

Kasie Whitener (00:04):

Good morning, welcome into Moore Impact. I'm your host, Dr. Kasie Whitener from the management department at the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. As always, our show on Tuesday mornings here, live radio on 100.7. The Point is meant to bring our research from the Darla Moore School and the work that we're doing over there at the university into our community. And share it with our listeners here on 100.7, the Point our Make, the Point Family, if you will, in the chair opposite me today, professor of International Business, Chris Yenkey is with me. I'm gonna introduce you in that very small, slight way, have you pull that mic nice and close to you, and then share with our listeners what your background is. How did you get to the Moore School, and tell us just a little bit about yourself.

Chris Yenkey (00:44):

Hey, good morning, Kasie. Thanks very much for having me. And good morning to the Midlands. How, how far out does the, does this all go all the way to Orangeburg? To Orangeburg All the way to Orangeburg? All right. Well, good morning, Orangeburg. If you're if you're with us this morning. Yeah, my name's Chris Yenkey. I am an Associate Professor in the IB department at the Moore School. How did

Kasie Whitener (01:01):

The number one business school in the nation

Chris Yenkey (01:03):

For 26 straight years? Yeah.

Kasie Whitener (01:05):

Thank you very much. It's pretty amazing. It's awesome to be part of that. Congratulations. I know you're part of that, so

Chris Yenkey (01:09):

Thanks. Yeah. We're really proud of it. We work we work real hard on a daily basis to to, to keep up a, a top research standard standards in our classroom. Alright. Serving our students as best as we can. And, and so far yeah, the market seems to, seems to appreciate what we're doing, so. Okay. You ask how I got here? Yes. all right. Well, I mean, how far, how far back do you,

Kasie Whitener (01:30):

Well, give us your background. Where did you study where was any of your business experience, and then how did you get to the Moore School?

Chris Yenkey (01:35):

Oh, man. Okay. I've got a really weird pathway. Kids, if you're listening, be real careful. I am I am high risk, high reward. I'm okay with that. So so I grew up in Central Kansas in a town called Salina, about 40,000 people. Smack dab in between Russell, Kansas and Abilene, Kansas. Okay. Birthplace of Bob Dole and Dwight Eisenhower. There you go, respectively. So, you know, I've got my high school memory, junior year high school drove over to Abilene, to the Eisenhower Library to watch Reagan give an address a year or two after he left office. So that's kind of where I, where I grew up. Yeah. So I, I had a, a,

an unusual track to getting to be a professor. Growing up I split my time between the debate team and being a bicycle racer.

Chris Yenkey ([02:21](#)):

Hmm. And so I wound up going to college right outta high school, but then I dropped out <laugh>. I'm probably the only tenured professor at the Moore School who at one point was a college dropout. That's awesome. Yeah. so so I dropped outta college for about seven years. I worked internationally in different jobs. And what that gave me an opportunity to do was to look around in the world and see what really caught my eye and what I was really interested in. And I wound up spending a lot of time in grocery stores. 'cause, You know, one's got to eat when you're working overseas. And the different things that were on the shelves at different price points, and that kind of thing was just fascinating to me. And so it really occurred to me like, I'm really interested in sort of where markets come from.

Chris Yenkey ([03:01](#)):

Okay. Right. And why mark different markets look different in different places. Okay. Right. Japanese grocery store versus a Belgian grocery store. Right. Versus one in Uruguay. And so when I, when I did go back to college to finish up I got an econ degree. 'cause I thought that was the toolkit that I needed. Sure. Right. And after that, I worked at the, as a research assistant in the Federal Reserve system for a couple of years. Okay. My first week on the job at the Fed was nine 11. No kidding. Yeah. And so I was there trying to figure out the policy response after nine 11 which was a really interesting week.

Kasie Whitener ([03:32](#)):

Were you in Washington DC

Chris Yenkey ([03:33](#)):

No, as a Kansas City. Okay. Kansas City Fed back home more or less. Right. And so so after a while in the economist realm, it finally, I finally realized, you know, what, what I was missing were the people. Right. There were a lot of price prices being floated around. Right. A lot of data points. But what had really attracted me to where markets come from was this idea of how, how people come together to exchange. And so then I found sociology. Okay. And and I never thought I would go back to get a PhD. I mean, when I was done with undergrad at 28, I thought that was the last time <laugh> I would ever step foot in a classroom again. But I found myself back getting a PhD because that's what was necessary in order to, to pursue the kind of questions I was interested in.

