25th ISOJ How should journalism & platforms constructively address global challenge of polarization

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Summer Harlow [00:00:00] Hello everybody, welcome back from your coffee break. We're getting ready to start our next panel, which is how should journalism and platforms constructively address the global challenge of polarization? And we've had a bit of a lineup change here. As the moderator for this panel is no longer going to be Janet Coates. It's going to be Amy Mitchell. Amy Mitchell is the founding executive director of the Center for News Technology and Innovation. A new organization that hopefully you all had a chance to learn a little more about, because they do have a table in the hallway. And prior to her role at CNTI, Amy served as managing director of news and information research at the Pew Research Center. So join me in welcoming Amy and the rest of our panelists.

Amy Mitchell [00:00:55] Thank you. And, everybody come on up. As I told Janet, I am not going to be able to replace the wonderfulness that she would bring to this panel discussion, but I will do my best. And unfortunately, now you guys have to see my face back to back in sessions. Hopefully it will be okay. And as we're talking about all these new challenges today, whether it's around AI and other kinds of changes in the journalism landscape, we still are talking about polarization. We still haven't managed to master that challenge. And in many ways, I think it's getting even more serious and concerning as we think about our societal developments. And so that's what this panel is going to focus on. And one of the things when we talk about polarization and think about it, it can be really easy to point fingers to find where the problem is to lay blame. And I think a lot of what is on us, this is where are there opportunities. We were at a point, especially in the U.S., I would say, where there are a number of coinciding developments. You have the, development and the emerging of technological advances that have a lot of positivity to them in terms of bringing in more voices, allowing more choices of where people are turning for news and information, diversity, minority, etc. It also allows people to separate if they choose to. We have the development of political hatred, I think, I dare say, for many across the aisle from us who think differently than us. Happening at the same time and I would say that is a greater, development in the U.S. and in some other parts of the world, at least it has been up to now. And we had with that the, with digital comes greater authority to the individual to question things and to check things out for themselves, which also is good, but can raise question and disbelief. And then finally, we have a period of time we were all even more separated because of a pandemic. And so we look to this panel to help us think about what are the ways to really focus on how can we come to areas of agreement and close some of those gaps, as opposed to focus on where they are? The problems with them and the expansions? And I think we're going to start with Richard Gingras. I'm going to introduce them one at a time as they're coming up. He is the, V.P. of Global News for Google, and he will share some thoughts and, things he's been working on over the last few years. Richard.

Richard Gingras [00:03:49] Thank you very much, Amy, and thank you, everyone, for for being here and particularly for engaging on what I think is an extraordinarily complex topic, that we all really need to think about and figure out how we can address, individually and

through the institutions that were part of. We live in a divided world. We live in fractured societies. The underlying issues are longstanding. Open markets and borderless capitalism drive disparities in income and fear of lost jobs. Growth in immigration is feared to disrupt culture, to disrupt religion, to drive ethnic strife. The politics of fear has forever been a powerful tool. Fear shifts and hardens our perceptions of reality. Our perceptions of who we are and how we perceive each other. Fear drives countries away from democratic principles toward authoritarian regimes. And history tells us that polarization stretched to the breaking point does not end well. We can go back centuries on that one. The themes and messages are similar to the ones we see today and the latest in communications technology was always fully exploited. With the Internet Society's access and participation and media became more open, it became intrinsically more diverse. It became mathematically more divisive. We choose the voices that reflect our view of our world, that reflect our biases. Good, bad or indifferent? In a world of unfettered free expression, the nature of both public discourse and political engagement changes. While the internet can elevate noble speech that which appeals to our better angels and allows us to find consensus. It also enables heinous speech, where anger and outrage in self-righteousness can fuel a hatred of others. After the United States election in 2016, I spoke of the need to bridge the gaps in our society by appealing to our innate sense of reasoning. It seemed right at the time. However, we have no innate sense of reasoning. We think first, as Daniel Goldman has made clear. Through a social construct, we think first about what our friends, our tribes expect us to believe. Our species, sadly, is more easily stimulated by emotion than by reason. We prefer our biases to be confirmed. Affirmation is more satisfying than information. It always was and always will be, and we're all subject to it. How do we address these challenges in our society? Some demand regulation demand mechanisms to filter out or amplify what might be deemed as harmful speech. That's tricky. What is unacceptable expression? What is the truth? How is that determined when there are many perspectives and few singular fact based truths? How do we address such questions when societies are fighting over what books are allowed in our libraries, and what history is taught in our classrooms? Where does one draw the line between awful and lawful? In a political world teeming with divisiveness and outrage. As Amy Mitchell knows, and the Center for News Technology and Innovation, recently warned in a report. These tools can be used against the press by less well intentioned leaders. So let's be careful what we expect for others to solve problems in our society. Us versus them. We versus today. What can journalism or technology or any other institution do to address the loss of understanding, the loss of trust, the loss of a broad sense of the collective good? How might each of us, in our own efforts rebuild a sense of value and trust in fact based knowledge? How might we address the challenge of polarization with our own constructive action? Let me just surface a few possibilities. But again, my effort here is just to try to stimulate the conversation. Journalism leans on principles of fact based coverage, however, news organizations have always had varying degrees of partizanship perspective opinion as is appropriate. However, the left leaning publication is despised by the right. The right leaning news brand is despised by the left. Both lean toward affirmation rather than information. Today, with unlimited space, news sites offer far more opinion than in the past. We have more partisan news sources than in the past. We assume readers understand the difference between fact based coverage and partisan opinion. They don't. The prevalence of opinion on a news site creates doubt about the fact based coverage sitting by its side. If they don't agree with your opinions, they won't accept the fact based coverage you provide. How might we address the role of opinion in presenting fact based journalism? How might news avoid amplifying societal fears? It bleeds, it leads. Every day we learn of the anomalous tick cars of our societies. How can we cover violent crime without amplifying fears that conflict with actual reality? Is that violent crime an anomaly or a trend? Our readers should know. In the United States, you are 35 times

