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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
The plight of low-income white Americans
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PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

    FRED DEWS

Contributors:

    CAROL GRAHAM
    Leo Pasvolsky Senior Fellow - Global Economy and Development,
    Brookings Global – CERES Economic and Social Policy in Latin America
    Initiative
    The Brookings Institution

    JOSHUA MELTZER
    Senior Fellow - Global Economy and Development
    The Brookings Institution

    HARSHA SINGH
    Executive Director - Brookings India
    Senior Fellow - Global Economy and Development, Brookings India
    The Brookings Institution

    LITAL
    Graduate Student in Public Policy and Leadership Studies
    The University of Virginia

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, a podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. First up on today's show, unhappiness in America and how that's playing out in our politics, and then our new ask-an-expert segment, and finally, thoughts on the election from an Indian perspective. A quick program note about a special series of election events here at Brookings. Throughout October, we're having a series of public events where our experts talk about the most important issues facing the country and their ideas for how to address them. The conversations are moderated by journalist Indira Lakshmanan and are being released as special episodes of the Brookings Podcast Network on this show and on our Intersections podcast. Visit iTunes to subscribe to both shows and you won't miss any of these special events.

The US presidential election is nearly upon us and one of the many trends that we've seen is the strong level of support for Donald Trump among non-college educated white people, especially men, and at the same time, we're seeing the emergence of a new awareness of the cultural and economic situation of poor white Americans especially as told in popular books like J.D. Vance's, "Hillbilly Elegy" and Nancy Eisenberg's "History: White Trash." Joining me today to help us understand this phenomenon and the research behind it is Carol Graham, the Leo Pasvolsky Senior Fellow in Global Economy and Development at Brookings and also the College Park Professor at the University of Maryland. Carol, thanks for joining me once again on this podcast.

GRAHAM: Thanks Fred; I'm happy to be here.

DEWS: I was reviewing the history and you were on the show about two-and-a-half years ago, March 2014, in a show that we had titled "Measuring the pursuit of happiness," which I'll mention again in a few minutes, but for our purposes now, you've co-authored with Sergio Pinto a policy brief in our election 2016 series titled "Unhappiness in America: Desperation in white towns, resilience and diversity in the cities," so again referencing the podcast that we did in March 2014, can you offer our viewers a quick overview of what happiness and wellbeing research is all about – the kinds of happiness that there are.

GRAHAM: Right, and thanks for the question because I think it's important to understand the findings. So, we've developed, over the past ten years, a new science, so to speak, of measuring wellbeing. Happiness is the term that captures all the public attention, but in the end what we're doing is measuring people's daily experiences on the one hand – are they stressed, are they worried, are they content, are they in a good mood, as they go through their lives, and on the other hand we're measuring their evaluations of their lives as a whole: do they have purpose and meaning, do they have the opportunity to do what they want to do with their lives, and they measure different things and as we get through the conversation you'll see why measures of stress and so on are quite important, but the basic idea is that we're able to match these measures with income based measures; we're not trying to replace GNP, we're not talking about gross national happiness, but we have developed a whole way of measuring quality of life, daily experience, life purpose and meaning, life satisfaction that compliment what's in GDP data and in fact several governments, including the UK, the OECD has recommended this, are already putting the statistics into their official statistics gathering

efforts and we've made some headway in the United States as well and they're in some of our national surveys. With these metrics we often get a picture of human welfare or wellbeing that's not exactly what GNP is telling us and where I think the metrics are most useful is where they diverge.

So, we see, for example, a country where GNP is rising and life satisfaction is going down. If you take China during its very rapid growth period, we had incredible levels of growth, increase in suicides, declining life satisfaction – something I've called the paradox of unhappy growth. There are other more specific things that we measure, for example, again you may be seeing GNP growth increasing or you may be seeing individual income levels going up and yet people or cohorts – groups of people that we're going to talk about in a little bit – may be very unhappy or miserable or stressed precisely because they aren't acting the way standard economics would predict. Everybody's a rational actor and they respond to incoming incentives. Well, any of us that have lived for a while know that isn't always the case and we're able to measure things – try and bucket them very quickly into two groups: one is the wellbeing effects of institutional arrangements individuals can't change.

