**[music]**

**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode nine of the Let's Talk Government podcast. Today we're going to discuss the international impact of the election from 2020. I am joined again by Dr. Tom Inglot and Dr. Jackie Vieceli who's a faculty amarita from the international relations program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. You will recognize our honored guest from episode 4 about US foreign policy. Well, I'm gonna open it up and let's talk about the election results from the federal elections in 2020. What kind of impact are they going to have? What do you think? And it's even not conclusive yet. Although we think we definitely have a president elect. So, let's get your opinions on that first. What about the election? Anything interesting?

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** I find it so mixed in the sense that I mean on one hand I think that it really does speak to US democracy and you know to what sort of instruments or power the people may have in terms of the turnout was historic. We have seen a little bit of violent clash between protesters and counter protesters, but you know nothing like we feared that we might see. So, I'm on that level and I've seen a little bit of reaction concurring with this maybe the American people have done ourselves decently proud. On the other hand, you know what's happening in terms of the top of the Republican Party. I mean Trump is Trump. But I think not to have the GSA sign off not to have an orderly transition and I think there I think they won one out of 30 lawsuits from what I've seen and that was about the distance that observers could stand from the canvas service. It's you know, it's everyone is saying it's dangerous to this country in terms of national security and in terms of health. And yet, you know you have the top of the Senate saying nothing you have the president calling 2 canvassers in Wayne County Michigan to lean on them and you have that whole fiasco that you know panned out from that. And later on, maybe I can mention some of the African reactions in social media that are quite thought provoking and quite amusing actually.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well before we go to Tom here, I do want to clarify an acronym that you use Jackie that was the GSA. And that's the General Services Administration which is an agency that supports the basic functioning of federal agencies. Just so if you're listening and you didn't know what the GSA is that's what that is. So, Tom what's your reaction?

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** I just wanna start by saying that the reaction originally mine was pretty similar to what I read about the world reaction which is originally you know we actually was euphoria and optimism that Biden wrong and then of course it slipped in and clear that he didn't win by as much of a margin that everyone expected, and statistics coming in and showing why he won. And how the Trump constituency solidified hold on certain counties and States, and how the legislatures at the state level were captured by Republicans, and how some people split the vote because of reaction to the black lives matter protest apparently. Let's think information all kinds of different themes start peeking through the results that we have a good hold on the results then we realized the polls were wrong. So, what kinds of complication? I think the most fundamental problem is I now realize that I wasn't that much. I wouldn't say aware of it, but I was more optimistic it will go that way is the complete collapse of unwritten Democratic norms. And there was this famous book that I assigned for my class a few years ago called, How Democracies Die by Steven Levitsky and Daniel's Ziblot. And this is the book that many people read and found very fascinating. What they discuss in this book is this authoritarian slide. That is space based not so much on the existence or nonexistence of rules and constitution and all that, but close unwritten agreements that certain things we respect. That there is a certain process that we want to follow. And we agree on it and that completely collapsed. And, every day we discover for example, today in the paper we discovered the Trump invited into the White House state representatives from Michigan. And, trying to caress them into electing the electors from that state that will both against the people. And that is completely unprecedented. Only few days ago people scratch their heads at all that will never come to this. So, every day we discover this is pushed further and further. Those people who certified the vote in Michigan to members of the election Commission were coerced into reversing their certification. Trump called one of them and then after that they said no, we change our mind we don't certify there was fraud. And, you know I can go on and on this so much of it. I think there are about 31 lawsuits yeah two of them are still pending and new ones are being filed. So, there's the legal situation. There is also mobilization and what I think disturbs me the most. And I heard that just last night from Mr. Susskind who was supposed to come as our guest speaker. I think Fred one of our committee members from Doctor Slocum arranged his visit. I think it didn't happen maybe, but he just had an interview last night on poor and company. And he said what he fears the most is that this president will not give up his ultimate weapon. Which is the mobilization of his supporters. They are waiting as troops. Behind the scenes to be mobilized they have weapons. Some of them would not do it. Probably majority would not do it. But there's a small minority of absolutely committed supporters who can be ignited at a moment’s notice and do horrible things to our country. And this is quite real. It will not go away even if Trump goes away at a certain point which we will probably start to you know but he can even organize this during the inauguration. I can imagine under the present circumstances this is my biggest fear of trump shaking hands with Biden or elbows or whatever at the inauguration after all this. He would not be well. And also, Biden would probably also not expect. So, we will not have a normal inauguration. That's 100% assured. What will happen I don't know but there a lot of bad scenarios. This is my biggest fear.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Yeah, I fear the same things. My hope though is there what we see is the number of people that voted for Trump who are not necessarily. We know that that we've got that core of really committed people that some of whom might do anything that we're worried about. But you know we've also got a lot of people that, “well, you know I like him for the economy. My 401K's been doing really well” and so on. I'm hoping that more of the public that still does retain some commitment to Democratic norms will just be disgusted by what's going on.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** Jackie, you know probably history Jackie that that quote from history, “oh, he built highways.”