more likely to die of cancer or heart disease than from violent crime. Yet we perceive those fears in reverse. Our fear of violent crime is far higher than our fear of dying in our cars. We live in a landscape of distorted risk. Might we provide the necessary context to close the gap between irrational and rational fear? Several years ago at Google, I began a project to build a massive data commons, coalescing statistics from thousands of authoritative sources. Might that make it easier for journalists to offer appropriate context? Might new AI tools assist the reporter in surfacing such data to provide that relevant context? Might we rethink the models and formats used in journalistic work? Tina Rosenberg, who's with us today of the Solutions Journalism Network and those at the Constructive Journalism Institute, explore a different vein of opportunity, presenting news coverage through a constructive lens. It rethinks the coverage model to display the necessary context. The hows and whys of a calamitous event, and, importantly, to report objectively on how the event could have been prevented. Can journalism convey the principles of unbiased, fact based coverage through renewed thinking about the structure of the work? Can such models guide critical thinking and guide the reader's own evaluation and judgment? Can we consider our use of language? Janet Coates, who is going to be with us today but couldn't, has been doing critical research on the linguistics of news. Her analysis of coverage of racial justice protests, specifically the murder of George Floyd, was sobering. Janet noted the words quite literally scorched off the page. The verbs used to describe protest actions repeatedly drew comparisons to fire or destruction, such as spark, fuel, erupt, trigger, ignite. Janet poses tough questions as the use of fiery language a deliberate choice, or is it a subconscious pattern covering such stories? How does that impact the perception of those who demonstrate? How might it fuel partisan divide? Language matters. Politicians know this. They spend millions testing which words and phrases will stimulate the desired response, be it hope or fear. My journalists also study our linguistics. Might we consider the impact of amplifying the false memes and spin propagated by the politicians we cover? Might we avoid terms and labels that emphasize divisiveness and instead promote constructive dialog? If we seek common ground, maybe the political talk show shouldn't be called crossfire. How do we address the challenge of the other without being perceived as someone else's other? I read Monica Guzman's thoughtful book about her own sharply divided family. It's called "I Never Thought of It That Way: How to have fearlessly curious conversations in dangerously divided times." We cannot find common ground without learning how to listen to each other. We cannot win an argument by putting a hand in front of someone else's mouth. Can all of us, in our own way, take care not to demonize those we disagree with? Can we avoid reducing the other to simplistic memes? Demonization doesn't bridge divides. It deepens them. Fear of the other. It's core to the crisis of divisiveness. Stanford led a recent mega study on interventions to decrease polarization. Two approaches seemed to work best. One is to leverage empathy. And the other is to leverage perceived similarity. Both are relevant to our work. The value of empathy is achieved by highlighting relatable, sympathetic exemplars of different political beliefs and avoiding the high conflict personalities who are typically seen in politics and media. The value of perceived similarity is leveraged by highlighting common cross partizan interests. There's the news publication feature information about non-controversial topics on local sports and community events, and the progression of life from birth to obituary. Such topics drive engagement, unify a community. And research has shown. Build trust. In the in the serious journalism that is provided, that is an opportunity for local news. These challenges aren't only for the media and journalism communities. How might other institutions do their part? How does Google do its part? How can algorithms and machine learning reflect sources that are authoritative, accurate, and reflect the diversity of a society's norms and perspectives? How might we offer resources that help users understand how to think and not be perceived as telling users what to think? The answers aren't easy. We won't find them

without asking the hard questions. It is up to us to do that in our actions. Our principles and our own thoughtful behavior. And may we have those conversations to find those difficult answers. I thank you.

Amy Mitchell [00:16:04] Thank you. Richard. I think next we're going to hear from Mónica, who I think has some slides, is going to share some, thoughts from her recent work that she's been doing around, Angel Brave and, really working to, as she might describe it, lower the temperature and learn and listen to each other. It's a really incredible project. So I look forward to, hearing and having all of us listen to Mónica. Thank.

Mónica Guzmán [00:16:33] Hi everyone. I want to make sure the slides are sliding. There they are. They are sliding. Are they sliding? They are sliding. Hi, everyone. Mónica Guzmán, really an honor to be here. I have been a journalist my whole career. In the last few years, I have felt, compulsively called into what is often known as the bridging space. The bridge building space. What does it mean to make connections across communities of difference, particularly political difference? I'm with Braver Angels, the nation's largest cross partizan nonprofit focused on political depolarization. I wrote the book you see there that Richard mentioned. I never thought of it that way. My most exciting project right now is the thing at the bottom, A Braver Way podcast, which is out to equip people with the tools they need to bridge the political divide. This is personal for me. This photo was taken on Election Day 2020. Those are my parents. In our cups is sangria, ee needed it. We did not vote for the same guy. That night was interesting. There were all kinds of arguments. There were people storming out of rooms. But there was also a real attempt to understand. It's been quite a journey. For me and my parents, they're conservative Republicans. I'm more liberal Democrat. And the contrast that I have seen, between, you know, those contexts and conversations where even across the most agonizing disagreements, people are able to illuminate something, not change people's minds, but illuminate some understanding. And those conversations that, for the most part, don't happen or blow up or just no one can even imagine them happening because of the differences that exist. I often say that we're we tend to be stuck in this cycle where we're judging each other more while we're engaging each other less. And how can we pretend to be informed when we're not informed about each other, how each other thinks, the perspectives that we each hold? So there are three main paths that I see toward this division. And Richard frankly summarized them really well sorting, othering and siloing the call for help. The S.O.S. three forces of human nature that brought us to where we are. Sorting is the very natural human tendency to want to be around people who are like us. That's literally how we make our friends form our communities. It's the easiest way to do it. It's fun. It's great. We love it. But once we're in our groups, othering can do its work. And othering is the natural human tendency to want to put distance between us and them. And as research going back to the 60s shows, the differences don't have to be that meaningful between groups for us to begin to subtly discriminate when the differences are meaningful, when there is a narrative there. Those people are out to get me. Those people hate me. Then othering can get a lot stronger. And then we have siloing, and siloing is really accelerated by our communications technology and of course, our media. You know, all of us, the industry, it's the stories we hear sort of generously versus not so generously based on the groups that we tend to find affinity in. And SOS adds up to this. It narrows our view of the world while convincing us we see enough of it. I think part of the problem is that we are so divided. We're blinded. We're blinded to the reality of the debates and the reality of what people around us truly think. So the question I think that can be really revolutionary is what kinds of people do I talk about, but never with? A lot of our readers, you know, could really ask this question in their own lives. And the reason this question is so important, I think, is because of the following inconvenient truth that in this divided world, whoever is underrepresented in your life will