So if you think about if you live with bad governance – I didn't used to think about the US this way but we're' you know' we're dealing with a lot of things going on at the political level that make people unhappy and worried and stressed but the individual can't do much about that high levels of inequality, macro-economic crises, individuals can't make a choice in the way that economics would predict or assume that they can make a rational choice showing their preferences. Well, there are times you can't do

that and yet whatever is going on may have very bad or good effects on you and so we can measure that through reported wellbeing surveys.

And secondly, when you see behaviors that are not the result of sort of perfect rational choices but addiction or self-control problems, obesity, smoking, drug addiction, which we'll also get to, that may be the result of other things going on, but people are making choices that are actually bad for their welfare and we need a different metric to understand that and then lastly there are also times that you have, for example, very poor people with very limited information, limited expectations, limited education, who may not be making choices at all because their daily life is such a struggle that they're not thinking ahead, they can't they're just getting through the day and so to say that they're making choices is – they're making choices within a very constrained situation and we can measure the wellbeing effects of all of those things and complement standard income metrics with those. That's probably more than you want to hear but –

DEWS: No that's great and I want to get to some of the specifics about the wellbeing, or the ill-being as you've also termed it, in America in a second but just to follow up a little bit on the happiness research data, it's also global right? You have data across, not only for United States and Britain and the OECD companies –

GRAHAM: Around the world. 162 countries around the world so we can compare wellbeing levels across countries, which is actually less useful because it's more predictable. In general, wealthier countries have higher average levels of wellbeing; it hides a lot of the interesting nuances, but even then we get interesting things like, Latin American countries tend to score much higher than their income levels would predict. In part, quality of life is pretty good in most of Latin America. In part, Latin Americans are

culturally Happier, that comes out in the scores. I'm from Peru so I don't feel like I'm making, you know, completely uninformed comments about this but it's also just in the data.

Other places like Eastern Europe, Russia who've had very tough few years will score lower than their income levels would predict just because of lots of other things about their transition, there may be cultural differences, and the US, which is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, does pretty well but it scores lower than other countries of comparable income levels and I would argue, and I think that's what we're going to next talk about, is that that has a lot to do with inequality and wellbeing, which sort of matches inequality of income and opportunity; it's just another way of thinking about it. So, our average score is okay, our high scores are very high in terms of you think about the people who report high levels of life satisfaction, but the people who report low levels of life satisfaction are very low, much lower than people in other parts of the world.

DEWS: Before we go on, I want to call everyone's attention to the point about GNP, GDP, and Happiness. You're the author of a paper for another series at Brookings called "Global Debates." I had recently interviewed Homi Kharas, the deputy director of the global program, and it's one of a series of 11 papers that you and your colleagues have put together about very important issues in globalization. An upcoming podcast episode will feature Homi Kharas talking about that as well. Let's go onto your policy brief for the Election 2016 Project "Unhappiness in America: desperation in white towns, resilience in diversity in the cities." First of all, what is your kind of top-line finding about who is unhappy in America

GRAHAM: Let me backtrack just two sentences to explain how I got there. You know, I've spent most of my life working in countries around the world, particularly developing economies, but I was struck in entering this project on the big differences in terms of income inequality but big differences in reported wellbeing across the rich and the poor in the United States, which were larger than differences in wellbeing across the rich and poor in Latin America. So that, you know, set off some sparks inside my head and I wanted to understand it better and when I broke down the different groups, I wanted to see if there were racial differences in addition to income differences, we also looked at other things like age but they're less stark, and I was very surprised initially by the findings and then since I started to understand them better.

When we compared three cohorts: poor whites, poor blacks, and poor Hispanics, and we measured life satisfaction, optimism about the future, stress, which is a marker of ill-being – people who are under high levels of stress have difficulty planning ahead which I sort of hinted at before – and what we found was remarkable when we first found it, which was incredibly high levels of optimism among poor blacks, almost higher than any group rich or poor in the data, this is based on gallop daily data for the US; reasonably high levels of optimism among poor Hispanics, which I expected; and then deep desperation among poor whites, and when I found this, it was at the time that Ferguson was blowing up, all of the new dialogue about what's going on with poor whites didn't exist yet and I was quite surprised and then as I started to dig into this and try and explain it, I found two very different directions of findings, which we can talk about more detail, but one was just incredibly high levels of resilience and optimism among minorities and then this deep desperation among poor whites, which is also now

linked to new findings that we have on mortality rates going up among middle-aged uneducated whites. So preventable deaths and I know what we'll get to all that but that's sort of the first stark findings.

