toward Republicans among these groups a factor, a result of their declining overall status in the electorate? Now, that doesn't work forever, and it doesn't work in the near term even if the Democratic constituencies make the same judgment and say, "Well, you know what? This is kind of like this quasi-racial, quasi-generational proxy war between the two parties. I've got to vote at the same levels as those guys."

But, for a while, especially given the distribution of the population, that diversity is not evenly distributed across the country, that places like Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin are all getting older and they're not getting much less whiter, you might be able to do the inside straight a couple of times. But when you look at something like two-thirds of millennial women calling themselves Democrats at this point, you say, you know, there's a real cost to this.

KRISTOL: I mean, could you have two elections in a row – it's a matter of – I 'm not a big, you know, populist majoritarian, but –

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

KRISTOL: Could you have two elections in a row, which would then be three in the last six, I guess, all to the Republicans' advantage where they've lost the popular vote and win the Electoral College? At some point that gets a little – that's supposed to happen once every 50 or 80 years.

BROWNSTEIN: It happened three times between the founding and 1996!

KRISTOL: Yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: And it potentially is going to happen three times in 20 years. After three times –

KRISTOL: I mean, that's a real –

BROWNSTEIN: So, the first election was 1788, was it? No, 1792.

KRISTOL: Yeah, 1788.

BROWNSTEIN: '78 was the first one, right, and then he got reelected. So, 1788 to 1996 is 208 years. It happened three times.

KRISTOL: Right.

BROWNSTEIN: And then it's going to happen three times in 20 years?

KRISTOL: Yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: Clearly, something is happening. And what's happening is, as I said, you essentially have a big series of demographic, cultural, and economic transformations that are bypassing big chunks of the country, that feel excluded, if not threatened by it. And so, you have this kind of weird disjunction where all of the biggest places in the country, even in the red states – Salt Lake City, Houston, Atlanta, Dallas – those metros are moving toward the Democrats. And Republicans are just dominant in the smaller, predominantly white, rural, mostly Christian places.

So, the idea of the Electoral College diverging from the popular vote does seem to be something that could happen more often. And where this really comes to a head, though, has to be the Senate. I mean, the Senate is – I'm sure if we added up the votes right now, the 51/49 Senate, of all the votes that the Democratic Senators got and all the votes the Republicans got, it would not be close.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's been done, I think. It's like 60/40 or 58/42 Democrat.

BROWNSTEIN: It would not be close.

KRISTOL: Yeah, it's not that close, yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: It would not be that close. And imagine this scenario: Trump loses the popular vote in '16 and wins. Republicans lose the popular vote in the 2018 House race and hold the House. And Trump loses the popular vote and wins again in 2020. At what point does the rubber band snap?

I think Blue America – now we have this 5/4 Republican majority on the Supreme Court. Roberts has kind of shed his earlier hesitation, I think, about kind of having that alignment over and over again. It just

kind of – it was almost like an assembly line or stamping press this month. You know, rolling out those five Republican Justices outvoting the four Democratic Justices with that fifth seat being one that would be controversial forever because of McConnell refusing to hold the vote on it.

All of this, I think, just deepens the trench and goes to the larger point of how much does Red and Blue America really want to be in one country anymore?

KRISTOL: I'm going to argue slightly against that here as we close out, maybe, because that's such an interesting deeper question, really, that the electoral analysis raises.

But, I mean, just another wildcard, of course Mueller's a big wildcard; of course what the economy does and foreign policy and stuff will affect the result. These demographic groups aren't so locked in that they're not affected by a recession, on the one hand, or affected the other way by decent economic growth on the other.

But the Court is a huge one. I think that brought back just a key margin of college-educated white Republicans in 2016 because the Scalia seat was up to Trump. "I don't like Trump. I don't approve of him, and some of his stuff is crazy on tariffs and even immigration. But, you know what? The court's a long-term. We're going to have a court that's going to be conservative." I *personally* know people who made this decision.

BROWNSTEIN: I agree. Let me interrupt you because it goes to my point, which is that if you feel the divergence between what you get out of a Democratic majority court and a Republican majority court is so profound that you are willing to vote for a guy who you think is temperamentally unsuited, misogynistic, racist, and volatile because what you want out of the Court is so different than what Hillary Clinton would give you, that to me underscores the underlying point: which is the divide is not only in Washington. The divide is in the country, and I'm not sure how we get out of a situation where roughly 49% of the country feels deeply aggrieved and alienated at all times, while 51% is not even really breathing easy, just kind of almost a sigh of relief that, "We're in control. The other side can't do anything bad to us."

