

**Demetri Kofinas:** What's up Everybody? Welcome to another episode of Hidden Forces with me, Demetri Kofinas. Today I speak with Daniel Drezner. Doctor Drezner is a professor of international politics at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at the Project on International Order and Strategy [00:00:30] at the Brookings Institution, and a contributor to The Washington Post. The author of numerous books, his latest The Ideas Industry forms the foundation for today's conversation.

In this episode we examine the state of intellectual thought in American society. From the media to academia. From think tanks to TED talks. The marketplace of ideas is a bizarre, full of wonders, and witchdoctors, hucksters selling snake oil, amid the honest shopkeepers and traffickers of good information. [00:01:00] How have the foundations of Western intellectual development, like Imperialism and reason, been turned into political footballs. Why has trust eroded to the bone of credibility where journalists are distrusted, scientists discounted, and expertise despised? And how is the growing trend of wealth disparity, partisanship, and information overload created a landscape welcoming to the thought leader but hostile to the very type of public intellectual that would have been celebrated less than 50 years before.

As always [00:01:30] you can get access to reading lists, put together by me, ahead of every episode by visiting the show's website at HiddenForces.io. Lastly, if you are listening to this show on iTunes or Android make sure to subscribe. If you like the show, write us a review. If you want a sneak peek into how the show is made, or for special story lines told through pictures and questions, then like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @HiddenForcesPod. Now let's get right to this week's conversation.

[00:02:00] Doctor Drezner thank you so much for coming on the show.

**Daniel Drezner:** It's a pleasure to be here.

**Demetri Kofinas:** It's actually a pleasure having you on. I'm very excited to have this conversation. I have been covering science and technology for almost, it feels like, the last three months straight with hardly a break. I do these kind of short market forces segments, but for the most part I've been focused on the sciences and technology. Social Sciences are my forte, but I haven't really had a chance to really delve into that. When I came across your work I mentioned [00:02:30] to you, in my email to you, that I got your name from Robert Johnson who was a guest on one of our programs, he's a president of INET. It was a link actually to an article written by someone else citing your book on the Ideas Industry and this dichotomy, this duality between public intellectuals and thought leaders. I have many questions for you. Before we even get into those, how did you get the idea to write a book like this? Where did the thought come from?

**Daniel Drezner:** A couple of different places. Probably [00:03:00] the primary one was my move from the University of Chicago to The Fletcher School. The University of Chicago was a very scholarly place. The emphasis there is on making sure you can publish in peer viewed journals and university pressed books. That's certainly a component of

what Fletcher's interest is as well, but they were also much more interested in public engagement. The idea that I wouldn't just be a scholar, but that I was also supposed to speak to a wider audience, including among other things, policy makers. Which is why Fletcher was a good fit for me. I'd always been interested in doing that. [00:03:30] Anyone who goes to graduate school in political science I think, enters with this sort of idyllic halcyon vision of oh I will learn deep things and then I will speak them and then by speaking them really important people will hear me and then I will actually manage to change the world. It's like that maxim that I quoted in the book from John Maynard Keynes about how essentially mad men in authority are really just repeating the academic scribblings of a century before.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual [00:04:00] influence are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.

**Daniel Drezner:** Excellent. Although, I always like to note that economist love that quote, but they always omit the part where he actually says economists and political philosophers, so he was not just talking about economics, he was talking about -

**Demetri Kofinas:** I love that quote. I have it written here. I don't just have this great memory, that was actually because I wrote it at the top of this run down that I have in preparation for our conversation. I absolutely love that quote. I think it's apropos that you sided it, but please continue.

**Daniel Drezner:** As I said, as I actually tried [00:04:30] to engage in the wider marketplace of ideas it was interesting to me. I would say I've had some successes. I mean I've been brought into brief a policy principle about a particular issue where I've an area of expertise. I've written for a wide audience for both Foreign Policy and The Washington Post. The marketplace of ideas was clearly changing and after having done this for a decade it struck me as something interesting to talk about because in some ways the explosion of the internet and of the variety of platforms [00:05:00] had altered things in such a way that I thought it was worth talking about the ways in which the ecosystem had changed.

I think it was also triggered by, among other things, the fact that it was unclear what influence ... One of the debates that we always have in political science is how can you measure the effect of our public engagement. This is always a difficult thing to talk about because very often in the policy making world if you are an outsider, and let's say you write a useful article or a useful policy proposal, that will work its way into the bureaucracy but then [00:05:30] the bureaucrat is going to take credit for that. Which is as it should be I might add. It's very difficult to process trace how your ideas potentially get out there, that's something to worry about. I realize this is a more complicated story to tell.

Then of course, the 2016 election was another interesting sort of data point where you had an instance in which every major foreign policy intellectual you could think of, both scholarly and non-scholarly, signed petition after petition saying, and regardless of ideological predilections, saying look whatever you do, don't elect Donald Trump president, he's going to be a foreign policy disaster. [00:06:00] That didn't seem to have much effect.

Which was an interesting question, which was to say whether or not this sort of marketplace of ideas really actually mattered. I decided that I was going to write about it. This is one of those rare cases for a book, if for any writer listening to this you know that writing a book is always a labor of love and then a mild amount of hate because you sort of just slough through it. Every once in a while, it's pretty easy and this book was remarkably easy for me to write. As I started writing it I realized, I've been thinking about this topic for a lot longer [00:06:30] than I had realized consciously.

**Demetri Kofinas:** It's interesting, when you were talking about the 2016 campaign, I wrote a number of quotes, actually I have four quotes. Two are from your book and two I think are from my own research and thoughts. It's the one that you have in your concluded chapter by Mark Lilia, which has to do with the responsibility by philosopher who finds himself surrounded by political and intellectual corruption. I sort of had that desire to withdrawal from the conversation, but I think it's a significant and important conversation. Much of the substance of your book and the relevance [00:07:00] of this conversation, and the importance of the intellectual in society, and public discourse, I think is a very important subject to cover.