Chris Yenkey ([04:14](#)):

So I got my PhD in sociology at Cornell. And then from there, my first faculty job was at the University of Chicago at the Booth School of Business. I was there for five years studying international markets, especially capital markets in Africa. And, and started to get into some misconduct and corruption kinds of studies, which I think is, is gonna be the bulk of what we're gonna talk about in our hour together. But but yeah, so I was, I was doing that kind of work at University of Chicago and then I got a call from the department chair here in here at the Moore School in international business asking if I'd be willing to relocate. They really liked my work, and, and they made me a deal I couldn't refuse.

Kasie Whitener ([04:51](#)):

And here you are in Columbia, South Carolina. That's right. Is it a lot like Kansas or very different from Kansas?

Chris Yenkey (04:58):

Let's see. Hmm. <Laugh>. I don't wanna say this, so, so, okay. So we love being in Columbia. It's a great place to live. Famously hot. Yes. Not my favorite selling point. Right. I don't consider, yeah. <Laugh>. The summers here are a little rough. It's brutal. It's a little brutal on, on this guy. So, yeah. But yeah, we have sort of similar sunsets Yeah. And that kind of thing. We don't really get electrical storms here. I miss that about home a lot. Oh, yeah.

Kasie Whitener (05:23):

<Laugh>, I miss the electrical storms.

Chris Yenkey (05:24):

I, I do, I do. Too many hurricanes. Not enough lightning storms,

Kasie Whitener (05:28):

<Laugh>. That's good stuff. All right. So we've got a couple minutes left in this segment. We're gonna have of course a break at about 15 after the hour. So I wanna kind of tee up this discussion in, in a very broad sense. Your most of your research is in the area of corruption, international business the way business interacts with governments and what that corruption looks like. So lay sort of set the scene here. Where does this come from? What are your, your general kind of big idea thoughts on this?

Chris Yenkey (05:53):

Yeah, so my, my trajectory into this kind of research on, on corrupt, so we call it, I call it corruption and misconduct. Okay. I mean, you know, look, once you get into this space, this is a really big tent that you can put lots of stuff Right. Underneath. And, and I research and I teach in these areas. I teach our, our class I teach a couple of classes at the Moore School. One is called Misconduct and Global Corruption. I teach that in our Masters of International Business Program. I feel

Kasie Whitener (06:18):

Like that class has gotta have a waiting list. Oh my God. Well, like everybody has gotta wanna take that class. Except that they know you're a really hard professor <laugh>.

Chris Yenkey (06:26):

I, I, I think most of them would say that I'm hard, but fair. Okay. <laugh>. Right. The sweet spot is a professor is is when they say, man, you have a lot more homework than the other professors. Right. But they're still smiling. Okay. That's good. <Laugh>, that's, that's what you're, that's what you're looking for. Not all of them are still smiling, but, but a lot of 'em. So we have a, we have a great, we have a great class environment. So yeah. So I got into this because my originally, my dissertation research was on financial market development in East Africa. And I did a long-term study of the development of the stock exchange in Kenya. Okay. And you just, you just can't research in a place like that, in a topic like that without eventually coming across misconduct

Kasie Whitener (07:05):

And corruption,

Chris Yenkey (07:06):

Some sort of fraud or Right. Or, or corruption or something like that. And so there were a couple of, of huge cases that, that I got sort of historically lucky happened while I was doing my, my, my research there. And maybe later we'll talk about one of those papers, but, you know Sure. I'm, I'm gonna try not to be the professor who jumps straight into his research papers. <Laugh> puts everybody to sleep. So so you just, eventually you have to deal with fraud, misconduct, corruption, that kind of thing. And, and it became a larger part than of my research portfolio over the years. And so now I've got published work, for example, on performance enhancing drug use by professional athletes financial fraud in capital markets. We are wrapping up a big field experiment project on bribery. Okay. we can talk about that later if we want. Although I hadn't, I hadn't planned to make that a, a focus of the conversation, but we took a sample of 1,400 individuals in Nairobi, Kenya. And the punchline is, is we actually engineered an opportunity for them to choose to be corrupt or not. Well, and we tested who took it, you know, who did it and who didn't. This