KRISTOL: But I would say on the courts, it's not clear to me that that's a correct analysis. It's not clear whether the courts are going to make such consequential decisions. They're not going to reverse Roe, probably, and even if they did, most of the bigger states would keep abortion rights. They're not going to reverse same-sex marriage. So, we're talking about some religious liberty decisions, which are important, but, you know, probably not at the biggest, sort of the middle of the 30-yard line.

BROWNSTEIN: Well, immigration and economics.

KRISTOL: Some immigration. It's not crazy for people to care a lot about the courts, but that also became itself – and this in a way confirms your point, doesn't challenge it – became itself symbolic as much as real.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, I describe 2020 as Armageddon. This just feels like the Battle of the Bulge we're heading toward. We're heading toward the Battle of the Bulge in 2020, where you have this just absolutely no-holds barred conflict between Blue America and Red America. And, yes, there will be erosion around the edges for Trump, particularly, I think, on the white-collar side. But, by and large, more of the Republican coalition than people anticipated, I think, are going to stick with him.

And the issue is going to be can Democrats avoid the fractionation of 2016 and also just increase turnout? And I think the answer is probably yes. And that Trump turns out maybe even more rural, blue-collar, older, Evangelical whites. And we just have this sense of like – what did Roosevelt say in 1912 when he walked out of the Republican Convention and started the Bull Moose Party? "We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord." I think like 70% of Americans are going to feel that way.

And, again, Trump didn't create any of this, but he gleefully intensifies it and exacerbates it and views widening the trench as an asset to him, and essentially runs as a wartime president, only the war is against Blue America.

KRISTOL: I mean, people like me hope for a primary challenge to Trump, even if that – you're doubtful of that, I'm sure.

BROWNSTEIN: No, no, I'm not, I'm not. I don't think –

KRISTOL: Yeah, please, yeah. Because there could be a recession, could be foreign policy, but obviously people –

BROWNSTEIN: I don't even think you need that. I think that a challenger could run against Trump and cause him – probably not beat him, almost certainly not beat him – but cause him serious long-term problems. Because I think if you had a challenger from the white-collar wing of the party, that particularly in the coastal and Upper Midwest states, you would see a substantial portion of college educated Republicans vote for the challenger.

There's been polling in New Hampshire, for example, where only one-third of college educated, likely Republican, primary voters said they want Trump to have another term. So, if you're John Kasich and you run against him, and you win the suburbs of Columbus and Northern Virginia and parts of New Jersey and Connecticut and New Hampshire, you are basically sending a signal to ordinarily Republican voting, white-collar voters that it's okay. You can still be Republican and not be for this guy. And I do think that increases the odds that more of those voters go somewhere else in the general election.

So, while you can't beat him, you could still make a point. You can make a point that he does not now concede, that there is a price. "We're here." It's like, you know, it's like you'll be like shaking him by the lapels, like, "Hey, you cannot govern in a way that completely ignores the unease of portions of white-collar Republican-leaning America about your racial demagoguery and your volatility and your Twitter fights. And if you do, there's a price." Because right now, he doesn't see any price.

KRISTOL: But also the policies. I mean, this is where I think –

BROWNSTEIN: The policies are trade and immigration.

KRISTOL: I mean particular areas, particular voters might move on; farmers in Iowa might be upset about trade. Other people might be upset about other issues, obviously.

BROWNSTEIN: But I think the biggest piece would be upset about *him*.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: Temperament and performance.

KRISTOL: Absolutely, and that's where the actual – one reason the border thing, I think, is big is that it's the actual consequences in the real world of his temperament and of his way of governing and of his views. Whereas on the NFL-National Anthem stuff, some people might find as distasteful or demagogic or not really healthy for the country, but at the end of the day, the NFL continues and the players continue to get several million dollars for playing. And, you know, it can be dismissed.

I'm struck talking to Republican, reluctant Trump supporters, which seems to be about half of them from the data. Fewer than half of Republicans voted for Trump in 2016. If you look at the approved, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, strongly disapprove. Somewhat approve is about as big as strongly

approve. So, he's got a lot of – these are more the upper-middle-class, college-educated Republicans. You know, look, "He's better than Hillary would have been. I like the tax cut; I like Gorsuch; the media's unfair; the left's horrible; Maxine Waters, etc., etc."