be overrepresented in your imagination. There are so many misperceptions and exaggerations across the political divide. Now that's my specialty. But honestly, lots of differences and lots of divides carry the same dynamic. So the solution is bridging. It's getting curious. Who do I talk about but never with? Who can I spend more time with? Now, as media, as journalists, how can we tell stories that invite people to do this in their own minds? I think that's the radical question. So there's eight, eight things in my research that I'm going to talk to you about that have really stood out, as ways to, as individuals, right, as individuals try to do that work in our own minds, that helps us see what's really there rather than sort of our imagination. And our fear tends to swirl up around the world. One is to question your certainty, and this is extremely important. Certainty, I think, of as the arch villain of curiosity. If you think you know, you won't think to ask. And what we know from cognitive research and a lot of sociology is that when societies are in times of deep anxiety and fear, they will manufacture certainty. Meaning, you know, here comes a media article with lots of confident sounding answers about millions of people's political choice. And if people are confounded and confused and angry about other people's political choice, they'll just believe everything in that article and then say, I don't need to talk to anyone. Of those millions of people I already know. I already know everything I need to know about why they made that choice. And this leads to a pretty incurious kind of society. So the next one question your fear. Question your fear. Because you can't wonder about something you think is out to get you. If I'm being chased by a bear, I don't care how fuzzy it is. I'm running away. And we know that fear is a superpower. Fear is extremely important. It keeps us safe. We are all survivors, because of fear. The thing is, and I remember hearing this quote. And I can't place it, but. Don't waste your fear on anything but danger. Don't waste your fear on anything but danger. Because what fear does to our brains is it brings all the resources into, you know, adrenaline, the parts of our brains that kind of slow time down, help us run fast and all of that. But once we're in that mode, it is really hard to be creative. It is really hard to be collaborative. It's really hard to solve the problems in our societies. Right? So we know that there is an elevated fear, that really takes on, really, really divided societies. Three question your assumptions about people. So again, it's just like as journalists, what can we do to help people do these things on their own? Right. Question your assumptions about people. And the biggest one is in a disagreement is they must be crazy, stupid or evil. You know, Richard was talking about affirmation, but often the kind of affirmation people really look for and click for is this: those people are crazy. They are stupid, they are evil. And I'm going to look for coverage that tells me that, right? But wow, what an enormous assumption that shuts down curiosity, right? Question your assumptions about motives. The most pernicious assumption that really kills curiosity dead in in politics is this one. If they oppose what I support, they must hate what I love. If they oppose abortion, they must hate women's freedom. If they oppose, easy gun ownership, they must hate people being able to defend themselves like these things are not true, but we tend to think that, don't we? We often jump to those conclusions. What can we do to help readers stay curious enough to be a little more resilient against these assumptions? The important principle, the really critical one is that people can only hear when they're heard. And I keep running into this. People can only hear when they're heard. How can we bring that into our understanding of what media can do? I am a fellow at the University of Florida, the Consortium of Trust in Media and Technology, and I'm working with the aforementioned Janet Coates, who couldn't be here today, on some research that is showing, like, an experimental evidence that people can only hear when they're heard. In in one study that we ran, we learned that the presence of two sentences in conversations about abortion and homelessness made all the difference in this. And the sentences were. I want to hear from you. What do you think? And when those two sentences existed in a huge, long conversation, people felt more heard. And by virtue of feeling more heard or more open to opposing views, to listening to opposing

views. Just remarkable. So, I mentioned braver angels. It can often seem completely impossible to bring people together across the political divide. Those lanyards, you see, the red lanyards are conservatives, the blue lanyards are liberals. And yes, labels can suck. But at the Braver Angels convention, we had exactly 50% liberals and exactly 50% percent conservatives. And I would say the labels did not suck. The labels helped everyone stay curious and stay open. And it was really fascinating. So, I'll leave you with a couple of questions that are particularly powerful for driving curious conversations in divided times. One is, how did you come to believe what you believe? Not why. Why do you believe what you believe? Across a divide where there's suspicion and mistrust can feel quite loaded? People will feel on trial. But if instead you ask, how did you come to believe what you believe? You release stories and guess what? Everyone is the reigning, the world's reigning expert on their own story. And there is always truth in somebody's story, even if there's no truth in their conclusions. So asking how not why? How did you come to believe? What you believe as journalists is really powerful. But also, if we can encourage and inspire through our coverage, our readers, to ask that of each other and the people they know in their own lives, it can go a long way. And then. What are your concerns or hopes or fears rather than what do you think about guns? What do you think about immigration? What concerns you about what's happening with immigration? What do you hope to see with the conversation around abortion? And the reason I'm asking about concerns is so special and important is when you ask what people worry about, you learn what they care about. And the research into values shows that you know how everybody says like they don't share my values. I can't talk to them. They don't share my values. The research into values as I see it, what what it concludes is that we do all share our values. We just rank them in a different order for different issues. That's the thing. So when you start talking about what you care about, nobody hates freedom. Nobody hates security. You start to find common ground. You will start to find common ground. So I will leave you with that. Check out A Braver Way, my podcast. Be on more on this and stay curious. And let's see what we can do to help our readers stay curious to.

