

SAM:

Hello everyone! Please take your seats.

Welcome to the divisiveness panel. I am Sam I am from the Ryerson leadership lab. David is a Delavan mental theorist at the University of Ottawa. He is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow. He is also the author of his first book. Please welcome David.

DAVID MOSCROP:

Thank you. Is everyone ready to get divisive? Is that what this is supposed to be? We want to divide people? Everyone with blue eyes to the left and everyone with brown eyes to the right.

Thank you so much for being here on this snowy Sunday. I almost broke my neck on the way here. I thought I would wear these shoes and no coat. The panel is divisiveness. We will take you down to the depressive problems. Backup at the end, time permitting.

If we run out of time, we are going to figure it out on your own. Let me introduced our panelists. We will have several minutes for lightning round of questions. The lightning will be you asking twitter style. Questions should end with the question mark. Otherwise it's a statement.

Let me introduce Martin. He's also a veteran of the Kerry and Obama campaigns. He worked for the Obama administration. His background in commercial software and using technology to support political action. Elizabeth Dubois is an Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa. She researches how people research.

She leads a multidisciplinary team. She happens to be my postdoctoral supervisor. Computer scientists and communication students. She also collaborates with nonprofits and others.

You can find her on Twitter at @lizdubois. Jane Hilderman. Dear old friend. She's the executive director of the Samara Center for democracy. She strengthens democracy by making it more accessible. She is frequently discussing tomorrow's work across the country. She has done her work at Parliament Hill. I didn't notice until recently she is a fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. She also strives to make Canada's democracy better to Canadians and the world.

Last, but not least, Mohammed Naeem he is the associate at more in common.

Last October he found hidden terms which was published in the 'New York Times' and others. His engagement with civil society has a background in medical research. He lives in Los Angeles. Let's get right to number one. It's on the back of one of these pages.

What are we talking about when we talk about division. I will start to my left with Elizabeth. How do you define it and can you sort productive versions of it versus unproductive?

ELIZABETH DUBOIS:

Is a good question over the last couple days we have heard a lot of things like filter bubbles and polarization. We intuitively want to group these things together. I think we need to be really clear about the idea that in all groupings of people are bad.

Not all of it leads to toxic polarization. There are a lot of useful ways to have populations divided. For example, we are more likely to engage politically if we are part of a community that is like-minded. We will get more contributors if we are part of a community that requires similar values. That does not mean that we only hear from those people, but having that sense of connection is really important.

In my work, what I am looking at typically, is how people form their political opinions in the way that they encounter different bits of information.

Whether or not they are the same, or if they have a variety in diversity within their media type.

What I am talking about is this idea of exposure to different types of ideas. This is one small slice of the larger question on how we get segmented politically.

MARTIN CUÉLLAR:

I am a member of Indivisible Chicago. The visible is right there in the name. Largely, we are both embracing and fighting against the vision. Most of our approach and activities based on resistance and opposition to the Trump restriction. It's very divisive in some of our tactics and our approach.

Our name is "Indivisible" because we are striving to remain in dues visible in that resistance. Bringing in as many people as we can.

Not letting ourselves get divided. As far as the good things, as I said we need to embrace the division in our opposition. The thing that we are challenged with and look out for and resist ourselves most of the time is intergroup divisions. That is very difficult, as we try to maintain a large organization in overall goal.

An example of the intragroup division in the United States, and the politics of the left in 2016 was the Bernie versus Hillary. It was largely overblown and fostered from Russians, and others. Both outside of the country and within the country, to get more divisions on the left side.

That something that we continue to deal with and fight.

MOHAMMED NAEEM:

We have been studying division particularly in the form of political polarization. Although I specifically represent a US portfolio we have been doing similar studies in Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands exerted. Our US methodology which I report details... Elizabeth is right because of the heightened state of division, you have higher levels of political activity.

It is in my belief and our organizations mission to see what divides folks and bring them back to the. Taking my More in Common hat off, as a divisiveness is only helpful when it ends in negotiation. Where you have a sense of blossoming ideas. If divisiveness is being used as a tool to get across to her agenda and crush the other side, it's generally not helpful.

As we studied the spectrum in the US, what you generally end up with as it currently stands is two wings on other side of the spectrum incredibly calcified. One wing where it believes where you should have human rights, access, refugees should be protected. Another side that believes in religion, faith... Then you have an exhausted majority.

This state of the vision you end up with a substantial amount of division in the country because of the politics. You cross that line which is difficult to cross back. I will go into what that means for the US, but also for Canada.

JANE HILDERMAN:

True confession time had anyone in this room gotten angry? I think human nature, anger is one of the many emotions that is normal and that we feel from time to time. It can be a highly productive emotion if you are a student of history of any social change, chances are it started with anger.

That goes to your point, Mohammed, it is incredibly mobilizing force. It can lead to a lot of productive things. In the sense of in politics it takes the shape of allegiance to a partisan ideology, or identity. Lately the problem is that we stoke anger so well and do not have the necessary respect and structure to respect that it should be the escalated. To find points of compromise and reconciliation.

We look at politics, and the Samara Center has been looking at how our political leaders are microcosm in some ways, and how they think about the use of anger in their politics.

How they often has applied a lens around us, versus them. You are with us or against us. It does not lead to that point of de-escalation that can happen.

I think polarization is some ways always have been part of politics. But it has become calcified. It is being replicated for Canadians, as well. Our leaders are doing it. We can talk about how to untangle

that cycle.