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Yeah. I know. And another one made the trains. I know.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** Well, that was another one. That was in Italy but yeah. You know he built highways and he gave us jobs, and we can get rid of him because he's a clown, and he will not last very long. So, we know this happened before. It's not first time. What worries me in connection to this is the fact that there are people who actively work on social media also to make money because trump is a profitable commodity. They sell a lot of product related with the media. People are making money. So, there's some cynical people in this business that are doing it for business, but there are also others like Bannon and people like him, ideologically committed to just directly in the whole thing and see what happens. So, and there agitating, organizing, mobilizing people in every state on every level to do violence if necessary and to oppose the system to drain the swamp or whatever. You have these people working actively so Trump is not alone. There is a whole movement there. It might look at you as disconnected, disjointed and all that. So even if they mobilize 100,000 people 200,000, it can be very damaged.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, I'm going to post to the two of you. We see this kind of chaos going on in the United States and a very close vote between president elect Biden and President Trump. What does that do for the legitimacy of the United States government in the world? And how does the world look at this election? Do they see the chaos, or do they see something different and areas of the world?

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Yeah, there's some very amusing ,commentary and thought provoking, commentary from Africa on Twitter. And, you know I am not myself in the social media, but you know you pull up various news reports and then they quote these things. And of course, they're pointing out I mean the state Department here now week or so ago criticize Tanzania for a flawed election. And you know they were been of course all sorts of criticisms leveled at African countries for corruption and various things. And so, you have whether the one I liked was the sole some folks in West Africa who were saying you know, “we really ought to organize an NGO a nongovernmental organization to help the American people with election reform. Maybe we should have some of our exchange students, University students, and others go over and help with teaching American children about Democratic norms.” And people were chiming in sure how we could organize get some donations. Hey, I'll have the research Department and hey I'll compose some songs for the for the cause you know and Buck up the American people and so you know there's been some thought provoking amusing commentaries is that come on you know we still look to the United states for Democratic norms. And you guys are missing in action. So, you know I could point out that reaction some of that reaction.

**Dr. Nelson:** I'm sorry I'm just laughing cause you're right. We did criticize Tanzania and then now you're looking at what's going on here. It's like pot calling the kettle black right. So, what about European reactions Tom? I mean they've actually had some very close elections within European countries as well for leaders. How was the legitimacy of this election standing up in Europe?

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** I just wanna add one thing to that I heard. You know Jackie, one of those American institutions that monitors elections in Africa is the Carter center, right. Atlanta, Georgia and I just heard this week on the news that for the first time in its history Carter center was called upon to monitor elections in Georgia itself. So, they've never been active nationally on in any election in the United States. They always align ask the specially to monitor election in Georgia. So that's where we came to. So that's one thing. But about Europe you know, and I can say generally also other countries. So, the first reaction I heard from people I know and it on the public and from the lease was absolutely euphoria. And I was really surprised because very rarely people react to US election in this way. They react insert, “finally we so happy for you. You got rid of Trump. You have Biden. He will change things.” So, it was for the first week or two it looked like it was very optimistic. But very soon after I think it kind. of gave way to confusion. And you know bewilderment of what's going on. And I think at this point people just zoned out. There is lot of things because they cannot follow. They're not so familiar cause our election system is so complicated and difficult to understand. But they kind of divide into several camps right now, and some still believing that the process is being followed. And they’re ignoring the problems that we just discussed in the system sliding towards some kind of authoritarian situation. Others shrug it off and they say, “well, it's temporary. It will be fixed” and so on. And there are some who are really worried but generally I think that minority are worried. I still believe America broke through this specially in Europe. I'm not sure other countries. I would just say generally that the reactions in Europe are divided into maybe three camps and there are those enthusiasts who still believe America is being tested but we needed, and we can see that it's still be can be a leader. Much more bigger group now is the pragmatist. People who think that you know we have to adjust to a new world that Trump has done permanent damage. It's been going on for a while. America has been isolating itself from the world, and we have to kind of rely on ourselves and look at our self-interest to survive this. And maybe it's good for us because we relied on America too much. And that's what many Europeans are saying. I think is that the largest camp now. And then we have those US skeptics. People who believe we are kind of on the verge of the apocalypse. And we have to dismiss the United States of hand that the new world will be built in different ways. And there are some people who are willing you know maybe not in Europe, but the rest of the world to acknowledge that author Chinese model, Russian model is going to be is going to survive. And will do well in the new times. And others who are hoping that somehow, we find them Democratic alternative but not based on the United States. But the United States has always been. This is more left wing group claiming that all it's another evidenced the United States imperialism. It you know democracy is fake. We need to find a different system. Go for socialism or some other solutions. This group is still very vocal and kind of says it's no different than before it's just a continuum. So, these are all the skeptics. So, these are the three perspectives I see in from the European a special position. We can talk about the individual countries later because that's kind of interesting how individual countries are trying to react to this.