Let's begin by framing the discussion as best as we can for the audience for who might not have read your book. I see there are two sort framings here, as I read your book and sort of looked through your work. One is this duality, this dichotomy, between the public intellectual and the thought leader and I do want to get into that. The other are these three underlying forces, as you call them, which [00:07:30] are driving the ideas industry. One is this erosion of trust, which you touched on. Another one is this political polarization that's happened in America. The third one is growth and income inequality. This economic inequality is something we've talked about to a great extent on the program from different angles and the way it sort of manifests perversions in society. We have no covered so much the erosion of trust and I don't think at all political polarization. I think these are all very fascinating, but I sort of see these as [00:08:00] sort of the Pincer movement, that's sort of working with each other. I was thinking, perhaps we could start sort of defining terms here.

**Daniel Drezner:** Sure.

**Demetri Kofinas:** You spent some time in your book chronicling the transformation of intellectual thought in American life since the early 20th century. How would you define the boundaries of what constitutes an intellectual and where would you start the clock on that in our history?

**Daniel Drezner:** One of the inspirations for the book was another book, which I quote a fair number in mine, which is Richard Hofstadter's [00:08:30] *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. Unfortunately I think a lot of people tend to have heard of that book without actually have read it and infer that Americans have actually always been anti-intellectual, but that is not actually the thesis of his book. The thesis of his book is that frankly America's attitudes towards intellectuals have waxed and waned over the years. That in fact, in some ways, the sort of founding fathers, the puritans, really delighted in intellectual pursuits, but that eventually, inevitability there's sort of a populous reaction

[00:09:00] to that in which suddenly intellectuals potentially fall out of favor. I would argue that America's relationship with intellectuals starts frankly in the pre-revolutionary era and has continued forwards. In terms of foreign policy, which was the primary area that I was talking about mostly because that is the area I know best. I imply in the book that I think that this applies reasonably well beyond that, but I didn't want to say that with too much confidence.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I would say it absolutely does.

**Daniel Drezner:** Okay.

**Demetri Kofinas:** We'll get into that. I'm happy to sort of -

**Daniel Drezner:** [00:09:30] I'll let you be my megaphone on that point -

**Demetri Kofinas:** Sure, go ahead.

**Daniel Drezner:** In terms of the foreign policy world, really you could argue that the United States foreign policy establishment as we know it, or in terms of any kind of size, really starts with World War II and its aftermath, the Cold War. Basically what I argue in the book is that there are two kinds of intellectuals. In here I mean people who do not necessarily work in the government but are clearly trying to write in such a way, or articulate ideas in such a way that they will either influence public attitudes about foreign policy [00:10:00] or influence elite attitudes about foreign policy.

The two style of intellectuals are called public intellectuals and thought leaders. In some ways I'm taking those terms and applying them to an essay that Isaiah Berlin famously wrote called, The Hedgehog and the Fox. In Berlin's reading the fox is someone who knows a little bit about a lot and that describes the public intellectual. Public intellectual has expertise in one area and they are often willing to opine on a wide variety of areas, but they are in some ways sort of generalist. [00:10:30] They know a little bit about a lot and what they excel at is being critics. The best thing the public intellectuals can do is tell everyone else what's wrong with their ideas.

**Demetri Kofinas:** That doesn't make them a very popular member of the cocktail party.

**Daniel Drezner:** Exactly. They're always the person at the cocktail party who says something blunt and truthful and then suddenly there's that awkward pause for about ten seconds afterwards and then everyone pretends the public intellectual didn't say anything. Public intellectuals are not very -

**Demetri Kofinas:** You know this from first-hand experience, I imagine.

**Daniel Drezner:** I'm not saying that's happened to me, but yeah, I can neither confirm nor deny that, but it is [00:11:00] a possibility.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Okay.

**Daniel Drezner:** Thought leaders are evangelists. Thought leaders are hedgehogs. They know one big thing and they use that big idea to try to explain everything about the world. In some ways what they do is anytime you ask a thought leader, well what's going in this issue, they will somehow find a way to bring it back to their big idea is. Thought leaders are also very often experts. There is a tension in the book, and I think many reviewers of a book have concluded that I'm trying to attack thought leaders, and I'm not exactly trying [00:11:30] to do that. I'll get to what I'm doing in a little bit later. The point is that thought leaders often generate new ideas.

Now for a marketplace of ideas to thrive, I'm basically arguing that you need a mix of public intellectuals and thought leaders. You need thought leaders to constantly inject new ideas and you need public intellectuals to criticize those ideas to within an inch of their life. If you have a marketplace of ideas that is weighted too heavily in favor of public intellectuals, then the marketplace is stagnate. The barriers to entry are too high. It becomes extremely difficult for anyone to introduce any [00:12:00] kind of new idea, because the gatekeepers are too powerful. On the other hand, a marketplace of ideas that dominated by thought leaders and doesn't have enough public intellectuals, is a market where the barriers to exit are too high. By that I mean the problem is that new ideas are introduced, there is a lot of heterogeneous conversation. Because there aren't enough public intellectuals, stupid ideas don't die, they just persist and people continue to believe them. That's equally problematic in some ways. In particular if those [00:12:30] stupid ideas wind up getting embraced by policy makers.

To go back to the three forces you were talking about, the erosion of trust in authority, the rise of political polarization, and the rise of economic inequality. What I am basically arguing is that each of these three trends are far larger trends than the marketplace of ideas. These are things that have been going on in the United States for about the last half century. All of them basically stack the deck in favor of thought leaders at the expense of public intellectuals. Had I been writing this book in the mid-1960's, [00:13:00] I'd probably be more critical of public intellectuals than I would be of thought leaders, or rather the problem with public intellectuals having too much power. As I am writing in 2017 the problem I am arguing is that it much easier to be a thought leader than it is to be a public intellectual. The problem is that thought leaders have a tendency to produce a lot of new ideas without ever having them properly or rigorously checked.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I want to touch on a few things there. First, you mentioned this goes back to our founding and in fact we had the [00:13:30] Federalist Papers. Madison, Hamilton and Jay were very intellectual individuals and of course they were also advocates. Just out curiosity, because that was sort of came to my mind, where would they fall in this? Or would they just simply be outside of the model? Would this not be something that would be a relevant question to ask and to throw them in there.

**Daniel Drezner:** If I had to say, I would probably put them in the category of public intellectuals, but they are really awesome public intellectuals.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Right, exactly.