DAVID MOSCROP:

To some extent, divisiveness is a tactic and a byproduct. Depending on what you're dealing with. You might have different approaches to thinking about it. Let's get some examples on the table. What we consider divisive. I will start with Martin, what is divisiveness in this talk six cents look like? When we look at the world and say, that is divisiveness, what are we looking at?

MARTIN CUÉLLAR:

One is social media, and the conversation we see there. There is a troll mentality in that way of behavior. It is not limited to social media. The troll culture that is trying to get someone else riled up, and to knock somebody else's down.

That is a huge problem, across the board. It gets in the way of real dialogue and understanding, and pushes people a part.

ELIZABETH DUBOIS:

I agree there are spaces where there are full-blown trolls, and get people riled up in a way that might not be productive for advancing democratic desires. We need to remember the vast majority of the population are naturals, they do not engage withdrawals, and when they do they do not trust the information they receive from them.

An important component is the emotional response, but we need to remember that humans are pretty good at evaluating other humans. We are getting much better at evaluating things at look like computers, like automated or trial accounts that have been motivated to act the way they do because an algorithm promotes that activity.

The sensationalism gets out on social media. People are an important part of this equation, I think. I want to put it out there that we tend to get really afraid of what the trolls or bad actors could do. When in reality the vast majority of the population is not being directly affected by it.

MOHAMMED NAEEM:

I agree. This is part of the reason why division received so much attention. Algorithms are set up to highlight that division on social media. It is the responsibility of the business to respond to shareholders, not the government.

The government regulates, and if they cannot regulate, businesses will do what they want. Another reason why the division is highlighted on social media, because folks spewing that are incredibly uncertain about what their values are.

14% of the US population is generally driving the conversation around climate change, raise, and any issue you can think of. Because they get broadcast, traditional and social media coverage, you are drowning out the voices of a substantial part of the country.

They don't have the confidence or feel like their voices matter. We speak... when I specifically speak to nonprofit leaders, and so forth, the key topic is social division and polarization.

If you don't reflect and think about how you will sell this, and about a solution,... A great example is the gridlock we saw in Washington. Because of the degree of division you had an entire government shutdown for an entire month.

People stand in bread lines. It had real consequences in real ways. This is not about politics. This is about lives. At that point you start to make some tangible progress.

JANE HILDERMAN:

I'm going to take it in a different direction. Not because I don't think social media is a part of it, but I conducted interviews with former members of Parliament to talk about their jobs. What worked well, where they struggle, what would make them more effective.

One channeled the frustration. He felt really well when he described his voting record was 98.6% of the time along with his party. That was considered a rebel because it wasn't 100%.

As such, it's funny because he said it was really hard to explain how much pressure goes to conform in our politics, inside parties selected. If the Democrats and Republicans had a 98% record, it would make votes in Congress way less interesting.

I use it like an interesting example where in the divisiveness is lacking in on one side versus the other. It does not leave room for that sort of creative thought to explore ideas or options that might be adjacent that are deemed as the "Position" of a leader or of a party.

That serves a discussion of what needs to be done really well. Huge questions about how to design an economy, or education for the future. I think we need much more flexibility in our politics, than ever before, to discuss innovative ideas.

Canada has said if you're not with us you are against us, even within the same party.

DAVID MOSCROP:

We are sort of mixed about military rule. Good to know. Technocracy. Ruled by the experts 50-50.

Some people do not care about progress. Just delivered. They do not care what happens to the outcomes.

To what extent is this divisiveness... A bunch of people really want to be divisive or folks at the top just really want results. We can pit the 14% against each other, set the agenda, and take it there.

JANE HILDERMAN:

We are living in democracies that were designed, and there has been a lot of change. We are hanging on to structures that still need to evolve, and we do not know how yet. When we make changes, sometimes there are good ones.

There are consequences we need to be aware of. There was a panel yesterday, I was talking about the role of political parties. One Democratic strength was getting political finance right, we eliminated corporate donations, eliminated union donations.

We don't have some of the problems that come with unlimited donations and spending, that we've seen in the Old West. Some depend upon raising all their money from small donors.

To do that, they rely a lot on pressing those emotional buttons. It is almost demonizing the other side, at times. Really plane up an event, it really is not such a big deal. You have to keep them angry, engaged to keep them donating.

It is illustrative, and the fact that we come into conversations with the best intent. We have the change or solution. We really need to pay attention to those unintended consequences.

SAM:

Do you see the emails that we get now? Yesterday Justin sneezed. They were saying, "Oh, no! He is germinating parliament!"

SPEAKER:

I thought the US had a lot of problems. It plays back to group identity. I was an organizer and doing large-scale mobilization work. How many remember what happened in Charlottesville? How many heard about the 118 mile march that went from Charlottesville to Washington DC?

I was one of the core leaders who lead that march for 180 miles. It was in the deep, red South. You saw folks who were telling us, particularly, to go back to China.

It was really weird. I was like, "OK, I've never been there, maybe I will go sometime."

(Laughter)

You had folks who were really dated or had not received the correct information, or devalued what we were striving for. The other side, there was also tension within the group that was organizing this effort.

With the attempt of the Virginia State Police department, we received a 30 police escort for 180 miles. At the time Governor Terry McCullough was under the gun, and he did that. There were attempts within the group to insight.

Some level to insight the police department to... what's the word? To arrest us or stop us along a road, and so forth. I absolutely did not agree. The reaction from the group was you are a guy, you are speaking with the group.