Kasie Whitener ([08:16](#)):

Is exactly, I think, where we probably will end up in about a half hour or so as we get a little bit deeper into this and, and start talking about, you know, which markets we're in. And by we, I mean U.S. Businesses where corruption is just sort of the way people do business. Yeah. And then and that's my experience is I, I think I've told you in, in one of our pre-conversations with my dad's experience in international business. So, alright, we're gonna run to break on the other side. Me and Chris are gonna break down this corruption idea. The research, the stories, the case studies, and whether or not we're in it right now, we'll be right back. Welcome back to Moore Impact Kasie Whitener here with Chris Yenkey. We're talking about corruption, specifically international business corruption and the source of your information, your data, your research in it began in African markets in Kenya. And, and now let's talk about what is corruption. So if you're gonna define it from an academic perspective, you know, you know it when you see it, right? <Laugh>? Yeah. Like, like what does it look like? Give us some of the pillars. You, you

Chris Yenkey ([09:28](#)):

Bet. Well, so corruption's one of these terms that it becomes really easy to throw around, right. Corruption has a specific definition. And, and and so I won't, you know, well, with academics we can of course have like 20 specific definitions that are just shades of gray, but Right, right. We talk about corruption, meaning the abuse of position for personal gain at the expense of principles. Okay. So we've probably, a lot of people have probably heard the term the principle agent relationship. Of course. Yeah. Right. So the principles are the owners, the agents are the representatives. So say you own a, you know, mutual funds or you got a retirement fund that, that hold stocks. Right. The managers or the executives of that company or the agents. Right. The shareholders are the owners of that company. And so when managers or executives are doing things for their own personal benefit, that is to the detriment of shareholders, we've got a principle agent violation.

Chris Yenkey ([10:20](#)):

Right. Okay. So now we take that to, to the, the corruption space more specifically. We often think about corruption as a public official who's kinda lining their own pockets at the expense of, of the taxpayers. Right? Right. It's another example of the principle agent violation. If you sort of make your way into government procurement, right. Or you're a, a cabinet secretary Right. And you're diverting business to friends of yours. Right. To the to the exclusion of better providers who could provide a better service at a better price point and and be a better financial custodian for taxpayers. You've got a principal agent violation. Yeah. And so when people officials find themselves in those positions of

power, and they abuse that for their own private gain or the private gain of, of their close associates to the detriment of the rest of us, we would call that corruption as, as an offshoot, I'll mention corruption's not unique to the public sector. Corruption happens in the private sector all the time too. Of course. Yeah. Right. But we, we often associate it with, with the public sector,

Kasie Whitener ([11:22](#)):

Anytime you have these principles that are trusting the agents to do things on their behalf, and anytime the agents have incentives that are antithetical to the, the incentives of the principles. So lemme give an example. 'cause I mentioned before we went to break about my dad working in Ukraine right after the Cold War and after the Soviet Union had broken up. And the way that the infrastructure was there is the individuals were selected for their job, and that was the job they were gonna have forever. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Like, that's just the job you're gonna have. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And you're not ever gonna make any more money than the job that you have right now. You're not ever, there was no advancement, there was no bonuses or anything like that. You just worked in that role. And so if you as a human want things, right? Mm-Hmm. And your girlfriend wants a fur coat and your kids need ballet lessons, the only way to get those things was to take money on the side. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And so that bribery became pretty much just insidious Yeah. In all of these former Soviet Union countries. And so when dad was in Ukraine and he is trying to do this business with them, that was sort of the cost of doing business, was you've gotta bribe these people. 'cause If you don't, they're not gonna do the thing you want them to do.

Chris Yenkey ([12:18](#)):

Yeah. And that, so you bring it up a really, we're gonna have a really cool conversation, <laugh>. It's fun. All right. So what a way to start a, a Tuesday morning. So, yeah, this is one of the, the things that I make sure my students understand is that what you're describing. So we often associate corruption with evil, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And, and, and for for good reason, right? I mean, corruption literally kills people. One of my first slides that I show my students is titled Corruption Kills. Okay. And I show them deaths from from natural disasters, right? Because in a, in a corrupt context, it's easy to bribe the building inspector, right? It's easy to bribe construction companies, right? They use shoddy materials, they pocket the savings. And when an earthquake or a flood hits, people die. Right? Right. And so, corruption literally kills.