**Daniel Drezner:** You're talking about one of the aspects of our National history is the idea that the founders were all polymaths [00:14:00] in one way or another, you know Benjamin Franklin, or Madison, or Jefferson, or Hamilton. It's not surprising that they were obviously pro constitution, but they wrote about topics pretty further and wider than that. In that sense, I would kind of think of them as the exemplar example of public intellectuals. On the other hand, there were a few thought leaders at the time. Someone like Thomas Paine for example, I would argue, probably was a thought leader because he prioritized the freedom of individuals over sort of über alles. As a result was one of reasons why he among [00:14:30] others did not support the constitution, if memory serves, he thought it was too restrictive he thought it empowered the executive too much. That said, I will confess a slight degree of discomfort, I'm not sure if my rubric goes so well all the way back to 1776.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Yeah, and if his big idea was basically freedom. Again I do think it doesn't really necessarily qualify what I'm getting at there. Cause I do want to ask you sort of about this ideas audience, and kind of some of the things who qualifies, because you have some very interesting tables. You actually list a bunch of intellectuals and I did [00:15:00] want to discuss some of that, but that might be a little nerdy. And maybe we can kind of leave that -

**Daniel Drezner:** Well, God forbid we get nerdy. That would just be awful. (laughs)

**Demetri Kofinas:** We've all sort of seen this. The TED talk phenomenon, this sort of big idea thing. The Deepak Chopra's, or the Michio Kaku's, or the Yuval Harari's and we've also seen all of this amidst these changes in society. One of course is this political polarization. I do want to talk a little bit more about this with you. Many people have written about this, but there is someone else who's written the book The [00:15:30] Righteous Mind, Johnathan Haidt. He mentions this phenomenon of disgust, that people report feeling disgusted or they express revulsion around certain parties or certain politicians, and that's a reflection of this widening gap of political polarization. How is this contributed? Also, how are we seeing that manifest? You have some really sort of standard data in your book that we've seen. Things like divergence of voting along party lines in congress and American [00:16:00] people and sort of distrust of government that's steadily declined with fits and starts since the end of World War II. How do we think about that? Do you also live, well you live in Massachusetts, but maybe from Washington D.C., like what have you seen?

**Daniel Drezner:** First on the partisanship, yeah. The data on this is incontrovertible. If you look at things like Congressional votes, it's becoming clear that basically over the last 50 years, the parties have become more idiotically uniform. [00:16:30] Democrats have moved somewhat to the left compared to 1968 and Republicans have moved way, way, way to the right since 1968, and that divide is very clear. It's also clear based on survey evidence that Pew and others have conducted with sort of political elites and party activists on both sides.

Where that kind of category of individual had kind of moved further towards the political extremes. The question whether the broad mass public has done this is a little bit more subject to debate. There's some who argue that there's not [00:17:00] so much been greater political extremism in the United States, but rather there's been a phenomenon called partisan sorting. One example of this would be for example, that the south was generally thought as reliably democratic up until the late 1960's and that as it turned out white southern Democrats were actually Republicans, they just didn't admit to that fact. Or Rockefeller Republicans in the North East were actually Democrats that just didn't admit to that ideologically. As those groups have sorted out, that's part of what's driving this phenomenon.

The fact is that even the mass public evidence suggests that at least for the [00:17:30] last 20 years or so there's also been polarization among the wider public. One of the effects of this is essentially political activists on both sides increasingly view as other as almost the enemy. Where survey evidence shows that the sort of adjectives used to apply to political elites on the other side are unrelentingly negative. Political activists on one side don't want their children to marry people of a different political persuasion. There are ways in which political identity, based on survey [00:18:00] experiments, have actually prove to be more discriminatory than issues of race or gender or sexual orientation. There was one survey experiment that was conducted where different resumes were sent to different employers. What was clear if you read the resume, you could tell what their political affiliation was. It was clear that extreme political human resource people who were nonetheless on one or other extreme side of the political spectrum were more likely to discriminate against resumes that indicated that person came from the opposite side of the political spectrum.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I wonder [00:18:30] if we would see a similar phenomenon for independents. For example, if someone is apolitical or doesn't really want to bring politics into their organization, if they would discriminate against people that they considered to be political in some way in another. Intuitively that seems to be true.

**Daniel Drezner:** In the research that I recall reading, I don't think that effect was discovered. Part of it also is that it's very dicey in political science when you see someone that describes themselves as an independent. Sometimes they genuinely are an independent, but very often [00:19:00] they say they are an Independent but if you actually figure out what their political preferences are they're really a Democratic or Republican. They are just saying they are an Independent for some reason or another.

The reason this effects the marketplace of ideas is pretty simple. Most public intellectuals tend to be somewhat heterogeneous or heterodox in terms of their ideas, they might actually say, Look I think I'm reliably liberal most of the time, but I think conservatives have valid point about school choice or about North Korea. Or Conservative intellectuals might say, look I'm relatively conservative when it comes [00:19:30] to market areas, but when it comes to climate change I do believe that in fact the science is really and we have to deal with something about that. Partisans don't like that. Partisans want basically their ideological world views to be reaffirmed by their intellectuals. Classic example of an intellectual who thrives in this kind of environment is someone like Dinesh D'Souza.

Dinesh D'Souza is someone who back in the early 90's actually wrote a book about politics of higher education. He has always been a pretty strong conservative and affiliated with the [00:20:00] Dartmouth Review and with Hoover and with the Reagan White House. The book was genuinely, critically well received across the board. Liberal outlets like the New Republic or The Atlantic disagreed with parts of it, but they took it seriously. What is interesting is since that first book, D'Souza has moved further and further to the right, and also frankly just become intellectually much sloppier. To the point where even respectable conservative outlets can't take his books seriously. What's interesting is that D'Souza himself said that he basically discovered something [00:20:30] around about the late 90's, which was the way for him to succeed financially was not necessarily to write to the critics. That's what he was told to do with his first book, but what he figured out very quickly was that there was this yawning thirst among local political elites for arguments that essentially, for intellectual ammunition to bolster what their arguments were. He basically started catering to the GOP base, writing books that were more and more absurd, blaming leftist intellectuals for creating a culture that allowed 9/11, or writing more recent [00:21:00] books about Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton that really aren't grounded in fact all that much. These have done relatively well commercially, even though critically they haven't been terribly well received.