The words made characterizations to my character, me being white, and a Muslim. Then they started making racial slurs. My father was incarcerated when I was a kid, I grew up with a single mom, my sister had blood poisoning.

I know what they are going through. That kind of attitude to insight another body because you just want to make political headlines. That is not true to who we are. It is against the very principles we fight for.

Doctor King did not do that. He spoke of sisterhood, brotherhood, and spoke good. That is one of the reasons why I ended up working for More in Common. Anyways.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

I want to add a couple things that I think that are part of the problem of everyday consumer politics. The way that our media works in the US. It's a full side type of problem. Everything that the present is presented as if there are two sides that are equal.

That colors and distorts what people say. There are not always to equal sides. They are not always to valid opinions. Particularly in the US where we are dealing with neo-Nazis and white supremacy. There is not another side to that. It's climate change or not. It's presented as two sides.

I think both sideism leads people to not see the problems for the magnitude that they are. Or tune out thinking that their needs are not being addressed.

Similar to that is the problem of centrism. That is in our politicians. The politicians that will want to work across those two sides. Make a deal with the neo-Nazis. Whatever deal you can make with them.

Making a deal is not always acceptable when you're dealing with people in organizations that are as extreme as they are.

We reject that dealmaking. Those concessions with this particular administration when it comes to things like building the wall. It has no foundation in any kind of numbers or metrics that you can think of. It is purely race-based.

I hope you all don't have to deal with those issues here as much or at all.

You can find a way not to get to this point that we are in.

SAM:

Parliamentary democracy is a good start.

SPEAKER:

I would like to jump in on the media point that you brought up. The two sides when really there are not two sides to most problems. Most of the time there are way more, and then sometimes we as a society has already dealt with it. No, there's one response to it. I want to talk about how people interact with the content.

There is a content that is being pushed out by major media companies by the US. That affects the Canadian consumer as well. A lot of Canadians also make use of American content because there is more of it and we are close by. When we think about how people actually go and take that content on board we see that people have a few key sources they go to regularly.

They may be the Fox News people. They make sure that they know what the headlines were.

They also tend to have a variety of other things that they check in on periodically. This idea of people constructing their own media environment in a way, to a certain extent, can counteract a certain balance in journalistic practicing. That is interesting.

I don't want this being a thing where I'm not in support of balanced media, if we can have that all the time that would be nice.

It seems a bit counter to be a critical thinker and an engaged human. The idea that let's think about a media system that is not just, you go to this one source, and what that source puts out and that is it.

Let's think about how people actually go and make use of social media. Make use of their friends and family if you're having it checked and who do you trust and what does that mean.

It is one thing that is a Silverlining that comes out of the, everything is fake news discussion.

At this point the digital media environment continues to evolve.

DAVID MOSCROP:

What time is it? Do we have to start questions? Here's a fair warning. For the third theme I'm going to ask you how it affects us before that, what is different from divisiveness in 1930, 1960, 1990.

It's hard to look at any time in the last hundred years, and not think that it was as bad as 1968, for instance. What is the difference now, and in the last century where we see divisiveness being more toxic?

SPEAKER:

The major difference that I have seen is that we think that we can quantify it in a reliable way. We cannot actually do.

Come talk to me after if you want me to explain why it is so bad. We think we can and then journalists report on it. Governments make use on it to support policymaking choices.

Wind up having this view of, look how divided we are. We have these numbers and it must be true. I think that's the biggest change.

DAVID MOSCROP:

Do you think it's overblown?

SPEAKER:

In different places it is different. The US context is different from the Canadian contexts when you come from two different parties you will have a better idea on the divisiveness. The fears that we have the people not being able to deal with the information that can be hyper partisan, think that's overblown.

The extent is so contextual.

DAVID MOSCROP:

One of the things that are different now... One of it is the in vitro in the US. We are dealing with white

supremacy but we are also dealing with one party that does not believe in democracy. Jerry going against the norms of democracy. Suppressing votes. Their basis is fine with that.

The magnitude of the problem against democracy is one of those major things. Another thing that is different, but in a good way, is the ubiquity of cell phones.

With video on them. There are morbid jokes that once everyone had a video recorder UFO's stopped abducting people and police started abusing people. We knew that this was a problem. It persists to be a problem. The police have been abusing certain parts of our population.

It has led a lot of people come to terms with who they are and where their place is in society.

It has opened up and let some of the communication flow that was not there before.

SPEAKER:

On police brutality... So pulling is an issue. Public opinion polling gives you binary answers. You agree with the government or you don't? Yes, or no? When we tested folks in the US. we had an 8000 sample group. There is considerable depth to our study. When we started asking questions about immigration, gender, and social justice, and race. Whether they think that immigration is good or bad for America...

When we do the cluster of information we created a spectrum using no Democrat of spectrum. It was 50 questions that tried to understand why people were holding the views that they did. These questions focused on your moral foundations, your parenting style, your perception of threat, your group affiliation and so forth. When you dig deeper into that human psychology, which spans humanity.

It's not specific to the United States. Humans, whether you have a high perception of threat, you're probably going to be off to newcomers coming to the country. If you are tied to your group you're going to show signs of tribal identity. When you do that analysis it gives you a more robust picture of where we stand as a society.

Then, those assumptions that you're making are not so exaggerated. The issue is that what happens is that the progressive left uses these binaries.