But I think the big moment that may be underestimated now is sort of the day after election day this year. When it's no longer, "Was I right to vote for Trump over Hillary. I'm annoyed by those Never Trumpers who are always waving their finger at me for doing this." But it becomes, "Do you want four additional years?"

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, it's a different question.

KRISTOL: It's a perspective question. And the best actual candidate against Trump probably is someone who says, "Look, I understand why you voted for him. I don't quarrel with you for voting for him. I mean, maybe I did." You know, if I'm Nikki Haley as opposed to John Kasich or Ben Sasse. "But he got some good things done and, you know, we shouldn't sound hysterical. But, I don't know, you know, the chaos, the divisiveness, a little older, second term could be kind of wild without any of those constraints. Maybe we need to change."

That kind of message you could see prying away people who did vote for him – because, after all, 91% of Republicans voted for him in 2016. And people who might be telling a pollster today still on the somewhat-approve category.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, I mean, the challenge will be the blue-collar side of the party.

KRISTOL: Yeah, and at the end of the day, you're saying that's probably enough for the party just to re-nominate him.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, because I think what will happen even a good challenger could split or even win the college side of the party 60/40, but he'll win the blue-collar side 80/20 and it will just add up, or maybe more. I think it's hard to win, but that doesn't mean it is futile because –

KRISTOL: I mean, you could win some delegates in some states.

BROWNSTEIN: No, but, again, right now he feels that he can attack Harley-Davidson on Twitter or talk about "infest" and "invade." And he maybe could pull out of NAFTA. And essentially the portions of the party who are uneasy with all of his racial nationalism and his volatility will be quiet and take it because they got Gorsuch and a tax cut and there's no price. There's no constraint.

If somebody runs and wins 45% of college-educated Republicans and wins a majority of them in a number of coastal states, and particularly in, maybe some places that he has to win, I think that alone – Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina – I think that alone is a shot across the bow. And thus makes it worthwhile for the voices in the party who don't like the direction.

Because, look, there is a cost to this. I mean, the possibility of Democrats winning 60% of college-educated white women and the possibility, in 2020, 70% of millennials voting against Trump, even as they are emerging as the largest generation in the electorate. I mean, it's not like this is cost-free. I mean, there's benefits, but the benefits are among groups that are shrinking.

KRISTOL: Yeah, my fanciful Republican candidate here in 2019, late 2019 would have to also say, "Look, I mean, with all due respect to President Trump, he's likely going to lose in 2020." The Senate is already – I'll just make up – is evenly divided or very close to it, has a horrible map in 2020 and is probably going to lose the Senate. Democrats will either hold the House if they already have it, or win it back, finally, if they're just down by a few seats after 2018. So, you're looking – the price of re-nominating Trump is Democratic governance in 2021.



And *then* the question – so let’s close maybe on this – what about the Democrats? I was thinking about this the other day with the court discussion, made me think about this. I mean, I don’t know what the Democrats – they could go pretty radical on some of these issues. I mean, what if they do jam through a [Supreme Court] nominee in 2019 and McConnell succeeds in doing it because they got 53 Senators or something like that. I mean, I just can imagine the conventional Democrats are all, you know, I like this combination, like we were saying earlier – older/younger, centrist, more aggressive, whatever.

I don’t know; I’m making this up, obviously. I think we’ll see some female Democratic law professor who says, “These people are all ridiculous. We need to increase the size of the Supreme Court, which is totally constitutional, to 11. And if you elect me with a Democratic Congress, I will fix this outrage that’s been perpetrated on us by Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump. We will have a court that will strike down Republican efforts to prevent minorities from voting. And, you know, all the obvious issues that we want to focus on.”

I don’t know, could such a candidate not sort of take off on a kind of Eugene McCarthy, Howard Dean sort of way? And then they go there, but then parts of the swing voters look up and say, “I don’t know. Shouldn’t we – is it that bad? Do we have to change the Supreme Court?” You could imagine the Democrats really being radicalized in this respect.