Amy Mitchell [00:27:59] Thank you so much, Mónica. Now we will hear from, Tina Rosenberg, who's co-founder of Solutions Journalism Network, and in that role is working on applying some of these very principles to journalism itself. I will let her share that with us.

Tina Rosenberg [00:28:23] Thank you, Amy, and thank you all for having me here. It's really an honor. It's my first ISOJ, and I'm very excited to be here. So I'm going to talk about how some of the brilliance we've just heard is being applied in local journalism and because I think that, these principles that, certainly what Mónica was talking about especially are very, very important for all of us to keep in mind, not just as human beings around the Thanksgiving dinner table, but as we go about our work. So how does how can we as journalists attempt to reduce polarization? The one big overall lesson I have is save local news, right? I mean, we all know how polarizing national news can be. When local news disappears, national news steps in. And what we want is, as Richard said, to be covering our communities from birth through the orbit. Because that is something that we all have in common and that can bring us together. And when we are divided, if we don't nationalize those issues, if we focus on what's important locally, it will help to depolarize us. So. The second, now I'm going to talk about a couple of ways to do that differently and the ways that newsrooms are doing it differently. This slide you're seeing from The Seattle Times is the debut of Education Lab and education Lab was and still is, is still going, not only at the Seattle Times but at many other newsrooms now in the Seattle Times not only has an education lab, but also a homelessness lab and a traffic lab, and they found this application to be very useful, which is verticals that use solutions reporting in addition to

problem focused reporting. So, this story was the first one, and it really sums up what solutions reporting is about. The last sentence in the caption is, so what happened here that allowed this elementary school to suddenly raise their test scores so dramatically and cannot be replicated elsewhere? That's really solutions reporting in in a in a nutshell. So solutions reporting is a way of talking about issues in a way that is inherently depolarizing education. We all have either covered school board meetings or sat under the covers with our blanket over our head during watching coverage of school board meetings, because it can get really unpleasant. But there's other ways of covering education that are less polarizing. And. Here we go. The Seattle Times did a lot of stories every month, a package of stories on what is working to improve public education, around Seattle, around the state of Washington, and also around the country. This was from a story about that came from Chicago, from Logan Square in Chicago, which is a community of mostly Latino immigrants who are very involved in their kids education. So what did Logan Square do to involve parents in their kids education? What did the community do? And that's the story that they that they they did the story. They had some Logan Square folks in to talk at a, town meeting about what they did and how this could happen here. And that kind of discourse automatically shifts the brain from a who's responsible for this mess into what can we do to solve it? It's the difference between talking about, can a person with a disability drive a car? If you ask for that discussion, you get. You get an argument about rights to. How can a person with a disability drive a car? And then you get a discussion about where to put the brake pedal. And that's the kind of discussion we want. So the other thing that is powerful about solutions, journalism, in terms of cutting down polarization, is that it helps us report beyond stereotypes. It is our common practice when we cover a marginalized community, whether that the South Appalachia, urban communities of color, to focus on their worst stereotype and go do stories that show how that stereotype is even truer than you already thought it was. And you can I think, we all know we've seen stories like this, but you can hear it from reporters themselves. You know, we go to Appalachia and we look for the people with four teeth if we're from the New York Times, we go to, we in our own cities. We go to poor communities of color in all we ask them about are shootings and violence. And this is I googled these two communities, Brownsville, Brooklyn and Grand Crossing, Chicago, just the name of the community, and you can see what comes up in Google News. This is not your fault, Richard. It is purely stories about, about violence and fraud in one case. And I think there's one beauty pageant involved there in the top 20. But but it's it's that's what we cover. That's what happens in these communities according to us. And that is not the way people want to be covered. People want to feel reflected and respected by the news. And when they don't, when they feel that the elites in the media, and this is really important, when they feel that the elites in the media are looking down on them and humiliating them, it's polarizing. And that, I think, is a big cause of polarization in many countries today, especially in the United States. People feel that the elites have contempt for them, and this is expressed through media coverage of their communities. We have to change that. So how can we change it? We can look at what people are doing to solve their own problems in their community. We worked with the Montgomery Advertiser early on and at the Solutions Journalism Network, and when I came down there, I first asked them, what do you guys think of mainstream media coverage of of Alabama in the national media? And all the reporters said, we hate it. It's awful. Why? Because you make us look like ignorant yahoos. And we talked about it and the stories were not inaccurate, but put together, they gave an inaccurate picture of reality because they only covered ignorant yahoo behavior. They didn't cover behavior that was otherwise. And they were very, very conscious of this when they were the victims of it. But they were not thinking about was how they covered their their city in the same way. This was exactly what they were doing to communities of color in Montgomery and the advertisers largely, perhaps exclusively, white newsroom at that time. So they started to