26% of the population is a group that is the most diverse and more conspiratorial.

There is a group that is ideologically more coherent but have this tendency. If this group were to slide up the voting margin by about 5%, the US is in trouble.

We need to think about the way in which we engage people who are apolitical but also to be thoughtful of what we are doing when we push that binary. When you push that binary the opposite reaction will be that. Overall, it will be dangerous.

SPEAKER:

I'm going back to the institution side. There is a recollection talking to older ones on how it used to be less divisive in the past.

There was a collegiality across the aisle. They would go out to meals together. They would go on fishing trips together. This was an era in the 60s and 70 where they were largely dudes.

I don't want to echo back to a period of time where things might have been "better" or less divisive.

We are not going back to having that homogeneity of leadership. We want our institution to be more diverse, and more like our communities. We are on that trendline. It's the slope trendline. It's happening all over.

Most recently it has happened in the midterm elections in the US. It is happening in Canada too. I think it's great. It goes to that purosness in our government.

It's the broad description of that broadness.

SPEAKER:

People often go back to the golden age of democracy. My favorite is when they go back to Greece. In about a minute each... I know this was going to happen. This is the solution section. We have about a minute of peace. How do we start to address this. You can reference something that you are involved in, worked on, or seen.

How do we start to address the toxic version of divisiveness. Jane, do you want to lead us off?

JANE HILDERMAN:

I'm not sure that they are necessarily at the front of the parade on this one. In the longer run, they wanted to make a solid long-term investment, it would be supporting more that Liz was talking about. Political literacy. We could talk about digital literacy, media literacy, media literacy.

I think our politics... I don't want to make this too much about your eat your broccoli moment. We have lost a lot of informal spaces where we lived together as people. These were power structures that may be did not work well, but at least there was some effort to try to unpack them and understand how you

may change them. This was done in religious communities.

It was done in big federated communities. These things that don't exist in the same way anymore. We have online communities. Communities that live on our social media sites. I don't think they're quite fulfilling the same function in that way. We have lost the opportunity of our own citizenship.

I say that because I think it's going to come from that silent majority, or exhausted majority in the middle who is going to be the source of change in our politics. How do you equip them to ask... For some reason, I would love to hear from you about why parties are market oriented entities in the sense that they look at how they get more voters.

If there exhausted in the middle, why are they being tapped?

MOHAMMED NAEEM:

At the end, it seems like we lost morality. The substantial part of the country, over three quarters, believes our differences are not so great and we can overcome them. That is significant. 80% believes racism is a problem. A substantial part believes refugees should be harbored.

My response is not an actual program or strategy, but narrowness never wins out. Largeness will always win out. Every Democratic candidate in the United States has needed to win over swing voters. Without it, they have lost every single time.

Every movement, the goal should be largeness. Losing the bedrock of who we are. You want to feel like people have your back, regardless of the political orientation of your paper. There's no excuse for racism, and that should be called out in droves. Absolutely.

At one point we will have to think about that the country is split as it is, and how are we going to bring it back together? If you have not invested in the bedrocks that provide our kids to go to school, and provide jobs, people will feel devalued.

That is a problem As much as anything else, but there is hope.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

Our parties have failed us. Why they failed us, exactly? I believe it to all to tell us. We are doing many things to address it. Our focus, post midterm election going forward, is several initiatives, like voter expansion.

Reaching out and finding all of the voters who have never voted before, those who have stopped. Election integrity is part of that as well. Making sure people's votes are counted and in the register.

There's also a big push to reach out across different groups. Advocacy groups work on different policies, and populations. They have been doing it for many years and do it very well.

Also, reaching out to academics and policy experts to teach us the right way forward for policy. More specific policy. If Cortez came up with a bad policy, we would call her on it. We aren't just going to go along with it. There are reason why we have not joined up with the party, there's a reason why the... With incumbent Democrats, and with those who are against with what we believe, which are progressive values.

ELIZABETH DUBOIS:

I will talk very specifically about the context of social media platforms, and search engines. That is what my research is on. We are going to try to fix divisiveness through that lens.

I think the way we fix this is one, to recognize that it already happens. It is just happening poorly. That means that companies are already making decisions about what shows up, what doesn't. These are those political spaces Jane mentioned.

These are not just physical spaces that people go where they share, exchange. If there be community standards, the tech companies need to uphold them. The companies are international, and they do not have the financial motivation to address the Canadian context.

That is where the government comes in. The government has to not be afraid to regulate. We need to recognize that space is crucial. This is not a partisan concern, and we should not think that we should not have this regulation.

We already know there is a concern about whether or not something is harassment, Conservatory. There are things that should not be allowed in public spaces.

We should think about them that way. The journalism industry needs to decide if they should be talked about publicly, or not. When the goal of the interaction is just to get media attention, that is something that the media should probably not give attention to.

(Applause)

DAVID MOSCROP:

Do you want to wrangle?

SPEAKER:

We only have time for two questions. This is going to be tight. I don't know who put up their hand first.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

My question is for you, Elizabeth. You talked about moderating content online. You take voices off the internet. I agree that some voices should be silenced. You also have a tendency to galvanize the supporters.

When something was taken off YouTube, people get louder about it. How can you strike the balance between keeping voices quiet, but at the same time, not making the supporters louder?

ELIZABETH DUBOIS:

It has a very important answer, when you say a voice should not be here, it is worth reporting, and will get attention. Tech companies have a series of ways to deprioritize information so it doesn't remove the voices, but instead makes it so the information is less accessible to a wider public.