Similarly, on the left, you have folks who will make a similar sort of full throated argument in favor Bernie Sanders or Jill Stein or what have you, and those are often also well received. These are people who are basically catering to their base. Someone who is a moderate, or someone who holds positions across multiple dimensions across the political spectrum [00:21:30] will often find it harder to talk to these kinds of audiences, because these kind of audiences do not want to hear anything that essentially undermines or potentially challenges their political world.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Where do you attribute that to, because you mentioned also science before there and there is this sort of really weird thing that has happened in society that is fairly new I think. There used to be, certainly I felt it growing up, there was this sort of epistemological consensus around [00:22:00] what we can know and how we can know something or not know something, and empirical models of analysis science effectively was seen as the standard method through which we could arrive at consensus around these things we traditionally considered facts. What I've sort of come across in seeing this, is not only has there been this sort of loss of faith in science on the traditional right, [00:22:30] but there's been this adherence to science as some nebulous idea on the left without a real understanding of what science is. To the point, it almost feel like, science has become some sort of weird meme or brand and it's become -

**Daniel Drezner:** Or religion.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Exactly. I mean this notion of I believe in science is counter-intuitive. This idea of believing in science, I mean science is not something that requires belief. It is a system of [00:23:00] achieving some level of understanding about the world. I'm curious on what you have to say on this front. I've tried to look at the subject, to the extent that you can even begin to draw a line, I don't know if there is one point, but I look

back at sort of McGovern, I look back the movement that happened within the Democratic Party, Neo conservatism, sort of talk radio, cable news, the sort of southern strategy. It seems like all of these things kind of congeal to create [00:23:30] issue driven politics on the right, and I don't know to what extent the left has participated in this process. I'm curious how you view that.

**Daniel Drezner:** I would say a few things on this. First, while this is a phenomena, at least with respect to science that is predominantly on the right, there are examples of this on the left as well. Think about the attitude about GMOs, genetically modified organisms, for example. That's an issue where the science has been pretty solid in saying that the externalities to this have been wildly over exaggerated. The left is still insisting that organic are [00:24:00] superior and so forth.

**Demetri Kofinas:** That's a very interesting point because I do imagine if you were to press most people who support organic, or free range, or local or whatever the terms are, and I'm not making statement on this one way or another, but I would imagine if you were to ask them they wouldn't have a logical foundation for their argument.

**Daniel Drezner:** Right.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Which I think speaks to the point that, for the most part, we have always been driven by belief and feeling.

**Daniel Drezner:** Yeah. Same with homeopathic medicines and so forth. To get back to your more general question, and [00:24:30] this is also true in social science, you know in the book I surveyed about 400 columnists, and think tank fellows, editors, journalists, and so on and so forth. What was fascinating to me is that when I asked them whether their confidence in social science had increased or decreased over the last ten years. If they identified themselves as either Conservative or Libertarian the response was very clear, they had less faith in social science over the past decade. That was not true of the Liberal respondents. I think there's a couple of things going on here. [00:25:00] First, to be entirely fair, there have been episodes where science has reversed itself. Where it seems like science has said one thing was true and then it turned out something else was true. I don't know if you're a fan of Woody Allen movies, but one of my favorite ones is Sleeper.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Of course. (laughs)

**Daniel Drezner:** Where if you recall he wakes up 200 years in the future and finds out, you know which was a joke in the early 70's, that it turns out eating eggs and red meat is the best thing for you. Of course this preceded a wave of science [00:25:30] that actually seemed to make this potentially be the case. Data about health and the best way to lose weight, and so on and so forth, has basically done a complete 180.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Well, that's a great example. Sorry to interrupt, but that movement, the cholesterol thing. There is a good book on this Good Cholesterol, Bad Cholesterol, and blanking on the name of the author, but he's cited the travails that Eisenhower endured

during the later years of his administration. Where he had a real issue with his heart and he was basically being starved to death, [00:26:00] taking cholesterol completely out of his diet and it didn't really resolve the problem. There was in fact a maniacal obsession with cholesterol and fat. That of course has reversed itself, and that speaks to what you are really getting to when you talk about this, that science. Quote science. Is that the peer review system and the consensus within the scientific community has had it wrong, and there of course politics and financial pressures with academia and within the scientific establishment [00:26:30] that degrades scientific outcomes. It just important to note that the scientific method is something different, and I think the conflation between those two I find to be astounding and challenging to a place where -

**Daniel Drezner:** No, I mean I'll defend the public on this, which is to say I think you're right that scientific method is different in of itself from scientific results, but asking the ordinary layperson. There is a concept in political science when we talk about public opinion polling, is that we point out that when it comes to politics, for example, [00:27:00] most of the public is what we would describe as rationally ignorant. Both of those words count for something, so their ignorant in the sense that they don't necessarily know that much about public policy issues, or political debates going on. We also point out that it's rational that they don't know what because by enlarge most of these things don't affect their daily lives.

There might be a long term impact, but if you're working a fifteen dollar an hour job and you're just trying to make ends meet and your exhausted at the end of the day you're [00:27:30] not going to have time or inclination to watch the news or read a newspaper or what have you. You are going to get little bits and pieces of information from your social media feeds, and from maybe glancing from headlines, or watching five minutes of news or so forth. What this means is that the public very often does not have that much information. Not just about public policy but also about how science works. Particularly if whatever ideas they have comes from what they learned in High School 20 years earlier. So, it's not surprising that if you have a strong preconceived [00:28:00] notion of how the world works, what will you tend to do is remember those data points that confirm that world view. So, if you are skeptical of science, you will remember the time science seemingly said one thing and then reversed course.

Even though this is an example of the scientific method working. This is an example of scientific progress showing in fact that the Sun does not revolve around the Earth, in fact that the Earth revolves around the Sun. To certain people that will seems like, see science is screwed up so whatever they say now will probably be something different 20 years [00:28:30] from now and it allows people to be skeptical.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Would you say that, that goes hand in hand with the loss of trust in institutions and experts and this may be partly due to an attitude among the intellectual class it isn't their job to convince people? I think, that's something I've thought of on my own, which is that there seems to be this sense and has been this sort of pejorative way to refer to it would be arrogance. Intellectual arrogance that I have authority and you should

listen to me, and this is a fact, and science says so and [00:29:00] blah blah. And people are just like, I'm checking out, I don't care what you say, I'm just going to push the red button.