do stories that we call the full Montgomery, where they are talking about how people in the communities are solving their problems. And this is an example, you can you can see the headline of the story yourself. Another one. Another one. More. And we're not saying that you should only do these stories. We're just saying to write the balance a bit. You're going to be writing about problems, but we should also be writing about people as agents, not as victims and not as perpetrators, but as agents in their own lives. And that, I believe, is polarization reducing by itself. And, one more comment I'm going to make, which is this is especially, oh, also the same thing with rural communities, especially in Appalachia. These stories are really great examples of how how to do these kinds of stories that treat people as full people with their full agency and don't look down on them. So this is really, really important this year. It's a big election year everywhere in the world. 60 elections this year. And our tendency in in election coverage is to be polarizing, is to treat conflict as the story and look for it and exploit it and occasionally foment it. That kind of coverage is misleading. It does not serve the public, and it's not informative for viewers. So, we have if I can give a plug to, the University of Texas Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, we have a moog, right? We have a moog that is just closing now, and it's archived. You can see it called A Better Way to Cover Elections. We're working with trusting news, with Harken, and with better conflict. Good, good conflict on this. And it's about a way to cover elections where you start out by talking to the community about what are the issues you want politicians to be discussing as they compete for your votes and covering those issues and talking to politicians about those issues and leading with that? Tell, tell people in your newsroom, announce in your newspaper or on your TV station that here's what we're going to cover. The community says they're interested in affordable housing and in their children's reading skills and in garbage pickup. And so those are the top three issues we're going to talk about. And we're going to ask politicians about that. You'll very rarely find that the community is most interested in why there are books about gay people in the library. They will be more interested in why their kids can't read, and that makes for better kinds of coverage. So this kind of coverage, which includes covering solutions, what are being done and what kinds of things are being done in other cities to solve these problems, is very important to depolarizing, in an election year and helping to better inform voters about what is at stake here. Covering the stakes, not the odds. What is at stake here and what the candidates are saying. So I will stop with that and, happy to talk later on with anybody who wants to talk more about about what newsrooms are doing to depolarize in their coverage. Thank you.

Amy Mitchell [00:38:57] Thank you, Tina. And we're going to close out here, with Sonal Shah, who is CEO, currently CEO of Texas Tribune and has had many other roles, that she has filled, throughout her career. And she's going to share some thoughts with us, I think, in particular on young people and some of the opportunities there.

Sonal Shah [00:39:17] So first of all, thank you. Amy, it's so great to have you here. And it's so great to be here with everybody. I know it's the afternoon. I know we have our coffee. I hope we have our sugar, but, I want to just quickly, hopefully this builds upon everything. That Richard, Mónica, and everybody has already said because I do think, I do think the solutions piece is actually helpful. So I just want to only build on the comment there. Support local journalism. With that, I want to I want to start with let me start with some observations. And then I'm going to talk about Gen Z and hopefully provide some thoughts moving forward. I'm going to bring in slightly different concepts. I know we're in journalism, but I wanted to bring in some other concepts here. In a Pew study of 24 countries, a median of 59% of the people said they're dissatisfied with how democracy is functioning. We sort of link journalism and democracy all the time. I want to just sort of put some of the concepts here. 74% of the people globally think that elected officials don't

care about what they think. 74% of the people globally do not believe that elected officials care about what they think. 42% say no political party in their country represents their views. And in 13 countries, a quarter or more of those surveyed think a system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or courts is a good form of government. Just sit with that for a second. In the United States, 40% of Americans believe the American political system needs to be completely reformed. And 83% believe that government doesn't care about what they think. Let me take that to Gen Z, because it's actually even more interesting. According to the Civil Center at Tufts, less than a third of young people said that they trust either of the two major political parties, their state government, Congress or the president. Less than a third of Gen Z thinks that. Nearly two thirds of young people, 62% expressed concern about the values of the American people, 45% say they believe that the country is failing to live up to its promise. All of that, and part of the reason I give you these stats, is really to say in one hand we're like, government is good. If government did its job better, people have a voice. In government, we want people to be civically engaged. But if you don't believe in the government anyway. And we keep talking about civic engagement. I want to ask the question, are we actually even meeting the threshold of the conversation? And when we think about solutions, as Tina was saying, in terms of understanding why people can't get civically engaged, it's important. A few more comments here on facts. Gen Z only 3% of Gen Z have a great deal of trust in news. Only 13% have quite a lot of trust in news. Add that together. That's just 16% of Gen-Z. They do trust science. They do trust the medical system. Younger Gen-Z, ages 12 to 18, have greater trust in institutions, and older Gen-Z ages 18 to 26. And business is the most trusted to integrate innovations into society. Business is the most trusted to integrate innovations into society. Give you a sense of how much faith has been lost in government. I say all of this because I think despite all of this, a majority of young people, 76%, believe they have the power to change the country and 77% are looking for ways to get involved. If we can give people ways to get involved in their communities at very local levels, because where trust does exist is at local levels. People believe in their local government. They don't believe in the national government. They don't believe in the state government, but they believe in their local government. People believe in local journalism because they want to know how they can get involved. They want to know how they can solve a problem. If we want people to participate, we need to understand how to give them ways to participate. It's not just voting. Because if you just vote and the outcome is exactly the same. You don't believe in this system if we find them ways. As Tina has said, has Mónica has given examples of finding ways for people to participate. They believe in the system. So I don't have all of the questions, or I don't certainly have all of the answers here. I do think for young people, we've got to find ways to engage them in places where they are. How many of you have heard of Twitch? 33 million people in the United States are on that on a regular basis. 33 million. About 8.5 million on a regular basis. If you get online, if you get on Twitch TV. Should we be getting on Twitch TV and having journalists talk on TV with them to be asking these questions, how do we be vulnerable? How do we think about getting to places where people are, where they are looking for authenticity? They're not looking for perfection. They're looking for authenticity from their government officials, but also from journalism. They think we are the in-between between government and them. And in many cases we are. But if that's true, how are we giving people a way into that process? How are we giving people away in to thinking about if every other institutions think about democratizing their stuff? How might we, as journalism, think about democratizing journalism to give people a way in? It's not just the technology. Because we've used the platforms as a way to get our information out. But thinking about the platforms as a way to engage and getting people engaged with us to ask those questions, to be more curious. I think there is polarization, but I also think people are looking for ways to get engaged in very local ways and solving very local problems. And sometimes we

make the local problem solutions seem too small in a world that seems to have big challenges. Don't change a light bulb if you want to change climate change. But if everyone changed the light bulb and 300 million people changed it might affect climate change. If 300 million people bought one less bottle of water, it might change climate change. But we have to give people the power to believe. That their voice matters. And what they do matters. So I posed the question for ourselves is to think about how can we do that? And how might we think about, at a very local level, giving people the power to be a part of that change? Thank you.