That still brings up problems. These processes are super arbitrary and really inconsistent and harmful to the most marginalized population. Historically, when we seen these platforms take things down, is typically people who do not have a big voice, and those people are those who are more problematic.

SPEAKER:

We have to wrap it up right now.

SAM:

We're done!

(Applause)

Thank you for coming. Thank you, to the panelists and the organizers.

SPEAKER:

Hi everybody, we are going to get started. Welcome to 'The Uphill Climb of Non-Partisan Democratic Engagement'. My name is Sam and I have the pleasure of introducing John Beebe. He was formerly with Samara where he developed nonpartisan engagement tools, including Vote PopUp.

He was in the U.S. Congress as staff to Congress in. We are very excited to have them with this panel. Welcome, John.

JOHN BEEBE:

Thank you very much. Before I introduce our panel. I want to get a sense of who is in the room. You might want to look around and get a sense from each other also.

Who has worked on a partisan engagement effort? Who here has worked on nonpartisan engagement efforts? Amazing! Has anyone worked on nonpartisan engaged political Democratic Engagement on a full-time basis? That makes me very happy.

I think, one of the overarching themes, and this is why we entitled this presentation 'The Uphill Climb of Non-Partisan Democratic Engagement' is that, in Canada we have a infrastructure of Democratic Engagement that relied very heavily on our partisans.

In terms of both the political parties and people who work for advocates around particular issues. That is how I describe it. We will unpack that, in a little bit.

Appear, we have some of the folks who are leading the nonpartisan Democratic Engagement. In the short time I have been in Canada, and have been a Canadian, I voted for the first time in the last federal election.

I have been very fortunate in to work in the space with these folks, I work and dryers where we work on developing tools. We are interested in seeing how we can ever lie that.

I will introduce some, then we will jump into the conversation. We are time-limited. I hope to open it up to conversation. Knowing you are a sophisticated audience. We will ask the tough questions of ourselves. That is what drives us and helps us to this work or effectively.

Seher Shafiq was recently named as the top Muslim youth making an impact in Canada. Since its inception in 2015, she has been part of the leadership team of The Canadian-Muslim Vote where she served as a community mobilizer, executive director and boardmember.

I won't read everyone's full bio, but one of the things I would note about Seher Shafiq, is that she was committed and worked in the space of nonpartisan engagement.

Including in.... For all Muslim leaders in the last election here in Ontario. She will talk how that has been a source of strength for the work she has done.

Samantha Ruesch is a Research & Evaluations Manager with Apathy is Boring. For those of you who don't know Apathy is Boring, you should. They have a long history of doing incredibly impactful non-partisan engagement with young people across Canada.

One of the things I love about the work they do, and that Samantha has on, is that they are incredibly reflective of their own practice to constantly improve, and constantly get better at what really works to get people back into the conversation.

Saeed Selvam is the manager of public policy, and former director of public affairs for Canadian Centre for International Justice. He has been a host of different activities throughout Canada, building a civil society. How do we strengthen the voice of communities who are not participating and who do not have an effective voice.

Last is John Rae, who brings a lifetime of experience as an advocate for disability rights where he has, and continues to work in community government and unions. John has really been a champion in this space, and I think brings a level of wisdom and experience that I think will enrich this conversation.

He has been involved in fights that have really transformed what it means for folks living and fighting with disabilities. He also saw the challenge of advocating in a space where you have a group who is not always engage, and often not heard as part of the conversation.

Those are the folks there. We are just going to jump in to the deep end of the pool here. One of the challenges that I feel, and that keep me up at night, is to go back to first principles of.

As we see the challenges of democracy we need to understand to see what we can do and why we need to defend that. I am a new Canadian, and I am learning about the space.

I was surprised that there was not a broader effort around nonpartisan democratic engagement. I would love to hear from the panel about why nonpartisan demographic engagement are needed. What is the value? Why can't we let the parties do the work?

Why don't we just leave it to them? Why do we need the space in Canada?

SPEAKER:

In preparing for the panel I looked up the definition of democracy. It is a system of government why the whole population or eligible numbers of the state particulate through elected representatives of.

If we know that the whole population is not participating that is why we need nonpartisan specific engagement. I do nonpartisan work because I think that is the best way to have more representation the formal Democratic channels.

SPEAKER:

For us, we think along the lines of what are the outcomes for? Have a political outcome, but if you step back and look at democracy as a whole, when you see groups participating less, you wonder what the new outcomes, possibilities, or ideas are brought into the space and perspectives.

That is how we approach, we try to be facilitators amongst youth. That is part of the work that we do.

SPEAKER:

It is important to have nonpartisan engagement because you need to get involved... When it comes to government, and getting elected in government, oftentimes it requires certain segments of the population to be involved, and others not to be involved.

The structures that allow people to remain in power don't allow for others to get involved in the democratic process. That is why it is important for people, groups and organizations to start speaking up.

When people do not speak up, you have the same folks being reelected. I think there is a lot of practicality with getting involved. Especially when the government and structures are not creating opportunities for you to get involved.

There needs to be a better effort and momentum.

JOHN RAE:

The issues that are talked about between elections are what creates a climate. The work that groups do between elections, that does create a climate and it influences the issues that are talked about during an election.

Is a disability community, we have never been brought into the process. Last year, I think there was a record number of candidates who have some sort of disability running. Anyone want to take against of how many that was? The number was 13. That is the highest it has been.