**Dr. Nelson:** So, I am going to ask your opinion on this. So, do you think if there had been a wider margin? So, if president elect Biden had garnered a lot more votes to win that would have increased his legitimacy at all or do you think that this attitude now would have been the same attitude no matter what his margin of winning was? cause it's very close right now. And this is opinion. I know. I'm asking your opinion.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Well, you know it's close. But then again it you know the margin is 5/5 and a half to 6,000,000 in the popular vote. So, you know I think that's a function of many more people I think turned out on both sides of the aisle. And I would have liked to see a wider margin myself for various reasons. But I I'm beginning to think that that may not have made that much of a difference because that proportion of people who think the elections were fraudulent and so on. They might in fact be worse. If it had been a really wide margin because of course one of the things that's being argued is look you know you not only have officials of both parties saying that this was a very secure very fair election. But look how close it is if the Democrats were really pulling that much fraud, don't you think they would have taken the Senate. And you know kept a really strong lead in the house and so on. If you're going to steal it, you know steal it the right way. And I'm hoping for one thing that the fact that it is known that it's very close. Maybe we'll take a little bit of the steam out of that. Although again you know I keep banking on logic which may be a mistake.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** You know, I'm you know I'm not banking on logic that much. But I think this is more of a domestic issue. That you asked that very bold question but it's important for us domestically. I don't think it matters that much internationally as long as they have confidence in what Biden can and cannot do. And I think that's what the discussion is going. Will be will Biden be able to reverse the things that Trump has done and how much support you have in the country for that. And there are people who still believe he has certain you know he has legitimacy definitely and he will have powers in his own hands specially in foreign policy definitely present has a lot of power. So, I don't think it really matters for foreign countries if he won. Even if he didn't win the popular vote but had been elected. You know legitimately doing in our Electoral College would you know in the eyes of the world and still be president. How he's willing to prevent certain things that matter for Europe, how much of what trump did he will still support or not support and every country basically you know this is the rule that Trump introduced. And looking from the perspective of individual countries, it may not have been that bad for them because they could make separate deals with him. Ok, and they viewed it as beneficial. Before America was following a certain policy which was good for certain countries not good for others, Trump can look at each case individually and try to make some kind of a deal. Sometimes good sometimes bad. But you know, if you are small country and you're able to strike a deal with Trump whatever you care about now, he's your president. So, you know that's their perspective. Very narrow minded. They rarely look at the big picture and that includes my home country of Poland. They're so enthusiastic about Trump because he moved troops from Germany and that's all they care about. He moved 2000 troops to Poland, and they consider that they think you know you can't even explain to them that those truth doesn't matter if Russia attacks will be overrun in two hours. You know only they think that you know that they will defend them. So, kind of perspective you can't get it out of their head no rational argument would work. They believe this is their national security.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Well, the other thing is you know I wonder how long of you people are taking because you know now there's talk about maybe another Trump ran in 2024. And you know who knows. So yeah, I think there is a lot of optimism around the world that Trump there that Biden may be able to fix some of that stuff that Trump did. But for how long? yeah you know, and the American public seems to not have a very steady compass in terms of you know. We make wild swings in our electoral preferences.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** Jackie, remember you know going back to this. We had a very imperfectly with something resembling a word order. World was built after World War Two. It was based on the United States leading and making broader coalitions in different parts of the world to follow simple end, including human rights but primarily economic development ,free trade. Now you can throw in climate and other things into this equation. But see what Trump has done is permanently damaged this this system. And now Biden will be expected to also negotiate separately with each country. And will be having very difficult time to convince them to come into the fold over coalition and give something you know up and maybe some other ways. No, no, no. Everyone has their own agenda said. We were able to do it with Trump. Why don't you do it for us now? And not be possible for him to repeat that you know. I just heard and some of these situations became very troubling. For example, the human rights community in China, they believe that Trump was their ally. And people in Hong Kong. You know this and I have an acquaintance whom I know here in the cities who is from Hong Kong. And he told us you know we went to a picnic this summer. He told us openly that people in Hong Kong the opposition who are very much supportive of Trump because they believe he's tough in China. And China needs a tough approach. The same Venezuela people are thinking in Florida. They voted so it's kind of bizarre. But from their perspective it makes sense because they want to have this image of someone standing up for them and yelling things at the Chinese. They believe violence is much more benign in relation with China who enter some kind of agreement and focus more on trade. Ignore their grievances you know. And looking from and I remember my own experience in Poland though Reagan was our hero because he stood up to Russia, Soviet Union. And nobody even people who were you know very liberal interviews with criticize. Only coming to this country, I realized how much President Reagan was despised by the unions, by the left, people in this country by progressive by University puzzle in criticize him how much damage he did to this country. I didn't have any idea; I was looking from outside and he was our ally. He was tough on the Soviet Union. He was negotiating with the Pope to dismantle communism. It was great. So, you know, it's very complicated picture. I think that look at Israel now. Compare went to the occupied territories for the first time yesterday. He's also not only Trump apparel is contemplating running for president. I don't think he's as charismatic will be remove successful but he's trying. So, he is solidifying the gains in Israel. Netanyahu is the best friend of Trump and he's still the Prime Minister. Palestinians are completely ignored over there. You know so when do the Golan Heights as well, so you know. And they've been pushing our countries including Saudi Arabia to sign up for this so called peace deal that they are you know engineering there so situation is extremely complex. I don't know if Biden and I watched him speak you know he does not you know simple as many politics how you look on TV very important. He does not project confidence and strength at all when he speaks. He's tired. He's much more contemplative even much more kind of wishy washy than sometimes Obama was. Because Obama must natural philosopher rather than president. And you know but people expect to present step in and say do this, do that, let's do this, and then have an agenda, and forward looking strong image. And people see kind of weak all their person who is hesitating you know it's very gentle in his speech. Fine, but that's not what they expect in a president in times of an emergency.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Yeah. Of all with the experience that he has with the connection city has and so on. I think people may find him in terms of actual policy more decisive than they think you know. I'm not disputing what you're saying about the image