Amy Mitchell [00:47:10] Thank you so much, all of you. What a terrific set of discussions and thoughts and insights. I'd like to start. We have a number of questions from the audience, so thank you all, and I will get to those. I have one, sort of follow on or two. Really, that I put forward to everybody, on this panel. And it gets to the question of audience, and I think we've talked and heard from, some of you about the the need to connect to others, the need to be able to produce journalism that that shows people for who they are, that welcomes them in. Part of the challenge, I think, in journalism today and I'll get to local in a second, because I think it's a challenge there too, is getting people in in the first place to even get the opportunity to bring that audience in. And one of the things we're seeing, I mean, there are a lot of the, the, the very strong polarization and negativity of other media sources is more at the national level. But there is more that's happening now at the local level. Two and a part of the sorting and siloing to get to Monica's point is occurring at the local level, where people are choosing to live or not live. And so when we get to that point, how does the journalism respond to that and actually connect people? Is there an opportunity for technology to play a role there that's less of a geographic balance when journalists are doing stories and producing stories? Is it more about explaining to the current audience what the other people are like and trying to do a decent job of that, or is it actually welcoming people in? So I would just put that out for thoughts from all and in any of you to start.

Mónica Guzmán [00:49:03] Well, I'll start just by, drawing one bit of complexity into something that, you know, I always speak of very simply. And I think many people do because it's useful, too. But when we think about divides and everything resolves into polls, right. Conservative? Liberal, yes. The great sort is happening in America. Blue zip codes are getting bluer, red zip codes are getting redder. And so it does lead to that question. Well, you know, Seattle's pretty much a blue zone. How how do you deal with, you know, making sure that people understand sort of the red side of things or whatnot. But I think when you look closer, there is remarkable pluralism and diversity everywhere, even on the ideological spectrum. So in Seattle, it happens to be more about like deep blue versus light blue and a lot of the same vilification, demonization in curiosity plagues the discussions, the civic discussions. It's just not red and blue. It's, you know, dark blue, light blue or whatever you want to call it is so that even within one's side, people are completely ill informed about the perspectives that actually exist. I mean, raise your hand if you've been, you know, in a conversation where everyone just assumed you agreed with them just because you made the same vote, right? Like this is not this is not how we actually work. There's a lot of nuance to our politics. So I think the answer for journalists and journalism and media is don't be too concerned about how uniform the perspectives appear to be in your community. They're not. We are infinitely complicated, and there are fractals of interesting angles. So instead, try to try to model the sort of constant curiosity that will surface whatever differences there and skips that temptation to assume perfect agreement just because the appearances are there.

Sonal Shah [00:51:02] I would add to that, only to say I think that, in some ways the the sorting side was actually perfect sorting and siloing even within the sorting and siloing, there's further sorting and siloing. And I think that's Monica's point. And I think when we think about sort of how to. Think about community, think about the whole person and the whole community, as opposed to which sort or which silo you might be in. But like, who is the person and what are they experiencing? How are they experiencing it? Why are they experiencing it? And then sort of understand how to get to those audiences too often. We we think about audiences as we've got to get to the Hispanic audience, or we've got to get to the black audience, and we've got to get to the LGBTQ audience. And like in a community, people are still neighbors and thinking about what does that community look like and who are the neighbors and how do they all get along, and what are the ways they're doing it? I think it's a way for us to think about stopping the sorting and siloing, but when we go into those communities, go in to understand the community, not the person living in that community. In our own identities, we all live in our own identities, to be fair. Maybe the broader question I would ask is, Amy, I think the, the thing I always think about is maybe at the end of the day, we are all tribal. And the question is, how do we work across tribes as opposed to how do we stop being tribal? And I think we keep coming at the question of how do we stop being tribal, as opposed to thinking about how might we just work across a tribe, and what does that look like?

Amy Mitchell [00:52:34] Richard?

Richard Gingras [00:52:37] As you might have sense from my remarks, I've. I've angst about this quite a bit. One of the things, however, that really kind of, I found open was that element in the Stanford study about addressing topical interest that cut across the political divide. It seemed right to me. But most importantly, it actually mapped to where I believe success and sustainability can be found in local news. And I do think local news is an extraordinarily powerful element that we have here to work with. And I say it's connected to that because, as I've worked over the last decade, in looking at where's there success, what might the future approaches and models be? The areas where I've seen success, particularly in terms of sustainability, is with entities like City Side, for instance, in California or Village Media in Canada, where they've taken this much more holistic approach to the community, where they have assessed communities information needs and not simply gone in and say, we've got to give people the accountability journalism that's important to that community, and that is important. But if you don't address the full community information needs. You lose the you lose an opportunity, right? Obituaries. If you look at the traffic, obituary still matter. And by the way, funeral homes advertise local sports matters. Community events matter, and they cut across the community. And when I talk to those folks who are doing that well, they recognize that what they're doing and providing that information is building a fabric of the community across the divide. And how powerful is that? Right? And what are the benefits of it? You go across the divide. You actually drive engagement. You know, when I look at the data from Village Media, where they get their reach is more than half of the population in the cities they serve. And that, by the way, doesn't come from the city council coverage. It comes from all of the other things that they offer. And that's also what drives their advertising revenue. And they're fully advertiser supported. So I think that is so key. And I get a little bit disappointed when I hear that, oh, local news can only be supported through philanthropy. I hope that's not true. Don't get me wrong. I think philanthropists, to the extent they can help should. But how do we build that sustainable model that matters to the community, that provides value to the community and lets them understand themselves and have a better sense of how they deal with the trickier questions in their community that are of a political nature. So I would just ask, if you take anything away from this, at least from what I say, it's that point

about trying to serve the breadth of the communities and information needs in that quest for engagement, sustainability and success.