DEWS: So resilience on the one hand, desperation on the other hand, that's really kind of an incredible contrast there and unexpected. Why would you say that optimism is higher amongst poor blocks and poor Hispanics?

GRAHAM: There are a lot of reasons, some psychological, some just, let's start with the easiest which is kind of socio economic progress, and these are groups that have been traditionally discriminated against and it's obvious, you know, their life hasn't been easy, but if you look there have been real indicators of gradual progress. One is the education gap is narrowing, so the education gaps across the rich and poor now are much bigger than education gaps across blacks and whites. There are still gaps but they're not as racially determinant, it doesn't mean they don't exist, they exist. Life expectancy, all blacks used to have a life expectancy in about 1990 that was seven years less than whites and that gap has narrowed to three years, so that's a big change; life expectancy doesn't change that quickly, poor Hispanics mirror the trends. So there's been gradual progress in terms of less discrimination, better education outcomes, better health outcomes, and what, you know, possibly even wage levels narrowing a bit.

So that's the objective stuff, but the psychological stuff is also really important. So poor blacks and poor Hispanics have higher levels of resilience as as psychologists describe it and resilience is being able to preserve your health, both your physical health and your mental health, when you have shocks that should be psychologically damaging, so you come out of adversity and adverse situations with your same level of

wellbeing and also with reasonably decent health preservation and that's linked to I think two things. One is just much more experience with dealing with shocks, you know, if it isn't you, it's your parents have had, you know, had to fight to get where they got. I've seen this also across the world; poor people are able to make it, they get through tough stuff and that seems to build resilience that may be passed on from parents to children, and related to that,black and Hispanic individuals, particularly poor ones, are very likely to be comparing themselves to parents who are much worse off than they were.

Poor whites, at least unskilled whites, maybe not all poor whites, but say blue collar, less than college-educated whites are comparing themselves to parents who were better off than they were and it's not necessarily better off in terms of absolute income levels, number of TVs, or cars, it's in terms of job stability, status – kind of blue-collar jobs are much less available, they're harder to find and they're hollowing out in a lot of places – it's a combination of all a sudden having to deal with insecurity, often for the first time, and also a loss of relative status, people are catching up to them and some of the psychological data on mortality also shows that Blacks and Hispanics have this higher levels of resilience that also links to lower vulnerability, to health shocks, and others are able to recover better so it's a complex problem, we don't fully understand it but their objective economic, socio economic trends interacting with societal changes and also with just a trajectory of having dealt with a lot of shocks, and having had at least stable lives in the past.

DEWS: Time for "Ask an Expert," our new feature in which you ask a Brookings expert a question. Here's one I got from a graduate student in Virginia:

LITAL: Hi, my name is Lital and I'm a master's student at the University of Virginia studying public policy and leadership and I want to know how our protectionist policies affect developing nations currently and in the future how they will change depending on the elected administration. Thanks Brookings.

MELTZER: Hi Lital, thanks for that excellent question. My name is Joshua Meltzer and I'm a senior fellow in the global economy and development program here at Brookings. Firstly, the good news is that the United States has overall got fairly low average tariffs of approximately four odd percent, so most goods do enter the United States relatively easily and facing limited barriers, but there are some higher tariffs on goods - imports into the united states that are of importance for people and businesses in developing countries in particular. One example here would be for instance higher tariffs in the United States on certain textiles and clothing which is a major industry in parts of Central America and Asia and is a significant employer of lower-skilled, low-income people.

So making progress on reducing those types of barriers is certainly good from a development perspective.; it provides new opportunities to export in the United States and can support further growth and jobs in the developing world and ultimately is actually also good for United States consumers who get access to cheaper products. As a more general point, your question, I think, picks up on something that's been probably missing a little bit from the debate on trade in the current political climate, which is the extent that trade liberalisation has been a really important driver of development outside of the united states. So if you look at, for instance, at lots of Asia - China obviously – but before that it started with Japan and Taiwan and Korea, you look at certainly what's

been happening in Mexico and other parts of Central America, opportunities to have so-called export-led growth have actually lifted many tens, if not hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.