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** People who read. People who follow. People who are educated. And we know I read the slide of his team. People nominated for possible cabinet positions. It is an A-Team. I mean excellent people. But so, what? You had excellent people many governments that collapsed in Europe other places because people see the president only. And that's how they don't know what's going on behind the scenes. They don't know the policy details. They you know and I've also something interesting yesterday about American election. Turns out to be that actually despite all the grim statistics about certain groups of people who suffered in the economy, the bulk majority of the middle class and businesses that includes even some of my students who are running businesses returning adults, feel they got good money from Trump. He you know. He signed the check, Jackie. It was Congress that did it and the Democrats, but people don't know it. They think it's Trump that gave them the money, gave them the loans. So, this is something that he says he promised, and he delivered. So, this is what you see as the image. Doesn't matter what the details are in the truth. This is what people see and how they interpret reality. Sorry you know this comes from somewhere this sentiment and you know the same in Europe. I mean for them president has to come in take a good picture, shake hands, and say I'm going to deliver this for your country. And whether it's true or not doesn't matter. It's symbolic. It's important for people to hear.

Dr. Nelson: So then as we're gonna bring our podcast to close, I wanna kind of pose one last question. How is the lack of transition that we're having, and we don't expect to really have much transition before the inauguration? How is that going to impact President Biden's administration in the world? because he really can't reach out. He doesn't have intelligence briefings. He doesn't get to really work with the state Department. How's that going to impact the transition here do you think?