Amy Mitchell [00:55:44] There's a question from the audience. Thank you all for that. On the solutions journalism, and it's a specific question, Tina, on the labeling. And as you think about how do you work in, these stories with as you're talking about covering problems and challenges and other things? Do you find, evidence of people responding specifically to the label of being solution journalism? And the question I had sort of that goes along with that is also who do you see as the audience for that? And how do you see that connect to, you know, what else they're reading if you have that data?

Tina Rosenberg [00:56:23] Thank you. It's a very interesting question about labeling. First of all, the name solutions is a very bad name. And, we really should be called the Responses to Problems Journalism Network. But we're stuck with solutions at this point. And it people take it the wrong way. It doesn't mean we've solved this problem. It means we're going to report on somebody who's trying to make a dent in this problem. So, a lot of people call their solutions reporting something else, like what's working or, you know, whatever you're comfortable with. We don't care what you call it, but it is important to signal that's what it is, because readers need to know that here's something different. And we know from the annual digital news report from the Reuters Institute in Oxford that the negativity of the news is by far the biggest reason people tune out from the news. And last year they included a question to, news of Reuters, what would make you tune back in? And the answer was positive news and solutions journalism. Now, I don't advocate positive news because I think that's not real journalism. But people I don't think they really understand the difference. They just want something that makes them feel less despairing. So label it. Yes, I think it's really important to label and and the answer to who wants it is that journalists have a little trouble with this concept, although not as much as we had feared. But non journalists have no trouble with it at all. Your audience wants this.

Amy Mitchell [00:58:02] Yeah. That's great. And speaking of labels, there was another question that asked about labels in algorithms Richard. And, specifically he, says you made a great point about readers not distinguishing between fact based coverage and opinion. Maybe Google should reward publishers that provide labels to distinguish those types of articles. Could you provide more SEO or, I guess, other kinds of ways for publishers that label those articles?

Richard Gingras [00:58:33] Very good point. And it's actually there. And this is something that we've been put focus on for a long time. And it started actually, with our efforts in supporting the foundation of the trust project. Because the trust project was just about that, about transparency, about the organization, about its authorship, about the nature of its work. We try very hard, and I'm, you know, I'm now old and I'm not running product anymore, but it would always drive me nuts if an opinion piece was leading a cluster on search or on news, because as far as I was concerned, a it shouldn't be there, it should be secondary and we should have picked it out sometime to start. And so it does help usually if it just says opinion right there for everyone else to see. I mean then then it's easier. Remember the old days, it would say, well, you know, the opinion content has a headline in italics, like anyone figured that out. They did not. So the protocols are there. The trust project has obviously been pushing it, and it doesn't really take a whole lot of effort. Just if you if you label it appropriately in our site, that will certainly help us do a better job of differentiating between the fact based coverage and opinion. So please do.

Amy Mitchell [00:59:49] That's great. And and here's a question on, I think, that may speak to, Sonal and maybe Mónica, maybe to all of you. But it has to do, with coverage of divisive speeches. And if we are in a time where we have political figures who are using very divisive language and maybe not even just political figures, but others. That would be news coverage. It's a news story. How would a journalist do that in a way that is seeking to bridge these divides? Let me just see the question specifically. How can we cover leaders with divisive speeches that cannot be removed from coverage? At the same time, just publishing these speeches increase polarization. How do we deal with divisive speeches from people of interest?

Sonal Shah [01:00:41] I'm just gonna give you an example, I think wha tour team, the editorial team has been, you know, SB 4 is such a divisive speech. And we had two leaders come to the border to talk about, you know, both both, President Biden and former President Trump. And I think the angle we tried to take on it was, how did the community actually feel? Not not what are the leaders actually saying? But how does the community actually feel? Because so often we're just giving voice to the leaders so their voice gets heard. But thinking about where the community sits in that and what are they feel is actually important. And I think we've our team has been trying really hard to think about where where are the stories that are not being covered of where people are. And I think that's a lot more of what we can do when we are doing. And I think that's why the local piece of this matters. We can we can come at it from the local piece. It's not going to be the national chains, but it certainly will be. It will. It's only things that we can do which is provide a different perspective of Texas.

Mónica Guzmán [01:01:41] And I'll just quickly add that, believe it or not, I think that's a service to the public officials. I've talked with a lot of public officials, you know, on background who will say, like, this job sucks, I cannot govern, I have to play this game like it stinks. But one of the ways that media can help, frankly, is when they use divisive speech because there's so many incentives driving them to just play to their base. But if their local newsroom goes to the folks who can say, wow, when the mayor says things like that, I feel like he's leaving me out. I feel like he's not really representing me. And if that's part of our story and that becomes part of the mayor's office is, you know, calculation for what the mayor ought to say. You actually depolarize your city.

Amy Mitchell [01:02:23] Yeah. That's great. This is kind of a follow on, and I think it's an interesting question. I mean, they all are, of course. But this person talks about how the polarization debate is playing out also in our various media outlets themselves, from the outrage over NBC's hiring of Ronna McDaniel to the criticism by NPR's Uri Berliner, if his own media, outlet as too liberal. How do media outlets work to bring in people with different views or represent different views themselves as journalists and in their outlets? In this polarized society, without betraying the values of truth, commitment to DEI, to name just to.

Mónica Guzmán [01:03:09] I'll just answer with a recommendation. Highly recommend that, folks. Check out a journalist named Isaac Saul who writes a newsletter called Tangle News. He's actually, I think, next week delivering a TED talk because like, at TEDx main mainstage, because he's really, really good at that. He, I remember I read one of his blogs where he reflected on how he is pro-choice and, you know, in his newsroom, how do we cover abortion? And there's someone in, you know, I think and she was an intern who was genuinely, like, beautifully pro-life. And how the newsroom learned to, you know, listen to her, talk to her, make sure that, they were learning from her sensibilities how to write about this issue, one that, as Richard was saying, linguistics of journalism. You guys, you know,

when you use the phrase reproductive rights, people know what side you're on, you know, and so language is so important. And for the most part, you know, red journalists don't realize they're swimming in red waters. Blue journalists don't realize they're swimming in blue waters. So learn about the diversity and pluralism of views around you and lean on that. But Isaac Saul of Tangle models this every day.