So trade's been a really positive force for development for many many years. In terms of the election outcomes, if Donald Trump was to be elected, his proposed trade policies would be very very harmful for the developing world. He's talked about raising tariffs on imports from China and imports from Mexico, both developing countries, his trade policies would likely create the conditions for a trade war where the United States and other countries would increasingly raise their own tariffs, which would make everyone poorer. Hillary Clinton has said she supports trade which is a very good thing; she has some misgivings about the trans-pacific partnership, which is the most recent trade agreement that President Obama signed earlier this year. The TPP as it is called, would be good for development. It includes a lot of developing countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia and Peru in the agreement and so again it would provide new access to U.S. markets and so that's a positive thing. We have to sort of see how that would transpire. If you want to learn more about international trade in the trade and development agenda, please visit our website and I look forward to discussing further.

DEWS: Thanks Joshua and thank you Lital. To show my thanks, I'll be sending you a Brookings coffee mug. Hey listeners, you can send in your own questions to our email address BCP@brookings.edu. If you attach an audio file, I'll play it on the air or maybe I'll meet you outside on the street. And now back to my conversation with Carol Graham. If you could then talk about that stress factor that you mentioned in these papers that particularly affect poor white people.

GRAHAM: Right, poor Whites are twice as likely to have stress in the previous day than poor blacks, which is pretty remarkable or poor blacks are fifty percent less likely to report stress in the previous day. I think that links to resilience, but what we find with stress and I think authors like Shaffir Inalaithan and others have written a lot about scarcity and stress and when people deal with constant negative shocks and sort of you don't know what's gonna happen the next day, you don't know, you know, if I get sick and I don't have health insurance, everything's over, which a lot of people live with in the U.S. today. Their work was based on the developing countries and poor people with this constant insecurity, but we have large numbers of people in this country that live with that same thing.

You know, the Walmart pulls out of a town in the Midwest and there's no other employment, what do you do? You have no health insurance, we don't have a great safety net, which we'll talk about more later, and that kind of daily stress has long-term cognitive effects so that it's, you know, if you can never plan for the next day, how can you plan for the future? How can you save for the future? How can you even think about that because you're dealing with a day every day, but that seems to have sort of longer-term effects. High levels of stress are linked to worse health outcomes across the board in a wide range of data.

DEWS: And then as you mentioned earlier, there's also opioid addiction, there's increased job loss, there's a bunch of other factors that spin out from this or are very much related to this.

GRAHAM: Signs of deep desperation and so let me try and cover two related things. So in terms of the deep desperation, yes, what we're finding is the mortality rate

in the U.S. is going up, which is unique among developed economies, say the top OACD economies. It's just us and it's being driven by uneducated Whites without a college level education and it's essentially preventable deaths. It's suicide, you know, opioid poisoning, alcohol poisoning, some of its obesity, and those kinds of, you know, things related to that, but mainly the real markers are the preventable deaths – I mean the immediately preventable deaths – and we have, I think, found kind of an opioid crisis, in particular, that is remarkable and it's linked to a lot of different things.

For example, Alan Krueger has a new paper on men out of the labor force and a lot of them are middle-aged Whites and they report high levels of pain, while a lot of people in high levels of pain seem to be also – have a lot of prescribed drugs, which has become an epidemic particularly among poor whites. I don't have the full explanation for that but I think it also links to the desperation data. If you're in a place where you have no future, right, employment has just hollowed-out, you aren't educated or skilled enough to switch, moving – where you going to move to? What are you gonna do? You see this this kind of vicious circle versus when you see people who have hope for the future, even if they're very poor in that – but they have, you know, some sort of hope for the future, they tend to do better; they live longer, they work harder, they're more productive, it's just, and that's documented in the trends, the data, not just for the U.S., but around the world. What is, I think, a social crisis that we don't fully understand is this sort of deep desperation among poor Whites. I mean I can objectively explain it as I have, but the extent of it, the depth of it, the solution to it, I don't think we really know yet.

DEWS: Mhm, I think J.D. Vance's book, "Hillbilly Elegy," really tries to capture that. It presents that in a very accessible and powerful way.