**Daniel Drezner:** No, there is no doubt about this. So in terms of the erosion of trust in expertise, I think I cited a general social survey that looked at trust in what we would call knowledge based institutions. The percentage of Americans that had high confidence in those institutions peaked in 1974 at about 50% and by 2012 it was down to 30%. I think there are a few reasons for this. Part of this science has made some mistakes. In the social sciences think about [00:29:30] the papers that have been published lately indicating that replication in psychology experiments. Turns out to generate a low rate of confirmation of preexisting hypothesis.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Could you please explain to our audience why that is so relevant and important.

**Daniel Drezner:** Sure, so there was a study, which is also been challenged, but there was a paper that basically looked back at something like, I'm probably going to get the number wrong, but I'm going to say it was something like 200 very well known, widely cited papers that had conducted psychology experiments and basically what this project did was [00:30:00] they tried to ... The whole point of experimental method is that you can presumably replicate those experiments and generate similar results. One of the more disturbing aspects of this paper was that it turned out that when they tried to do this, an awful lot of those high widely cited results were not replicable. This is in some ways a dagger that goes to the heart of an awful lot of experimental social science.

**Demetri Kofinas:** And the reason, just to clarify, sort of the most probably reasons for that, a mixture of is, purposeful deceit in terms of manipulation [00:30:30] of data, and or unintentional, but ultimately poor shoddy research.

**Daniel Drezner:** Yeah, it was mostly unintentional.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Sure.

**Daniel Drezner:** If memory serves with this paper, an awful lot of these authors that authored the originally papers were very cooperative in terms of setting up the replicated studies. There are obviously cases of academic fraud, but this is more a case where it just turned out that no one had bothered to replicate, and so this was revealed that there were certain limits. That's one thing. Another thing, and this goes to the point of political polarization, is that one of [00:31:00] the easiest ways that conservatives can discredit academics, is by arguing that whoever is making this argument, you know so called quote scientific research unquote, they can accuse that person of being a liberal elite academic who is out of touch with the heartland of America. And nine times out of ten is accusation is going to be accurate, in that the academy has shifted pretty far to the left, even as the country has shifted somewhat to the right. These shifts are reflected in surveys of professors as opposed to [00:31:30] the rest of the public, and it's been concentrated since 1990.

Now I want to stress that just because the academy has shifted to the left does not mean that the peer review research that academics do is somehow tainted or flawed. I wouldn't, and I think even those who have conducted the surveys would acknowledge that, but it means two things. First, it is possible that academics don't ask questions that would make their liberal assumptions uncomfortable as it were. Second, it means they are vulnerable to this kind of caricature. [00:32:00] So, I think this is both true of science and social science. In one of the chapters I talk about why, for example, in public policy worlds economist are taken more seriously than political scientists, even though economists have screwed up badly over the last decade. Far worse than political scientists. I would argue one of the reasons is that surveys of economists show they are far more middle of the road than political scientists are. So it becomes tougher for conservatives to label economists as being out of touch lefty academics in a way in which that charge will stick to political science.

**Demetri Kofinas:** [00:32:30] I actually want to ask you about that because I also, I think there is also an interesting dichotomy there as well. Between quantitative and qualitative, and simpler versus complex, and sort of bullet point acronym. The interesting thing about the economics versus foreign policy debate, and I think there is only one exception I can imagine really is Ian Bremmer whose sort of a thought leader on foreign policy, but you find more of those in economics is because the public is so saturated with information that they have become far more [00:33:00] receptive towards easily digestible bullet points. That's why acronym usage has gone up, I think. It used to be that you had to read a DOD paper to see all these acronyms, now everyone is using acronyms for everything. Everyone is trying to give you a hack on success. You have guys, Tim Ferriss is great, super smart great stuff, you have him Gary Vaynerchuk. You have these sort of people, you may not even know who these folks are, you may know who Tim is, but there-

**Daniel Drezner:** Yeah, I know who Tim is.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Yeah so essentially, they appeal to [00:33:30] this you've got limited time here's what you need to know, the five facts of the day, you know Business Insider, Gawker, you know whatever these things are. And same thing -

**Daniel Drezner:** That's why TED talks work as well by the way. The great thing about TED talks, that when done well, they are ideally simple distillations of complex ideas.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Yeah, that's a good point, and also, we should get into that because you do talk about TED talks a lot and I would like ... I have some questions about that. The other thing about TED talks also is that they don't require critical thinking on the part of the audience in the same way that [00:34:00] it would if you were tuning into CSPAN or watching an open on the record conversation at the Council on Foreign Relations.

**Daniel Drezner:** Right, but as you would well know, if have a choice between watching fifteen minutes of CSPAN or watching a fifteen minute TED talk, I mean I don't care how sympathetic you are to public intellectuals, almost everyone is going to take that TED talk option.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I love, listen, you are talking to the wrong guy. You're talking to the wrong guy. I use to watch-

**Daniel Drezner:** No, and I mean as we -

**Demetri Kofinas:** I use to watch, it's funny because I mention Ian Bremmer. Ian Bremmer works out at my gym and I saw him there and I said " [00:34:30] Are you Ian Bremmer?", and he goes "Yes." And I forgot what else I asked him, but he was like, "How did you know me?", and I was like, "You're Ian Bremmer, I use to watch you at the Nixon Center talk with all these other guys as part of the national review, having conversations about the minutia of policy in Iraq in 2006." And he's like -

**Daniel Drezner:** I went to graduate school with Ian, so I know him pretty well.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Okay well that's cool and he was, in so much so that I have to say that the next time I saw him I said "Ian.", and he turned around with the same enthusiastic [00:35:00] look. He was excited because he thought it was somebody else, the second person that recognized him.