BROWNSTEIN: So, look, as I said to you before, I believe we are living through the modern equivalent of the 1850s. I just don’t know what the modern equivalent of the 1860s looks like. But when I say that we are living through the modern equivalent of the 1850s, I mean it very precisely. From the Compromise of 1850 until the beginning of the Civil War, there was a cold war between the North and the South, and every issue followed that sectional divide. Every institution in American life broke along that sectional divide. And things that were unimaginable at the beginning of the decade became imaginable. You know, there was open combat in Missouri before the Civil War. There was the *Dred Scott* decision. There was the Kanas-Nebraska Act and the breakup of the Whig Party.

And I think it was because, at some level, a growing number of Americans *believed* themselves to be living in a state of civil conflict before it was a shooting war. And I think there’s a parallel to now. I mean, I think that there is a growing number of at least activists on each side who believe that we are living in some sort of irrepressible conflict between Red and Blue America. And, therefore, there will be an audience for ever more radical measures as Mitch McConnell himself demonstrated in 2016 by doing something that would not have been, I think, imaginable 40 years earlier.

KRISTOL: Probably, probably.

BROWNSTEIN: And, therefore, even though there is a big chunk of the middle of the country that might like all of this to tamp down, the centrifugal force in both parties is such that, without that specific example, I consider it not only possible but likely that escalations of the conflict that we can’t yet envision sitting here will unfold in the next 10-15 years.

KRISTOL: A counter argument, I suppose, would be slavery was, of course, a genuine huge division. A lot of this is sort of self-generated, rhetorical, identity politics. At the end of the day, is the America that most Trump voters want to live in, *that different* from the America that most Democratic voters want to live in? They have a sort of different vision and wish and slightly attitude towards the past and the future. But most of them are working in companies that include both of them, or maybe less than they used to, living in communities that do include some people from the other side.

BROWNSTEIN: But that part – you’re right that there is no single issue that reaches the magnitude of slavery. But I do think there is an interlocking set of issues all around the same axis of change – demographic change, cultural change, economic change. Do you welcome it? Do you see it as improving what America is or do you see it as transforming America into something unrecognizable? You know, on

election night in 2012 when Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly both had some version of "We've lost America." And "Make America Great Again." "Again" being the key word.

KRISTOL: And the Flight 93 thing, which was very indicative of September of 2016. "This is the last election to preserve some version of America."

BROWNSTEIN: Preserve the kind of political predominance of white, Christian, small-government America maybe. And all of that, I think, even without a single issue of the magnitude of slavery, that all adds up to something.

Seattle is very different than Trump country, and in terms of the way it looks and feels and how it makes its money, and how it feels about global markets, and how it feels about immigration.

KRISTOL: The different weight it gives to equal rights for gays, as opposed to preserving liberty for religious store owners and so forth.

BROWNSTEIN: Right, all of those things – again, it may not be – how many times do bakers have to choose whether certain? – It may not be as real, and pervasive, and omnipresent as slavery was, but there's a lot of it. And there's a lot of issues that divide the country along the same geographic generational/racial/class line, which itself by the way is – college graduates are concentrating in fewer places. I mean, smaller places are having trouble holding onto their college graduates.

I mean, if you look at – just take one powerful example. Hillary Clinton won fewer than one-sixth of the counties in America and her counties accounted for two-thirds of the GDP.

So, you know, essentially the parts of the country that are embracing the future feel as though they are being dictated to by the parts of the country that are most fearful of that future. And the parts of the country most fearful of the future feel that the other side is transforming America into something unrecognizable. "We're on a slalom ride to Sweden economically, and then we're becoming this polyglot."

So, I mean, it would take extraordinary leadership to try to overcome this. I'm not sure anybody *can* overcome it. But what's unique about Trump is that he wants to sail into the wind. He's there trying to make this current even deeper, the trench even deeper and that's just pretty explosive.

KRISTOL: As suppose, analytically, what everyone would wish – you have to say the odds of the next two plus years are – just objective events. Whether it's Mueller Report, the 2018 election, it's consequences, the judicial appointment, whatever – will deepen the trench, not lead people to say, "Wait a second, we need to put some bridges over the trench."

I mean, a crisis, I would once have said – and we'll close by asking this. What if there really were either an economic crisis? Like 2008, it's not like we haven't hadn't had them? The foreign-policy crisis of 2001 situation, 9/11?