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** I think very badly. There's no way to know this but in in hindsight I think it will be very interesting. I suspect that there is a lot of surreptitious communication going on under the woodwork. Maybe you know maybe I'm just wanting to be hopeful, but you know. I think we know certainly that former officials who are not under constrained you know are talking very actively. You know there has been some movement among Republicans in Congress to say enough is enough. We need this transition. I'm at least equally worried about what will happen in terms of these run offs in the Senate. And you know will McConnell and the leadership of the Senate if they if they retain good control. Continue to be obstructionist I mean some are speculating that Biden and McConnell have a personal friendship. And work together for a long time and maybe we really will see some real negotiation in real work across the aisle. But I can see Biden suffering a lame presidency for four years. And yes, being able to do some things in the policy, foreign policy arena. Maybe not nearly as much as we would like. And I hope it doesn't go down that way. But I certainly can see that. Being a real prospect.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** So, starting on the optimistic side for a change I think that the good thing is that he has already prepared some documents that he's going to sign probably on the first day. Which includes the joining of the Paris accord on climate. So, if he sends good signals to the world on the first day, it is gonna give Biden some time. But in terms of longer term, I agree with Jackie on many fronts. Even though Jackie focused more on the domestic situation. But internationally I think is the US interest will be damaged not only because of the transition, but because of all the work he has to do to prepare the government for his administration, and also make sure that people in all these departments including state Department Treasury trade are his loyalists. Because Trump created the situation is when the people that he's gonna leave behind will be there in different positions are his supporters and loyalists. And they will not work with this administration. So, they have to do a clean sweep of all these agencies. And also make sure that they have people who are loyal to that Democrats and their administration. Which will be very hard job. And before this whole job is done the world will not stand still. We haven't condemned make. We have all kinds of problems and US leadership will be missed for a year before things are under control. So, in a long term looks very bad. And now this time is wasted. The intelligence community is demoralized. And who knows what will happen between now and January. And some things I also heard that very disturbing yesterday. I read in the paper that President Trump is probably one of the few presidents who will not leave behind his papers for posterity. He is destroying all the documents and people are scrambling to save some information so we may have a situation like you know last days of a dictatorship that will be a furnace in the White House burning, and they'll be burning our package. You know activity so you know. All these things you know it's just impossible to grasp. So, you know I'm very worried about the future.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Well and then the news of you know is he planning some kind of strike on Iran. Maybe he thinks if at the last minute he can get the country into a hot war. Bad people will accept. Well, we're at war now maybe he'd better stay.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** Well, it kind of contradicts his withdrawal from Afghanistan. So, I'm not worried. He doesn't want to lose. He is doing things in Iran using Israel. We know that Israel and yesterday I heard the one sentence that was kind of ominous about this. That one journalist from Tel Aviv said, “well there might be some bombing, but the bomb doesn't mean that it's dropped from airplane.” There are other ways of bombing things that can happen in Iran right now because Israel has this network of agents inside the countries that can do damage. So, there is something in the works right now.

**Dr. Jackie Vieceli:** Right and even from my human rights standpoint. You know again the media is not showing us much, but I am beginning to wonder if civil society in Iran is going through a lot of what the people of Iraq went through in terms of sanctions. So, we're not being shown that, but you know this is this is another area that we haven't even talked about in terms of the Trump administration and whether Biden can fix it. I mean all these horrific humanitarian catastrophes that we are in part responsible for. In Yemen for example. In Syria. I don't know are those things that Biden can fix. And of course, from the perspective of the left I mean you know biting is not going to change the basic imperialist philosophy the left would say. An imperialist conduct of the United States.

**Dr. Tom Inglot:** So, one more danger Jackie, in the Middle East is very important because the coalition that Trump leaves behind and Israel is a coalition of black rain in United Arab Emirates, Israel all other states end silently also Saudi Arabia that cannot sign to it because of ideological reasons. And the religious and so forth but they're supporting this against the united coalition solidified invite them. And Biden coming in cannot break it up without causing problems. So that means he cannot reach out to Iran. And Iranians know it. So, they're going to be very much defensive now and try to do something to counter this. So, it's a situation completely different than Obama face when he was in this agreement with Europeans about controlling nuclear production. So, we're talking about the Trump set the stage for mayhem.

**Dr. Nelson:** And on that note. We're gonna come back in the spring to start talking again after the inauguration about what is that mayhem and how is it impacting. Thank you so much! I know we could talk on and on and on but thank you so much both of you for joining me today. I hope the listeners really enjoyed this conversation. I know I did. So will be it back in the spring. So, thank you.

**[music]**

Thank you for listening to this episode of Let's Talk Government. If you have suggestions for future episode topics or other areas, you'd like us to cover, please visit our website at link.msu.edu\let'stalkgov to submit your ideas. Join us every Tuesday for a new episode and thank you for listening.