**Daniel Drezner:** (laughs)

**Demetri Kofinas:** So, yeah you are talking to the wrong guy. I love this stuff. I think CSPAN is amazing. Obviously, I'd rather watch fifteen minutes of TED talks than fifteen minutes of CSPAN, but I'd rather watch an hour of CSPAN than fifteen minutes of TED talks. In other words -

**Daniel Drezner:** That's a better way of thinking about it. That's fair.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Yeah, I think that the CSPAN is more comprehensive, and so I think there is that aspect as well. There's this liturgy, sort of evangelizing quality of the TED talk, where you can just kind of get this information. I must say, [00:35:30] and I did notice how even handed you were attempting to be in your book, and you made some sort of criticisms of TED talks, granting of course that there are great benefits. I must say, this was the first time that I ever considered that there might be any negative to TED talks. I've found them incredibly useful.

**Daniel Drezner:** No. Look at it this way. Again, one of the advantages of TED talks I think, and one of the advantages of the process, as someone who has at least done a couple of TEDX talks, is that it does force you to hone your ideas in such a way that you can actually reach a general audience. That [00:36:00] part I completely agree with. I tend to read criticisms of TED talks, by intellectuals, as sort of curmudgeons saying get off my intellectual lawn.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).(laugh)

**Daniel Drezner:** I certainly don't mean to say that they're totally worthless, but as I think I say in the book, I don't just want TED talks, I want TED talks with discussions. Essentially, the problem with a TED talk is that you give a version of your idea, it ends with a standing ovation, and very often you just don't-

**Demetri Kofinas:** (laughs) That's got to be exciting.

**Daniel Drezner:** Yeah, that's exciting, [00:36:30] that's really great and it doesn't occur to you well why might that idea be wrong, or what's the problem with these ideas.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Sure.

**Daniel Drezner:** It's particularly true if you are listening to a talk that's outside of your expertise. So, what I would almost like to see with TED talks is the fifteen minutes, and then just add five minutes. Five minutes of discussion to say okay this is the part that I really like, and this is the part that is the strongest part of the argument, but this is the part where I think the situation is more complex than you are saying. That's certainly an area, I do believe that the problem with TED talks [00:37:00] is that they are perfectly set out for thought leaders, because again they are almost intellectual sermons as it were. Sometimes these ideas are incredible valuable, but you can always be wrong. I want the TED talk to be falsified, I guess would be the way to put it.

**Demetri Kofinas:** The best part of these panels at CSI or CSR are the questions, but I wonder what the audience at TED would have the capacity to properly engage in that way, or it may not be the appropriate place.

**Daniel Drezner:** Right, and this is interesting. I have talked to people who have actually done, you know given TED talks, and they tell me that the actual [00:37:30] conference itself, there is often questions from the audience, that they are never filmed. There are events that are before and after every talk where there's a lot more interaction with the audience, and that's certainly valuable, particularly for those people who pay the money to attend. The problem is that you and I, who are only seeing the videos don't see that part. All we see is the presentation.

**Demetri Kofinas:** So that brings up something else, which is, TED is a conference really. There has been this explosion in these exclusive conferences that remarkable, and our audience knows that because I've talked about a number [00:38:00] of the ones that I attend regularly. I attend one by David Kirkpatrick called Dichotomy, and there is another here, Jim Grant does one at the plaza once a year, just one day, it's awesome, it's a financial industry conference. Of course, you have Davos and these sort of things and I was sort of thinking about this.

**Daniel Drezner:** I should have full disclosure because I just came from a Ditchley Park conference over the weekend.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Okay, cool. Well how was that?

**Daniel Drezner:** Actually, as these things go, it was incredibly eye opening for me. I learned a lot.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I think this is sort of a movement, you have all [00:38:30] these great conferences that are super educational. That is something that you talk about, which is that you frame it in context of elites because in fact you do have to have a certain salary or you have to be sponsored in order to go to these otherwise expensive events. I was thinking also something else, which is you have these traditional organizations that are the traditional intellectual circles of Bilderberg or Bohemian Grove. I know that they're often seen in this conspiratorial light. You have these sort of old school, those would probably be more for the intellectuals, right?

**Daniel Drezner:** Right, [00:39:00] well, in foreign policy circles the council inform relations fits that description as well.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Sure, absolutely, that's absolutely true. So, I guess, that's another question I have in respect to this, which just has to do with education at large. I created this show in part ... There's a reason why I read your book, it spoke to me on a number of levels, including in this one which is I recognize this trend of income and wealth inequality. I see it and I recognize that it shifts the paradigm and it changes the viability of various business models. [00:39:30] In other words, you don't need to be big to profitable, in the same way that you use to. You just have to have the right audience and so there's also this need at the same time of educating the public, and sort of how do you mix those two things together. So, I guess that kind of touches on two points that I want to get to you. One has to do with how beneficial do you think this sort of has been in general, in terms of making this information available. There's also the sort of effect in universities, you know what has this done to the university [00:40:00] environment, or is it just really filling the gap for where the universities have fallen behind in terms of relevance and staying up to date in technology. There was another one but it slipped my mind, I'll let you talk to those two and then I'll see if I can remember it.

**Daniel Drezner:** Okay, so I'll answer the second question first because I forgot the first one. The question about universities in the challenges that they face in this environment. There is no denying that the universities face a more difficult challenge for a couple of reasons. First of all, again this sort of trust in universities has gone down [00:40:30] significantly. Again, you take a look at Gallup or any other survey, trust in every major social institution in the United States, with the exception of the military, has declined significantly over the last 50 years. Universities are no small exception and in no small part the problem that universities face is simply, they charge too much for admission that it's actually changed the relationship between universities students and more importantly the parents of those students who are often the ones shelling out that money. They want to make sure that their student is getting their money's worth and also is [00:41:00] being treated as a customer rather potentially than a student. Those two relationships are often intention.

You mention Jonathan Haidt, and one of the things that Haidt also wrote or co-authored was a cover story in The Atlantic talking about the coddling of the American mind. In which he argues, among other things, that essentially universities have basically created this cocoon for their students and as a result it means the students are somehow more intellectually fragile. Although, it's interesting is that there is also a different book that came out, roughly around the same time, by William Deresiewicz [00:41:30] called Excellent Sheep, arguing that the problem with the universities is that they were too neo liberal. That all they are doing is factories trying to transform students into well trained workers who can join the labor force. I would gently suggest that these two criticisms are in conflict, but it's one of the things -

**Demetri Kofinas:** Yeah, very much so.

**Daniel Drezner:** But one of the challenges that universities face is that they're getting criticism from both conservatives, that's long standing, but now they are getting it from liberals. So in some ways they are fighting a war on college on two fronts and that's potentially challenging. [00:42:00] The other issue is that universities are experiencing a more difficult or fraught relationship with philanthropists. A lot of universities at the elite level have some degree of autonomy precisely because they have large endowments, and because a large part of their budget will come from their endowment fund. But that means they need alumni to constantly give money to sustain that kind of capital base.