People with disabilities comprise at least 20% of the population, and only 13 of us ran in the last Federal Election. I leave a voting booth not knowing if I actually voted for the candidate of my choice.

That is why I want to see alternate methods of voting. For others, just getting into candidates meetings, there is a barrier. You cannot get in. There are a lot of barriers built into the electoral process.

The things that pervade our lives are part of the reason why political parties are not reaching out to us.

JOHN BEEBEE:

The "C" word, civic engagement, is a deadly word to use. It does not suggest the underlying rationale why people do not get involved. Pushing away from politics is leading to a political response.

From the perspective of the work you have been doing, where do you see power as a tool to mobilize people, and where do you see that being as a disconnect?

SAEED SELVAM:

One thing that is interesting to see, is that Democratic Engagement is not a privilege or a right. It is now becoming a luxury. When you have young people working long jobs, have a 82 minute commute to and from work, and when others have to deal with lower income realities, thinking how to get involved in civic or democratic recourse, is really becoming a last priority, for many.

Then it becomes, the people who get involved in this work, are the people who have the time, or the money, or who were employed to do it as a job. At the Laidlaw Foundation, because we are a funder, provide grants to young people who try to go to good in their community. We tried to get the voices who are not often heard, in the youth demographic.

Ideally want people who are in the worst situations, who are actually in need of finances to get themselves engaged, anyone to provide them the funding. At the same time we also need to recognize our privileges as a funder.

We are a funder that emphasizes that applications be youth driven, and written by young people. That is part of a requirement of getting a grant. There were a lot of organizations working for young people, but they were not youth led.

If you apply for a grant, your application has to be over 50 or 60% young people driven. We are starting to focus on the young people. We still have that piece of criteria. Young people have to be the ones writing the grant applications. How difficult is it for a person who was experiencing the challenges of the child where first system to sit down despite the many other issues that they have to deal with, to sit down and write a 5 to 10 page grant? And then risk the fact that they might not get it.

It's hard to get people involved. That is a problem we are starting to see. Whether it is socially... They are so busy but they are saying that they are voting for that guy because they have the necessary. I'm voting for that guy because he has the nicest smile. That becomes problematic.

When you start to see that you step outside of your echo chamber and talk to people, people outside of this room are not focused on politics were being civic linkage.

How do you get them engaged? The people who are appealing to populism right now, this is why receiving shipped globally. They are winning because people do not have the time or the resources to focus outside of their immediate survival needs.

That is becoming a big problem. It keeps everyone else from getting involved in the real in-depth way that they should.

SPEAKER:

If I could build on that, I think first it is important to sanction between civic engagement and democratic engagement. Civic engagement could take the form of political participation and it could take the form of being involved in issues that you care about.

Democratic engagement and political participation is participating through the formal channels of politics have been placed in Canada. Things like voting or running for office. These formal mechanisms have been put in place, those are two different things. He made a really strong point about democratic election being a luxury... To have the time to engage in those formal mechanisms means that they are at a certain stage in their life.

When you were talking, Saeed, I was thinking about for years and the last federal election I gave the talk about the importance of voting. It was a lot of new immigrants. He stood up and said to the room, "I came here, I have five kids, and I'm working three part-time jobs. I don't have time to watch a full debate and inform myself on the issues. Then, make sure I go cast a ballot."

There's this huge segment of the population that is not engaging to these formal channels. That's where the power plays into the equation. This is a group of people who are not... They are separately engaged but they are not participating in the formal way. They are raised.

JOHN RAE:

This whole power disconnect is a major issue for the disability community. We have moved to a more positive discourse on disability. From what our community talks about from the change to the medical model to the social model. Where our barriers are now framed more in the way that society is constructed.

That more positive discourses useful. That is useful but it has not done much to change the power imbalance. Our chronic unemployment results in this. There are not nearly enough of us in the places where major decisions are made. Whether that is in the offices of newspapers, and radio stations, where decisions are made, and what stories are covered. Whether that is in the board rooms of companies that make technology.

What it is like going to a meeting and will it be made accessible from the get go? Or will we have to seek it?

In the primaries office where the legislation gets made. That's one of the reasons we continue to remain. Too many of us are on the sidelines, rather than in the mainstream where we want to be.

SPEAKER:

In terms of challenge... We have identified that these barriers to power... I also know that you all have done some very important and effective work to overcome these barriers. What is it that you are doing and how do you convince someone who is trying to balance many different competing interests, and ideas in their community, and bring them into this conversation in ways that is meaningful to them?

JOHN RAE:

It includes lobbying, litigation, and election challenge at each federal election, where we write to each party with a series of questions. Questions that we sent to our members across the country in hopes that they will use them at candidate meetings.

We have never succeeded at getting one single question about disability asked during a federal meeting. But we try.

That shows the notion that it's out of sight, out of mind. We comprise 20% of the population. Remember that. Our issues still get ignored.

SPEAKER:

I think about in the way that we work. I agree with every thing that my fellow panelists have said. I think about it in terms of moving forward. In terms of education we try to have those shared problems, whatever problems have been identified, that they know how those problems can be addressed or solutions can be formed in formal democratic channels. But, also, within community and civic spaces.

Young people are more connected in civic spaces, but that is not making them jump into democratic participation. We think a lot about how we can connect that civic engagement to broader electoral participation, and how we can get them into positions where they can be effective decision-makers for their young people, and the community.