I guess I would have once said those might bring people together. I mean, 2008 for all the hubbub, Bush and the Democratic Congress passed a bailout. A lot of people complained about it but at the end of the day, Bernanke and those guys were able to get us out of it before the total collapse of the world economy and we ended up coming back adequately, maybe more slowly than we should have and so forth. And, of course, 9/11 there was genuine unity for a year or two before it kind of broke apart.

I mean, I suppose it would be an interesting question. Does a recession or a crisis cause an attempt to reach across the trench or does it just make it even worse?

BROWNSTEIN: No. I think it's very unlikely that anything could happen that could cause Blue America to put trust in Trump. I think that the view in Blue America is so overwhelming that he is unfit in every possible way.

KRISTOL: Trump is a particular problem. If Trump disappeared, you could imagine Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer –

BROWNSTEIN: Sure, sure, yes. But as long as Trump is there, I think any crisis would cause Blue America to feel even more, and probably portions of Red America, like "We can't afford this craziness anymore." And if there was a real military crisis, then I think you would have overwhelming sentiments in Blue America and, as I said, even a portion of Red America saying, "Hey, I don't trust this guy to be making the choices about life or death."

KRISTOL: Or conversely, I suppose, if there were a terror incident, you could imagine a lot of Red America rallying to a Trump doing things that a lot of Blue America would say really –

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah, no, no. I don't think crisis makes us better. I actually think crisis makes it worse.

I'm not sure what makes it better while he's there. And, ultimately, in the Republican Party, I think the evidence is clear, he has to be shown to be a loser. Because it is not going to be a *moral* stand that causes a big portion of the coalition to sheer off from Trump. It's going to have to be shown that it doesn't work in the long-run.

And there are still those voices: you're one, there are others, Jeff Flake, who are like, "Hey, If we're betting entirely on shrinking groups, of squeezing more blood out of shrinking stones, essentially, that that can't go on forever."

But politics is always a near-horizon kind of business, and I think people have to see a consequence in 2018. If they lose the House and they are annihilated in white-collar suburbs, you may see more people saying in 2019, "Hey, do we want to repeat this exercise again in two years?"

KRISTOL: And one can imagine then the Democrats then going in a direction in which they go off the rails in 2021. Well, whatever, it's hard to –

BROWNSTEIN: Well, again, that would not necessarily point toward that though, because if you won the House in white-collar suburban districts –

KRISTOL: Right, that would –

BROWNSTEIN: It would kind of push you more toward finding someone who can talk to those voters.

KRISTOL: That would be good if someone in each party tried to talk to –

BROWNSTEIN: Tried to talk to everybody.

KRISTOL: To voters who are not – yeah.

BROWNSTEIN: Right, right.

KRISTOL: Trump's particular – this is very explicit in his speeches and in his tweets. "My people. My people are the best, and my voters are the greatest. And that's who I'm speaking for."

BROWNSTEIN: He's a wartime president.

KRISTOL: We have never had a president –

BROWNSTEIN: He's a wartime president, only the war is at home.

KRISTOL: Yeah. We've never had a president who really didn't at least *pretend* to be in a political –

BROWNSTEIN: To be the president of everyone.

KRISTOL: In a political –

BROWNSTEIN: Or *try* in some way.

KRISTOL: Yeah, in some way just for self-interest, right.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Because if you get elected with a small margin, you want a bigger margin.

BROWNSTEIN: Bill Clinton once told me he would sit around and think about people like Jesse Helms and Pat Robertson and say, "I know we disagree on 99 things. What is the one thing that I could find to have him over to the White House over that we could do something together?" You know, kind of AIDS in Africa or something.

Trump is the opposite. I think Trump looks at Blue America as a foil, as a way to kind of say to his supporters, "They're coming to get you. They're coming to take away your America." And so, he is a wartime president for a domestic war.

KRISTOL: We will reconvene after election day.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And see what's happened in 2018 and in the immediate aftermath. That could be quite interesting in Congress and elsewhere.

BROWNSTEIN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: And then, you can tell us –

BROWNSTEIN: How wrong I was.

KRISTOL: Yes, we can both agree how wrong we both were, and then what's going to happen in the next year.

This has been a very instructive and not entirely encouraging or cheering conversation, but reality is reality. Ron Brownstein, thanks a lot for joining me.

BROWNSTEIN: Thanks, Bill.

KRISTOL: And thanks for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]