Increasingly what you are seeing with the wealthy is that they have become philanthropist capitalist, which means [00:42:30] to say they want to donate large amounts of money, but they want to get results for that money in the same way that they want results for their money in the private sector. This means they tend to be a little more hands on with their donations, but there is a fundamental tension with doing that and the idea of the freedom of inquiry within universities. They might be perfectly willing to donate money to a university but they want to direct where that money should go. There are times where that universities are going to have to resist that impulse because it degrades the relationship [00:43:00] and degrades their reputation for intellectual autonomy. So that's a pretty big challenge and it leads philanthropist capitalists very often to redirecting their money towards, let's say, their own start up think tank, or towards what they would call a do tank, or funding more private sector research, or what have you. I can't remember what your other question was, I'm sorry.

**Demetri Kofinas:** It's okay I remember the one I hadn't remembered. It's interesting, I call philanthropist capitalists benefactors with benefits. (laughing)

**Daniel Drezner:** (laughing) That's a good one. I like that line.

**Demetri Kofinas:** [crosstalk 00:43:28] I came up with that as I [00:43:30] was writing my notes. But there is benefactor with benefits who you either know personally or you know through your work, which is Jeff Bezos who has purchased The Washington Post, you write for The Washington Post. What has been -

**Daniel Drezner:** No, I do not know Jeff personally though.

**Demetri Kofinas:** No, well not many people have do so I haven't been impressed. I threw that out there in case, you never know. What has been your experience? I've heard good things on par in terms, although I must say their coverage has, it clearly, it's hard not to be partisan in so far as to not be seen as partisan in this political climate. [00:44:00] I must say that's another thing, because The Washington Post clearly has a leftist leaning in its coverage of the Trump Administration, but at the same time it's hard to know how you would not be perceived as taking a partisan stance in this such vitriolic climate. I'm curious what your experience is working at The Post. And I've heard a number of really amazing things that Jeff is doing in terms of revamping the paper, in terms of really trying to leverage Amazon, as only really, he can, and the prime membership, and [00:44:30] the digital savvy of his team. What have you experienced?

**Daniel Drezner:** Alright so, I will push back on the notion of The Post as being a sort of lefty publication. I would argue that the news coverage of The Post is about as non-partisan as you can get. In that sense, Marty Baron, I think, has done a fabulous job as editor. I write for the opinions section obviously and that's a different story, and you can make whatever inference you want. I can point out we have a thick number of conservatives who write for The Post. In terms of what Bezos has done, in some ways he represents the exemplar, [00:45:00] and this is going to sound like sucking up but it is true based on my own experiences, I would argue that Bezos represents the exemplar of what a philanthropist would do to a newspaper. Which is to say, Bezos made it very clear from day one when he took over that he was not going to talk at all about the news content of The Post. That there was going to be a strict wall between editorial and news coverage.

I think the other thing that Bezos did that was incredibly smart, is in contrast with let's say Chris Hughes, who I talked about in the book when he took [00:45:30] over The New Republic, is that Bezos knew what he didn't know. Which is to say, the parts where he intervened in The Post were the parts where he actually knew great deal, which was mainly how to market its digital content. And so as you say the relationship between The Post and Amazon or making The Post reports and columns sort of syndicated so that local newspapers elsewhere could share absolutely helped The Post. Also, basically just ramping up the digital and video teams. One of the few things that [00:46:00] I did for The Post that truly went viral was a collaborative project with Alyssa Rosenberg and Sonny Bunch where we before the Star Wars the Forces Awakes came out, we did a sort of mockup of how Ken Burns would talk about Star Wars. So it was kind of a cross between Star Wars and his civil war documentary.

**Demetri Kofinas:** I was going to say. Did you hear, it turns out Princess Leia has a PhD. Did you hear this?

**Daniel Drezner:** I blogged about that. I wrote about that.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Oh, you wrote about that so maybe I saw that.

**Daniel Drezner:** Oh no I heard about that. [crosstalk 00:46:29]

**Demetri Kofinas:** You wrote about that because you [00:46:30] were nerding out on vacation you said. Right?

**Daniel Drezner:** Exactly. Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Demetri Kofinas:** That's fascinating.

**Daniel Drezner:** Right so this kind of thing they set up the video. We did a documentary style thing of about four minutes. It went massively viral. Mark Zuckerberg had watched, he said he loved it. Ken Burns watched it, he said he loved it. I think The Wall street Journal had a story showing this as an example of encouraging this kind of innovation at the ground level, that basically did a good job of promoting The Post brand. I would say the biggest thing Jeff Bezos brought to the post [00:47:00] though, to be honest, was in some ways in both the reporting floor and in the opinions side, was just a confidence that The Post was going to endure. Was the notion that okay someone has our back, we can write what we want write and weren't not going to worry that somehow one or two stories is going to deep six The Post. One of the things I've been amused by with Donald Trump going after Bezos is that I think his nickname for The Post is easily his worst nickname ever. You know calling us the Amazon Washington Post, that's a compliment.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Who calls [00:47:30] you that? Is that Trump, Trump calling you that?

**Daniel Drezner:** Yeah, Trump likes to talk about the Amazon Washington Post. You know-

**Demetri Kofinas:** I don't know how anyone is supposed to cover that administration. I think Robert Kast over at The Washington Post has done a tremendous job. In fact, after I made my point about left leaning I thought about Kast [crosstalk 00:47:45] Yeah, I think he's done such a remarkable job towing that line. I tend never to get involved in the palace intrigue of politics. I'm very much an example of someone who is switched off. I [00:48:00] must say the other thing that I found extremely challenging in this environment is how do you contribute effectively if you genuinely care and you want to make a difference in so far as moving the needle in a positive direction, wherever that is.