In questions of access as well, thinking about financial resources, how often do young people get the opportunity to be leaders and make decisions?

Thinking long term if we are talking about us a sustainable democracy the voter outcome of youth

today will be the overall outcome over 20 or 30 years. What kind of democracy do we have if that the client? Transferring that power through whatever means we can, providing access and resources to use boasts our democracy over time.

When we started our organization four years ago it was started because we did some research and found that voter turnout across Canada was 35 to 45% which was lower than the national average which is 65%. In 2015 we spent the whole entire year doing grassroots outreach. We adjusted messaging in a way that would resonate with this group of people.

Long story short, all year long we did this grassroots campaign. 2015 federal election, the average national turnout was 60% and for the Muslim community it was 79% on average.

Where we were going to events and doing speaking, where we were spreading the room physically it was up to 88%.

(Applause)

That is proof that when you engage a community, there is tangible proof that they will engage formally in these democratic channels. When it came to the 2018 provincial election last year, once we had built that mobilization in 2015 and we had the numbers to prove it, all of a sudden we had the ear of all of the candidates that were running.

We ended up becoming the only organization, to my knowledge in Ontario that was sitting down with all four provincial parties and interviewed them. Not all of the candidates were agreeing to do media. We were able to sit down and tell them the issues we wanted to hear about. We had over 100,000 views when we publish them. When you mumble as a group and you showed to politicians that this matters, it can really impact the way that the playing field works.

SAEED SELVAM:

We offer micro grants around election time. In the amount of \$1000 for young people to apply to and host a whole town hall or some kind of civic engagement. Around the federal election we had some really amazing grantees that hosted town halls for their candidates.

One of the most exciting initiatives in terms of engagement is the citizen empowerment project. They are doing great work around the Finch area. They are educating and sharing information about how politics impact on the ground. They understand how to get mobilized and involved.

That is changing perceptions and realities. When people are not engaged they are not engaged because they feel that their voice doesn't count, or matter. Their vote doesn't matter. Or, everything is

relatively good. They basically said, "I have a roof over my head, food on the table."

Things are decent, let me just go to work and come back home and deal with some of the challenges in my day-to-day life.

Those are some of the issues that people have to understand. Their strength in numbers still.

When communities, especially communities that are not often represented, or reflected in politics. When they are reached out to by other groups and organizations, and they effectively get them to come out and vote, all of a sudden politicians stripping attention. We want to make sure that we keep funding network.

JOHN BEEBEE:

Talk about that. When you are at the door and talking about my life is not perfect but it's OK. Those guys don't really care about what I'm going to do, so... Sorry, bye.

We have all, in various settings, run into that response. How do you get beyond that, either in the moment, or in a broader systemic way in your work?

SPEAKER:

One of the things we find in doing research about why young people don't vote or participate, a really big one is often that no one has ever asked them to. When you look at the broader society, in general, when we think about the other spaces we are in, like workspaces or schools, if we don't expect democracy from the space that we live in, and expecting it from political leaders can be difficult also.

People don't think to engage in that way. When we asked, often people will respond, there are liberality's and people coming from backgrounds where that is not the case.

Bringing people into community, providing access to focus on things that interest them, getting them into decision-making roles, building power in a very personal and community based way.

The long-term view of that will be as they grow they will see the power in engaging more, and more. That leads to a fuller spectrum of engagement. That is a longer-term solution. In talking about short-term or immediate action, just getting involved.

SPEAKER:

We are doing to very specific things to address why they don't get involved. One is the videos that I mentioned. We reached out to the party leaders and have them speak directly about the issues to the community. We told the community these politicians care enough, so they should engage by voting.

We did that in 2015 encouraging the community to vote. One thing is engaging with them and join the community that they are engaging with you. Another thing we did, we have 800 - 900 community people at a celebratory dinner to celebrate civic engagement.

We also had 30 to 35 elected officials in the same room engaging with the community. That shows the politicians that the community is engaged and they cannot ignore them. 30 - 35 elected issues took an evening to be there, it shows a community.

JOHN BEEBE:

We will go to Q&A from you now. I have more questions that I would like to ask, but I know you are really engaged in the space. We have a mic here. Here is one up here, and another.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi. There is Behavioral research called 'Nudge Theory.' There is research showing that when people have education, they do not necessarily act like how they should. We need to give them a nudge. Nudge Theory is applied by people in leadership positions to get a desired behavior.

What would Nudge Theory look like if we reversed it, and applied it to them, and have them act like we expected?

SAEED SELVAM:

I think Nudge Theory is VERY fascinating when we look into it. It is typical politics - street-level politics. It plays out in all three levels of government.

When it speaks to them on continuing their power, that gives them a nudge. Anything that makes them look good, focuses on their PR, their branding, that gets a response.

Another thing to do is gather data. We, as a collective and his people as organizational as who worked there, if we rally around one issue at a time... We have a lot of fragmentation on cross issues.

When a leader is entertaining a lot of different issues, every single day, it is almost in the best interest of the government to have fragmentation. It doesn't really change anything. You have a lot of scattered voices, and nothing gets done.

When you have one unified voice, it is more likely that things get done. One way to nudge in the right direction is come together collectively. That is not happening because a lot are starting their own initiatives or policy, and because there's so many issues not a lot is happening.

JOHN RAE:

The goal of trying to nudge politicians, or political parties, or to push political parties would be to get them to become more like the Canadian graphics, to bring in more women and people with disabilities.