Sonal Shah [01:04:26] Just to give as an example of a story we covered of a small town in Texas where the whole city council had resigned. And rather than covering the story as whose fault was it and who did what, the story was really about, what happened, what did what the what happened in that small town, you couldn't even tell who was if it was a red town or a blue town. Like the way the story was covered was very much about why did the city council resign? What were the issues? Listening to the city council, the mayor, the people throw it. And that story was so beautifully edited. The mayor called the reporter and said, thank you for writing a very fair story. We're now having a conversation, right? That's what you want more of is, is having that ability to understand what's happening in the community and being able to report it and really sort of taking, the politics out of it, but really understanding the source issues underneath it.

Amy Mitchell [01:05:24] Yeah, that's that's fascinating. I have a question. I guess, I'm aware that this has been a very U.S. focused conversation. And we have a lot of folks, here, either in person or online, who are not in the United States. I know in the in research I did a while ago, in my earlier role that looked at this kind of polarization politically and in news media sorting specifically, in, in a variety of other countries outside the US. It, it didn't exist to the same degree. And I think a lot of that was because the digital environment hadn't really emerged as strongly at that point. And there weren't there were still that the traditional outlets were really where the vast majority of folks went across, political ideologies. But I'm curious if you all have thoughts, about where there may be differences or where people have seen things internationally. Richard, you may be one who has, you know, you spent a lot of time traveling. I wonder if you have any any thoughts on that, not to put you on the spot.

Richard Gingras [01:06:34] I can't say, as I've seen examples of, of of where it is, for instance, being dealt with in any particularly more constructive fashion. I think it's closer to what you said, in that the, the degree of evolution of the digital ecosystem isn't there. I was in Nigeria last summer and was just struck, frankly, with I did a 30 minute interviews on major television programs about complex subjects, really thoughtful interviews, you know, like, gosh, that wouldn't even happen in the United States. Who would like it reduced to some confrontational thing almost automatically? Is that just based on the evolution of their media environment? To some degree, yes. Because they I know they are deeply concerned there about all the same issues here ethnic strife, religious strife, so on and so forth. But if you look at other countries, Brazil, kind of similar, right. You've got these highly partizan, for instance, whether they're cable channels or satellite channels or whatever, streaming channels where, you know, you've got these confrontational chat shows with people yelling at each other, it's a it's a real deep challenge. I wish I could say there's a country that's getting it right, but if so, I haven't bumped into it.

Amy Mitchell [01:07:50] Yeah, it's it's interesting and welcome thoughts from others either in in conversation or online about that. It is fascinating. And I think the anti institutional element is very much present in a lot of other countries as well. One last question, as we wrap up and I guess it for, for me, it would be a question to each of you on. What's what would be your goal? What would be if you look out a couple of years? What would what would make us feel good about where we've gotten? I don't think it's getting rid of all of it. I

think it's about understanding. But when we think specifically about journalism and the way of telling stories and communicating news, is there sort of one, you know, here's what I'd really work towards. Tina.

Tina Rosenberg [01:08:39] Well, from my parochial perspective, as someone who whose mission is to try and get journalists to write about solutions. My goal would be that, we broaden our definition of news and we move it away from conflict, and we, we move it towards important things that are happening in the world, whether they are. The Ebola epidemic or the cure for Ebola being discovered. Those two things, one of them gets reported on and the other one doesn't. So I would hope that we can give a more accurate and full picture of the world to our readers through, through a more useful and more accurate and, and, and more whole, definition of news and that this is a tool that journalists use when appropriate, like investigative journalism is. That's what organization is hoping for. I mean, what I other than that, my personal hope is that, we can rebuild a local news. We can not just rebuild it, but make local news better, build back better. Like inthe United States and everywhere in the world where it's threatened. Because that is absolutely key.

Richard Gingras [01:10:09] The thing I would suggest, and obviously I'm speaking for myself. This is you know, Google doesn't have a position on these things. But the thing I would suggest is this might be really careful and thoughtful about doing whatever you can such that your publication isn't seen to have a partisan line. And I know that's hard in today's world, but as soon as it has a partisan lean, then you become part of that team. Your red team, blue team hate the whole concept of red team. Blue team. And if that's the way things fall, I don't see how we get ourselves out of this. And there too, if we look historically at what's happened in countries, it doesn't end well. So how do we kind of, if we can't find ways to kind of go across the chasm, which again, goes back to that, you know, where are the areas of content and interest? It cut across the chasm to help decrease that sense that you are the other.

Mónica Guzmán [01:11:18] Yeah, I'm looking for a journalism that has the guts to be intellectually humble. And the best, definition that I've gotten of that is from a researcher named Darryl van Tongran. That humility is about being the right size in a given situation. If you are, you know, too big in a conversation. You might be arrogant. If you're too small, you're a pushover. I think in a lot of situations, journalism walks around and it's too big. We need to be more humble, about what? We don't know so that the people we serve can be more humble about what they don't know. And that's going to be extremely important going forward.

Sonal Shah [01:11:57] I'd say for us, just building trust, building trust with the communities that we work in, building trust with the state that we live in, that people feel and find us because they believe that what they're going to read us is trustworthy, and it's something that they believe is important for them to know.

Amy Mitchell [01:12:15] Well, this is just to have been terrific. And thank you all who's sending questions. There were a lot of wonderful questions. I hope we can share them with the speakers, the ones that we didn't get to hear. On stage. Thank you all so much.