GRAHAM: Yeah, that's a great book and then another one we've also discussed a bit is a book called "White Trash" by Nancy Eisenberg who is making the point that this isn't new that because we, I think with good reason, have this strongly held American Dream and people can get ahead who come here from abroad or whatever it may be – people who work hard and invest in their education can get ahead here. It's harder and harder, but that there has traditionally been a segment of poor white population who live very different kinds of lives; they just never got much attention. The only attention they're getting now is from Donald Trump and it's exploded and woken us up to it.

DEWS: I do want to get two solutions before we finish here but first I want to go to another layer of your analysis in this policy brief, and it's in the subtitle "desperation in white towns, resilience and diversity in the cities." So you're making a distinction between towns and cities, can you explain that a little bit please?

GRAHAM: Right, and of course that's a title so, you know, but if you look at cities or metropolitan areas that are urban and they're typically more diverse, people interact much more, right? If you live in a city, there's a city center, you're on the subway, you're taking the bus, there're people biking, whatever it might be, so they actually have a healthier behavior, they are more diverse if you just look at the demographics vs say the hollowed-out towns in the Midwest that are predominantly white and what we call now the suicide belt, so by definition there're healthier behaviors there, but there's also, I think, much healthier social interaction. So if you live in a town in the Midwest where the

last employer, say Walmart, pulled out and there's nothing going on. There is no, you know, obvious communal center; people have to drive everywhere, it's really hot in the summer and really cold in the winter, and it's locationally dispersed so people are much more likely to be isolated.

The other thing that we looked at specifically, we looked at average levels of health behaviors across metropolitan statistical areas, rural and urban, and also racial diversity and we found that in general, on average, places with a higher level of percent black respondents or percent Hispanic respondents had higher levels of life satisfaction optimism for the future. Places with a higher percent of people that smoked or didn't exercise had much lower levels of optimism and life satisfaction. The pain data sort of mirror these and the stress data also mirror those findings. So again, it's pointing to these very isolated, quite homogeneous places in the country that also seem to match the places where the opioid problem is biggest. Again, we're talking averages and there are specifics that we don't have time to get into, but there is something going on.

And then in terms of the diversity finding part, I think it's just, you know, there's more movement, there's more going on, but if you look at the data on optimism among minorities, well that, you know, you have a higher percentage of people in your area that are optimistic and, you know, healthy, and are looking into the future, that will probably have some spillover effects as well.

DEWS: So Carol, one of the reasons I love working at Brookings is that I get to talk to scholars like yourself who are very data-driven; this is all data-driven phenomena, but another reason is that you talk about solutions. So, we could talk about the horse race aspects of the election and why Donald Trump is appealing to this

particular group or not, but no matter who wins on November 8th, and remember this issue will still be with us, this phenomenon will still be with us. So looking ahead, you discussed in your policy brief some of the policy solutions that are going to have to be considered by the next president by the country in generally, can you talk about some of those?

GRAHAM: Sure and, I again, yeah I'm happy to avoid the state of verbiage in terms of our election and if it's done anything it has woken us up to this social crisis we didn't know about. So, there are several things I've thought about, one of them is really trying to get a better handle on the causes and the extent of this. I think we have – the basic numbers that we have are compelling; we've got a big problem. Some of the political behavior associated with this is also, you know, adding to divisions and hopelessness and everything else. So we know that, but I don't think we fully understand the opioid crisis. The, you know, the depths of desperation. We need to document that a little bit better over time, including this kind of locational aspect to it and its links to inequality and inequality of opportunity and economic structural changes; I've done a lot of thinking about that, but there's sort of those data there and the desperation data there and matching them is a little more more complicated.

Secondly though, I think it's time for us to really reconsider what we do for people that fall behind. So, our language, the American Dream and everybody who is poor, there's a lot of – when there's discussion safety net programs, not everyone who talks about them but – a lot of the political dialogue is: well people are poor because they're lazy, or it's their fault, or that, you know – if you fall behind in the land of the dream, it's not a great easy thing. Our safety net programs unlike those in much of the rest of the

world and including in Latin America where we've seen poverty and inequality go down in the past decade, our safety net programs typically are hard to access, they tend to stigmatize the poor, the bureaucracies around our safety net programs are incredibly unfriendly versus the bureaucracies around Medicare, Social Security, the universally available Programs, they they function like semi- privatized or they are semi-privatized and they function very nicely, thank you very much, but if you need to get or access TANF, which is the cash assistance for needy families, it's really hard and support the levels of that kind of assistance have been going down particularly in Republican states. Earned income tax credit has gone up particularly during the financial crisis, which is a good thing, but there're people who don't have job opportunities as in these places in the hollowed-out Midwest where there aren't job opportunities, are not eligible for Earned Income Tax Credits.