As staff, and volunteers, when they look at who make up the groups, to see people as part of it. If people don't see themselves, they aren't so likely to get involved. The more parties reflect Canadian demographics, the more minorities will get encouraged to participate.

SPEAKER:

We should say political parties need to do a better job at nudging Canadians. If people would email me and convince me to go into a store and buy a product that I literally do not need...

(Laughter)

... We all engage in behavior that we actually don't need. Why can't political parties engage with us in a way that is good for all of us? This is important for our lives. I think the bar needs to be a little bit higher for political parties, and elected officials, as well.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I have been an advocate for youth and have done research. What I wanted to ask, for example when the electoral law was changed, we had something in our research. We found that one knowledge that was available, was every time you voted, you funded the party you are voting for.

I am trying to say that electoral reform is incredibly important to what you are doing. How much of the advocacy work that you do is apply to political parties, as opposed to the people represent in the youth or the community?

JOHN RAE:

You raise the question of electoral reform. Interesting question. I have asked a number of proponents and I have challenged a lot of them. I asked if they could show me how likely it is to result in a outcome that is reflective of Canadian...

Not one has attempted an answer. Not one, nada, not one!

JOHN BEEBE:

I hear an opportunity there.

SPEAKER:

We tend to stay outside of the debate around electoral reform.

JOHN RAE:

So do we!

SPEAKER:

We do speak a lot to folks on the other side, we do advocacy work on behalf of youth.

It is really a cycle. Youth don't bow, political parties don't pay attention to youth, so you don't vote. You have to look at both sides. What are we doing in the youth population who don't vote? On the other side, encouraging political parties to engage youth and unlock that potential in the population.

SPEAKER:

Do you have any ladies with any questions?

SPEAKER:

You have a question?

SPEAKER:

Coming to you.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Highly tactical question based on your community organizing and get out to vote work. I am looking at case studies involving rural communities. Canada is not just dense rural areas.

We are in role areas where people have distant barriers, and you're asking them to do something that is quite difficult and requires a commitment of time.

Can you give me an example of what worked in rural communities?

SAEED SELVAM:

A lot of money. We had a town hall for the provincial election master. We knew there were a lot of young in rural and indigenous communities who would have trouble getting to the actual location in downtown Toronto.

One thing we apply to all of our funding aspects, we find there transportation and access. Grants come. In some cases they fly in, get honorariums, food. In order to engage people collectively.

We cannot be Toronto based. We have to acknowledge all the barriers that they face. In many cases it is about funding, and providing that funding. In this climate there was a lot more provincial government

support that was being provided to the communities, in the way of helping excess.

A lot of that has dried up. So a lot of pressure is on the community. We have to try to fill the gap, so it is not happening the way it is happening now. That creates more challenges. I think funding is a good first step. That is something we are trying to do.

SPEAKER:

We are not targeting youth. There is this distinction there because their values are different. Going into the selection, a lot of the work we are going to be doing is focusing on how we allow youth to self organize. To be able to go into the spaces they were already in and engage with their peers. Building those networks there, but allowing us to support that. Targeting rural youth will be part of our strategy. But we have not been excellent at it.

SPEAKER:

I think you pointed out a very important reality that we are facing. There is not a lot of research around this. There is a lot of opportunity for need in case studies and research. We are trying to burst moving forward. We need your help to make this a reality.

JOHN RAE:

I'm not one that tends to be a fan of technology.

Online webinars are ways of getting information out to people who are not able to get to where the event is taking place, for whatever reason. Distance is part of that problem. Technology can be a way of bridging that gap, sort of.

SPEAKER:

Any last questions?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

How did you decide that you would be a nonpartisan group rather than married to a political group. They have policies that best reflect their self interest.

JOHN RAE:

We do not endorse. We raise our issues with all parties, all the time. Governments do change. A party that may be in opposition now... And sometimes parties are way more interested in your issues when they are in opposition when they become government.

Hopefully what they learn in opposition they will take with them. You never know who is going to win an election.

I think it's critical that community groups work with all sides.

SAEED SELVAM:

We are required by law to be non-partisan. We have to be completely being nonpartisan. With that being said, that does not mean we cannot support certain policies going forward. Often times if those policies benefit people then we can throw our weight and support behind it.

We definitely remain nonpartisan for multiple reasons. It is good form because no matter what government gets elected, or at what time, we have the ability to at least begin starting that conversation to build a relationship.

SPEAKER:

Nonpartisanship is a huge core of what we do. It's really fundamental to the philosophy of how we approach youth engagement. It keeps us humble and going to spaces where we don't always have all the answers. We want to build power amongst youth for them to go forward and engage in those spaces. Philosophic, it keeps us in a space where we can do that effectively without getting caught up in our own desires.

SPEAKER:

Our reason was to affect voter turnout. This really was what was missing for this community.

JOHN BEEBE:

With that, we are going to have to wrap the formal part of this up. The lunch is next. I think everyone here is hanging out for little while. We hope that you will continue to engage. I will do a workshop this afternoon on the boat pop-up and voter engagement as we head into 2019. It is our hope that the Democratic exchange we will be able to lift up this work and make bridges. There is a nonpartisan component. Ultimately, it is about strengthening communities whose voices are not heard, and it is about power.

We heard that people are committed to lifting up and giving power to people who do not currently have it and using this as a tool. Thank you very much. Thank you for being here. Enjoy lunch.

(Applause)

(Music plays)