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AUDIENCE:

So my question is sort of two-fold. It sort of goes back on some of the other things we've discussed with the recent elections. So I've recently been following some of your stuff. And there's evidence that suggests that you sort of predicted the rise of the Trump campaign about seven years ago.

And I'm sort of curious, what was so different about this election? I presume you've seen the rise of many presidential candidates over the years. And I'm sort of curious to understand, what sort of prompted that speculation?

And the second part of my question sort of is looking more so into the future. So as we've discussed, America is probably more polarized. And it's sort of been-- in the past. And there's this idea that the clustering of like-minded Americans is tearing us apart. So where do you see the future of this nation going?

NOAM CHOMSKY: Well, I mean, there are many special factors in the United States.

Societies are different. But notice that what happened in this election, what actually happened in the 2016 election is that the mainstream establishment institutions were basically destroyed.

The two major phenomena in this election were the Sanders campaign among the Democrats and the Trump campaign among the Republicans. And they were both anti-establishment. And the voters went that way.

If you take a look at polling results, you can see it. I mean, anger and contempt for institutions is just phenomenal. If you ask people in polls, do you have any-- what do you think about Congress? You know, 90% say they should be all thrown out. In fact, about the only institution that has any respect is the military because you're taught somehow, the military is defending us from who knows what.

And the same is true in Europe. Take a look at the French election a couple of days ago. The two candidates were outsiders. The political parties barely participated. Macron and Le Pen are from outside the mainstream that has run Europe for 50 years. The center right and center

left parties are gone.

Same thing happened in England with Brexit. Same thing's happening in other European countries. We're seeing the phenomenon all over the Western world in which the centrist-- center left, center right-- institutions are under attack. People are angry about them. They hate them. They think they're not working for us.

And they're right. That's the effect of the neoliberal programs. We're all subjected to the same socioeconomic programs. They've had a similar effect everywhere. They've led to stagnation, decline, undermining of public services, inability-- Reagan's slogan, the state is the problem, not the solution. Let's turn it over to private tyrannies, which make it worse. That's happening. Bits and pieces of that are happening everywhere. So it happened in the United States in its own particular way.

But notice that it's two directions. It's Sanders and Trump. And I think in many ways, they're appealing to the same sentiments. And they could even converge.

A lot of the pop-- if you look at what people believe, the policies that they favor. A lot of it's shared.

So for example, across the population, all the way over to the Tea Party, people think there ought to be higher taxes on the rich. Probably a majority of the population thinks there ought to be national health care.

In fact, the support for nationally guaranteed health care has been so high over the years, that sometimes it's almost hard to believe. So in the late Reagan years, for example, about 70% of the population thought that guaranteed national health care ought to be in the Constitution because it's such an obvious demand.

About 40% of the population thought it already was in the Constitution. Nobody knows what's in the Constitution. Just everything good must be in the Constitution. Since this is so obviously good, it must be in the Constitution.

And right at the present, the most recent polls show somewhat over 50% supporting national health care. When Obama's Affordable Care Act was being pushed through, at first one of the proposals, one of the parts of it, was what was called a public option, which means you could choose if you wanted to be part of a government health care program. About two thirds of the

population favored that, but it was just thrown out without discussion.

And in fact, if you go case by case, there's a lot of similarity in the attitudes about social/political issues. Not necessarily cultural issues, but social/political issues among parts of the population that appear to be extremely polarized. It's very interesting.

In England right now, if you followed it, Jeremy Corbyn, who's kind of a-- a little bit like Sanders, is bitterly attacked by the media, including the liberal media, like The Guardian and by the parliamentary labor party. Meaning the guys who sort of-- the elites who run the party. They just came out with a-- I happened to be in England a couple of days ago, so I was reading the British press.

They just came out with-- the labor party-- with their program, which was just lambasted by the media-- crazy, lunatic, insane. It will destroy the labor party.

At the same time, polls came out asking people about the components of the program. They're all very popular. Very strong support among the population for the elements of the program. But attack on the party that's proposing them. And in particular, on Corbyn.

Serious activism and organizing could overcome this. I mean, you're fighting elite elements who have their own image of the way they want society to go. And in fact, there's quite a lot of interesting things going on. A lot of it is stuff that you guys might be interested in. It has to do with data harvesting.

There's a company called Cambridge Analytics, I think, which is run by some ultra-right billionaires. Peter Thiel, the guy who owns PayPal and a bunch of other things. Robert Mercer, who's a big hedge fund manager, multi-billionaire, a couple of others.

What they've been doing-- and this essentially gave the election to Trump-- is extremely careful data analysis. There's a ton of data now from Facebook and other things about people's personal preferences and attitudes and feelings. Are you depressed, all kinds of things.

And what they're doing is looking carefully at this data and analyzing it to see if you can find small numbers of people in particular areas who are vulnerable to one or another form of manipulation.

And what they're doing is trying to say, look. If they kind of tend to be liberal, try to get them to

get so disillusioned that they won't vote. And if they tend to be, say, traditionally conservative, maybe religious or whatever, try to get them to-- reach them individually in ways which will increase the probability they'll vote for the right wing.

This has small effects, but the elections are won on very small effects. As you know, Trump lost the popular vote by a couple of million. But in particular counties that made the difference, a couple of 100,000 votes shifted the election.

In England, Brexit was the same. They estimate about maybe 600,000 votes. The whole country switched.

Now, these companies using a lot of complicated data processing and statistics, and so on, are working on ways to try to control the electoral process. I mean, this is way more important than any of the nonsense about the Russian hacking. That's all garbage. But this stuff is real. And it's right in front of our eyes.

It's the people we know. MIT students going off to work on these things. And it has a big effect on controlling formal democratic systems.

This is Steve Bannon. This is his image of how you control the world, you know? These are people who are influential. They have tons of money. Deeply reactionary. And they want to use modern data processing. You know, big data, statistical analysis, and so on, to see if you can just find ways of swinging elections by going after individual vulnerabilities using the massive data that people provide through Google and Facebook, and all of this stuff.

Google and the rest of them use it for advertisers, so that advertisers can go after you individually and say-- you try to get a book on Amazon and they suggest 10 other books you ought to buy because they've got so much information on you that they think, maybe I can sort of sell this one. That's going on all the time.

But here, it's right in the middle of a political system. And it's really significant. Quite unlike the Russian hacking story, this is real. And it's not very far from us. In fact, it's happening right here.

There are things that can be done about that. Like exposing it for one thing. These should be live issues, I think, amongst students. Do we want to devote our lives to destroying democracy? Maybe.