How do you get involved in this vitriolic climate without being perceived as being biased and having an agenda. I think that's extremely difficult and I think that speaks to your, sort of, this battle, this dichotomy, this push and pull between the intellectual and the thought leader. Which is why, one of the reasons I was so attracted to you work is because I [00:48:30] do agree with you. I do think we need more intellectuals and we need more people that the public can simply sort of trust in a way again because I think that's fundamentally a problem because the public is not going to be able to go into the data and understand the models and look at the formula to conduct this experiment, and how many subjects did you have in this study, and x y z and make a determination. No one can do that,

regardless of how intelligent they are. They don't have the time. So, that [00:49:00] I think, leads us to solutions. What do you think the solution to this situation we find ourselves in?

**Daniel Drezner:** Right, well, this is the tricky part of the book because in some ways I am saying the problem with the marketplace of ideas are these big macro forces of the erosion of trust of intuitions, and rise of political polarization, and rise of wealth inequality. All we have to do is just reverse these three big macro forces and everything will work out, but I am a political scientist and I can't just snap my fingers and say okay all you have to do is reverse those three trends. [00:49:30] There are a few small bore things that I think can be done. One, which I talk about, is relying on a greater diversity of intellectuals, both in terms of gender and religion and race. Not that, that's necessarily going to produce a more heterogeneous conversation, but it cuts against what I talk about in the book, which is the superstar phenomenon.

**Demetri Kofinas:** You know I should say something, I just wanted to interrupt because I've noticed something. I've noticed that on TED talks, because we were talking about TED talks before, I find that in the cases where minorities or women are put on, more often than [00:50:00] not the conversations they're asked to have or that they are brought on to have are conversations that are gender specific or almost sort of stick them in a box. I think that's quite unfortunate and I think that's a big problem that we have. That goes back to sort of the political correctness and everything else. It's this thing that we're doing it wrong, we're finding the wrong ways to have to ... It should be if you are scientist you are scientist whether you're a woman or a man and you can talk about quantum mechanics or you can talk about gene editing. You don't have to talk about ... I mean I have actually [00:50:30] written down a bunch of these TED talks that I've seen. I don't have them with me here, but I mean, some outrageous titles for talks given by minorities or by women. I just wanted to throw that out there because I've actually noticed that empirically, I've actually gone through TEDS videos and I've seen it.

**Daniel Drezner:** The other thing that I would recommend is that, the sort of more traditional foundations which back in the days of the hay day of the Cold War, sort of Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation use to be some of the primary funders of a lot of public intellectual output. I would argue they've become prisoners [00:51:00] to some extent of the management consultants of the world, where they are now so obsessed with impact that they are now being reluctant to give money to scholarship or public intellectuals unless they see an immediate impact in the next quarter and so forth. So they need to have a little more patience on this front. This is also a potential way in which you can diversify sources of funding, which makes it easier for public intellectuals to carve out a living being critics, rather than just generating [00:51:30] ideas that tech entrepreneurs want to hear.

The last thing, and this might be the weakest read but it is one that I think is important is that intellectuals themselves need to be able to self-discipline. One of the hopes that I have with this book is by basically pointing out to intellectuals that maybe the shift in material incentives is changing the way in which we engage the public. And that's not necessarily a good thing, would actually make people a little more self-conscience about accepting the

more ethically questionable [00:52:00] assignments, or writing gigs, or speaking fees. In theory one of the things that should make intellectuals stand out is that income maximization should not necessarily be the primary goal we have. We certainly want to make money, there's nothing wrong with that, but presumably we also want to actually have some degree of self-respect. We want the ideas to be able to live on their own. The concluding chapter, the title of it is The Dark Knight Theory of the Ideas Industry because I'm quoting a line from Harvey Dent in The Dark Knight where [00:52:30] he says, "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain." I would like all intellectuals to not die, I want them to live long lives, but I don't want them to become the villain.

**Demetri Kofinas:** Let me ask you this, with respect to what you are talking about in terms of solutions. Have you looked at the problem of the intermediation of technology and how that has had an effect on the quality of ideas that are out there. Is that something that you have considered at all? There's some people like Tristan Harris for example who's recently come [00:53:00] out of google engineer design ethicists essentially, look at some of the technological solutions that can help drive quality over ... You know low quality material like cat videos or whatever as often happens with Facebook and the way that they prime their algorithm.

**Daniel Drezner:** So, I would say two things on this. The first is that I am somewhat skeptical of technological solutions to deeper social problems. You know what I am describing is the way that people are hardwired and the ways in which deeper sociocultural trends are effecting the way we think about ideas. [00:53:30] I think anyone who thinks this is a technological fix to this is actually suffering from something that I criticize in the book which is the Silicon Valley attitude to politics. I've talked to a lot of the entrepreneurs on this, where they think of politics as this piece of faulty code that somehow needs to be hacked or bypassed as a way of achieving what they want. There are occasions or situations where that might be the case, but there are a lot more where in fact, no this is the way we do politics and you [00:54:00] need to actually get down into the muck and figure out the art of compromise.

**Demetri Kofinas:** But you don't think that Facebook and Twitter have had a noticeably negative effect in some significant ways?

**Daniel Drezner:** No, I think that the jury is out on this. I think they have had an effect, but I would argue that public intellectuals have been almost successful in terms of using tech as thought leaders have.

**Demetri Kofinas:** That's interesting. I've actually, I think my sense would be the opposite. I've found the way in which we engage with information has been diluted [00:54:30] in some significant ways. I think the early internet and the early incarnations of the platforms was effected, but as the platforms went to monazite their audiences it changed a bit. So, Doctor Drezner I know we got to wrap up. I did want to ask you some questions on foreign policy but we won't be able to get to them. We just stuck to the meat

of your book. Thank you so much for coming on the program and I know our audience will really appreciate this conversation.

**Daniel Drezner:** Thanks for having me, I appreciate it.

**Demetri Kofinas:** And that was my episode with Daniel Drezner. [00:55:00] I want to thank Doctor Drezner for being on my program. Today's episode was produced by me and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes you can check out our website at [HiddenForces.io](https://HiddenForces.io). Join the conversation on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at @hiddenforcespod or send me an email. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.