Chris Yenkey ([13:01](#)):

And so it's very easy and it's not unfounded to, to see it as a real evil. I mean, it really does kill people. It robs education, it robs healthcare, right. Infrastructure, all these kinds of things. Okay? But it's not that simple either when you're in a, when you're in a highly resource constrained environment like you just described, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Ukraine after the wall came down, right? Right. There is also what we call injunctive norms. Okay. That that is okay. And I'm gonna, I'm gonna unpack that ridiculously academic jargony term, right. Injunctive norms describe what is right and proper. Okay? And then at first glance, you think, well, corruption could never be right and proper. Right? Right. Well, what if, what if the kids don't have shoes? Right. Right. What if you're not really sure where the next meal is gonna come from? Right.

Kasie Whitener ([13:45](#)):

Stealing the loaf of bread to feed your family.

Chris Yenkey (13:47):

Steal the loaf of bread to steal your family. Exactly. Right. And so if somebody has a scheme for you to secure, right. A more reliable food source, or a way to get the kids into school, or the way to get the heat turned on mm-hmm <affirmative>. Or something like that. Right. Then, you know, colluding and participating in corrupt schemes is a way to to actually serve the normative pro-social model of taking care of one's family or one's kin. Right. That, that kind of thing.

Kasie Whitener (14:14):

And if it seems like everybody is doing it, then it doesn't seem like the stakes are very high. The risk isn't really there. Yeah. Instead, the benefits are gonna outweigh that.

Chris Yenkey (14:23):

There you go. And so now when you say everybody is doing it, now I'm gonna have my second jargony term for the morning, we call these descriptive norms. Okay. Descriptive norm. So injunctive norms tell us what is right and proper and moral to do. Right. Descriptive norms just tell us what's common. Right. What's everybody else doing? Okay. And of course, these two things feed on each other because when you see somebody else sort of stealing or working on the side to secure, you're like,

Kasie Whitener (14:46):

How did that guy resources get a chance to do that? He makes the same as mu as I do.

Chris Yenkey (14:49):

Exactly. Right. Right. And so then if everybody else is doing it, it's perfectly rational for you to do it also. Right. Right. And a great example of this, it's not exactly corruption, but Right. Go out onto the highways in South Carolina, how many people are going the speed limit, right. <Laugh>. Right? Like, why do I,

Kasie Whitener (15:04):

Why's just keeping up with traffic. Exactly.

Chris Yenkey (15:05):

I'm just, that's ex what a perfect example, right. Of of descriptive norms. That's right. And so we get pulled along into a social system mm-hmm <affirmative>. That winds up being procor corruption. Right? Right. And not intentionally we don't think it's right. Right. But there's reasons why it can be justified, and it makes it hard to eradicate. Could

Kasie Whitener (15:25):

That be because the restrictions seem irrational or the restrict restrictions seem unsustainable? I mean, if you think about, I think on the speed limit side, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. That the speed limit is 55 coming down 2 77 into town. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. I don't see, there's nobody going 55 coming in mm-hmm <affirmative>. Right? And so the is is the question that people believe that that 55 is not an accurate Right. Like, that that should not be the speed limit there. And so they don't trust the speed limit. They don't think that that's the right, does that make any sense?

Chris Yenkey (15:53):

Yeah, no, it makes sense. And I understand the logic. It's just an ex I think it's a very, very thin logic. Oh, it's an excuse. It's, it's a hundred percent. It's really dangerous because once you decide that, then you're, you're putting yourself in a, you and the mob are, are in a position to now decide what laws you think are okay. And why not. Right? A hundred percent. And, and, and that's a scary part of the society that we're in right now, is that we are, are losing an, an, a centralized shared anchoring point on what's reasonable and not reasonable. We can't even decide whether or not the January 6th riots were patriotism or, or, you know, treason. Yeah. Yeah. I, I, so good luck trying to agree on whether 55 speed limit coming into town, right.

Kasie Whitener ([16:40](#)):

Is

Chris Yenkey ([16:40](#)):

Reasonable. Like, yeah, we got bigger prob, we got bigger problems than just that speed limit.

Kasie Whitener ([16:43](#)):

So when we think about those descriptive norms and societies that are going to have maybe what we consider to be more corruption or less corruption, what are the hallmarks of like, the more like, give us a spectrum. The most corruption looks like this, the least corruption looks like that.