You have people – what we call SNAP, which is our food assistance program has gone up but it's questionable how effective a form of welfare assistance that is. It's stigmatizing, it comes only in the form of food, it's not tied to investing in your future – it's it's, you know, it helps very poor families, for sure. Versus if you compare that to safety net programs for example the conditional cash transfer programs in Latin America who give poor people who fall below a cutoff line, non-marginal amount of cash so they, assuming that they're grown-ups and they can spend it on their family as – you know – they see best, conditional on them sending their kids to school and to the health post. So the idea is you're pulling them into society via the investments of their kids, investments in the future, but you're not stigmatizing them. They don't go to a store with a particular card that says I'm poor, I have food stamps or whatever. They don't have to

fight, you know, horrible bureaucracies that, sort of again, say, well if you need this, you're a loser and, you know, I think if you link the income data and the medical data with the desperation data, I don't think our safety nets are really helping and there's a final point on that which links to the difference in broadband access between poor and rich and so many poor households in the U.S. just can't afford broadband access and, again, also the incentives to provide poor communities are also lower, but if – going back to the sort of hollowed-out places in the Midwest, there is no, sort of, social assistance office in your neighborhood likely, right?

If you live in, you know, rural Wisconsin it's going to be in another town very far away and most of the the safety net programs now are actually – there is a digital access component to them and there are many poor households that don't have access to the internet, they can barely pay their cell phone bill and so they're precisely the households that should be able to get online to even see what's available and they're not getting, you know, the help that they might be eligible for and you know you combine that with desperation and drug addiction and everything else and you can see a kind of a downward spiral that's very worrisome.

DEWS: Well Carol, I want to thank you for your time and expertise today and helping us understand this phenomenon that will live on past this crazy election.
GRAHAM: Thanks Fred, pleasure to speak with you.

DEWS: You can read Carol Graham's policy brief co-authored with Sergio Pinto and all the Election 2016 materials on our website brookings.edu. Finally today, I have Harsha Singh, he is the executive director of and a senior fellow in Brookings India located in New Delhi. Harsha sat down with me to offer his thoughts on the U.S.

presidential election from an Indian perspective. Dr. Harsha Singh, welcome to the show.

SINGH: Thank you, thank you very much. Very happy to be here.

DEWS: Let's turn our attention, if we can, to the political situation in the United States. We have a presidential election coming up. Prime Minister Modi of India and President Obama have forged much closer ties over the past few years, there's been a number of one-on-one meetings between the two leaders and a lot of contacts between the two nations. How do you see the U.S.-India relationship developing under the next president, either President Clinton or even President Trump.

SINGH: Very good question and something which I'm sure a lot of Indian policy makers or those working on India would be thinking of. There was a book released, Shivshankar Menon's book, it's a very interesting book and those who want greater insight into India, I recommend this book to them. So both he and Nick Burns who was one of the panel members who addressed the issues concerned, noted that U.S.-India relations have actually been growing since President Clinton, that was the turning point.

With President Bush it became stronger and it was consolidated by President Obama and even in India, so you've had now leaders from two different parties who have been involved in building this relationship. So the point which was raised, which was emphasized was that there seems to be bipartisan support, both in U.S. and India for a strong relationship. The way I see it is the reasons which are responsible for consolidating that and making that more effective remain. So it is our hope that this level of engagement, meaningful engagement in several areas will continue because it builds even greater trust and better capability of understanding each other's concerns as well

as areas of common interest in a better way and how to take the common interests forward together and how to facilitate the achievement of whatever might be the different objectives as those who work together towards a larger common good should be able to do so.

So my hope is that will continue; however, as in any election, this election also has seen strong views being expressed. That's common in every country when elections take place, you make statements like that. So when the new president comes in and in that position assesses the nature and strength of relationships with different countries, my feeling is that that president will see the value of a strong U.S.-India relationship so I would expect it to continue, but what I cannot anticipate right now, depending on who is the president, what kind of points of differences might arise. A different emphasis might arise and until now the two countries have been able to deal with these in a very satisfactory manner, progressing from a very good beginning to more and more solid engagement and understanding for mutual benefit. So there is a lot of mutual benefit involved and I expect that to continue.

DEWS: How important do you think is the personal relationship, say between a President Obama and Prime Minister Modi, or between previous U.S. presidents and previous Indian Prime Ministers in the overall framework of U.S.-India relations where you've got foreign policy issues, geostrategic issues, you've got economic issues, and you've got your sort of cultural person-to-person issues. How important is that, that very top level personal relationship to the overall U.S.-India relation?

SINGH: I would say it's very important, but the relationship as such is formed on the basis of a deeper understanding of strategic and other common areas of action

which could be taken in such a way that they are mutually beneficial to the objectives of the two countries concerned. The difference of a personal relationship is that the manner in which you can deal with differences when they arise in a much more conciliatory, understanding way. The manner in which you can seek solutions, which actually are those which both accommodate as well as achieve objectives of the two parties, become much more feasible.

So the understanding, the deeper understanding with a relaxed way in which the trust which they have with each other can take the solution frontier, so to say, more ahead then what otherwise would be possible. So a necessary condition is all the other underlying of foundational preparation which is required and as far as that foundation is concerned, as I just mentioned, it's become quite strong right now and when leaders see that common strength or common objectives with differences, I mean these are two large nations with different histories, different economic situations, etc. But to the extent they see a common ground for working together towards common objectives, I think that's a very good basis to develop that friendship also. So how much it develops depends on the individuals.

DEWS: How much, if at all, are Indians following the U.S. election?

SINGH: There's a huge interest in India. U.S. is a very important country and the Indians by their very nature are very inquisitive and news hungry and, you know, want to understand what's happening in the rest of the world. Even though it's a large country, it has a large proportion of young population also. So, the overall level of knowledge seeking and trying to see how the world is developing is quite high in India I feel and in that context, U.S. of course is really very high priority country with a large

presence and large impact and at present in the current elections, as I mentioned earlier, the kind of strong positions which are being taken would further increase the interest of Indians to follow what's happening because the implications can be quite significant.

DEWS: I want to set up this next question by referencing the 2014 national elections in India. Now at that time and in the year before, Tanvi Madan, who I referenced earlier, led a series of seminars here at Brookings exploring the Indian elections and what I learned, one of the things I learned that was fascinating, is that there are more voters in India then there are Americans alive. There's three-hundred and thirty-something million Americans, there are far more than that, six/seven-hundred million people who participated in India's national elections across all of India's states. What do you think the United States could learn from India's election process?

SINGH: I think the issues which are relevant in India and the manner in which they are conducted may be different from those in the United States. So if there is mutual learning, and, you know, one can learn from each other's experience in that way and see what could be points of improving the the way things are done. I think it's not so much the manner in which elections are held, the organization of booths, and voting, etc., but more the manner in which issues have been brought up and you mentioned 2014. 2014 election in India was an election, which in some sense was a departure from some of the other ones earlier. It was an election which focused on growth, it focused on improving opportunities, it focused on improving skills, it focused on creating a bright future through schemes and through better investment, through performance, which would give opportunities while India being a much larger part of the global community

and interacting with the global community. So that was one aspect which stood out in the 2014 elections.

Second was the use of technology because, you know, Prime Minister Modi when he was canvassing, he actually used holographic images of himself in public meetings when he. Because India is that way – the number of public meetings had to be huge. So he even did that at times, but he tried to go everywhere he thought he should be going, but he also used technology to project messages in ways which earlier had not been done. What that did was that the response time, and that's something which is also true of the U.S. system in terms of – because technology, media, there's almost an immediate impact and need to respond – but the response time for issues which were raised in one speech to be addressed in another speech given by the other side, which was very close in time was very very short, so and they still manage to respond to issues raised – some significant issues raised by other candidates in their own speeches themselves. So it was a very interactive, it was a very participative kind of election, and the scope as you yourself said was huge. So to manage that in that large scope and reach out to people and ignite their dreams in a way where it was participative as had not been the experience of previous elections, perhaps was the contributory factor to the party in power today getting a majority.

DEWS: We talked to Harsha Singh, executive director of Brookings India. Thank you for your time today.

SINGH: Thank you very much.

DEWS: And that does it for this edition of the Brookings Cafeteria, brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gaston

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