Chris Yenkey ([16:58](#)):

Oh, boy. You know, that's a really hard, it's a hard one to compare. We, we all, we, we often search for fixed points of reference. But it's really hard. So, for example, take petty corruption versus grand corruption. Okay. Just last night, my, my son, I got 13-year-old at home. Right. And he is, he is a rule of law man for sure. Right? <laugh>. And, and he was asking last night, he, he wanted to see my latest paper on bribery, so I sent it to him, right? And so he's asking, he's like, dad, where are the, the most bribes? I said, well, what do you mean by the number of bribes paid or by the value of bribes? Right? Right. And so you want the, you want this kind of, where is corruption worse? Where is it not as bad? It's really hard to, it's really hard to pin that down because of the difference between petty corruption and grand corruption.

Chris Yenkey ([17:42](#)):

So if we just take bribes, right, which is a, you know it when you see it, right? There's no doubt about it. Okay. There's a real difference between the 50 cents or the dollar that you need to pay a police officer in Lagos, Nigeria or Nairobi or something to, to get outta your, your speeding ticket. Right. Versus the \$50 million that Airbus paid the Ghanaian military to choose their contract instead of somebody else's. Right. So there's a real difference between volume of corrupt dealings and value of corrupt dealings. Right. and so a couple of stylized numbers, the World Bank estimates that annually about \$1 trillion in bribes are paid worldwide. Okay? Right. But in terms of the, the quantity I think it was trans, it's in one of my recent papers, the, the quantity of bribes is estimated at something like 2 billion Okay. Per

Kasie Whitener ([18:36](#)):

Year. So how you said it was 1 trillion as the overall value is the, is

Chris Yenkey ([18:39](#)):

The estimated estimated value, because of course, you're dealing with a hidden Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, you don't exactly walk up to government official X and say,

Kasie Whitener ([18:46](#)):

Hey, how many bribes have you taken this year, <laugh>.

Chris Yenkey ([18:48](#)):

Exactly. You ask people that number, you get a global value of \$0 that and the bribes paid.

Kasie Whitener ([18:53](#)):

Right. Which are pretty sure nobody's bribing anybody. It's amazing. We're

Chris Yenkey ([18:55](#)):

Pretty sure that's not accurate. Okay.

Kasie Whitener ([18:57](#)):

So we think about in that case, right? If we're gonna try to unpack that piece and say, all right, well, we've got this global corruption Yeah. We have these descriptive norms, we have this experience where people who have access, people who are decision makers can in some way enrich themselves by making specific choices mm-hmm <affirmative>. That are not necessarily in line with procedure. Yeah. Not necessarily in line with culture. Yeah. Or, or even the law. Yeah. That's, I guess maybe the question I'm asking is like, where's the gray area? Yeah. Where and where do we sit?

Chris Yenkey ([19:26](#)):

Well, okay, this is so much fun, <laugh>, you're a fun host. Right? All right. So you said within the law. Yeah. Right. Well, if I make something legal, does that mean it's not corrupt?

Kasie Whitener ([19:35](#)):

Yeah. No, no, no, no,

Chris Yenkey ([19:37](#)):

No. I don't think so. The, the, it is a very false line to say that whatever is legal is not is not corrupt. Right. And I'll give you a good example,

Kasie Whitener ([19:44](#)):

But we just know there's no consequences for it.

Chris Yenkey ([19:46](#)):

Yeah. There you go. Okay. So that's critical. So some countries are better at legalizing corrupt practices so that they, they cease to be problematic for elites. Right. We call this state capture. Okay. State capture is a durable relationship between elite private interests and government officials. So for the, the, the betterment of the two of them at the expense of, of the rest of us. So for example, if we looked at you know, like take us campaign finance law and what it allows, right? And if you, if you transported

our normal legal practices to a place like Sub-Saharan Africa, right? He'd be screaming corruption. They would be

Kasie Whitener ([20:22](#)):

One of the

Chris Yenkey ([20:22](#)):

<Laugh>. Oh my, they would absolutely Right. <Laugh>. I mean, if you, so I, I show my students the case, this was several years ago. Ted Cruz won a Supreme Court case about campaign finance. So it was, I think it was 2012 when he was in a heated reelection bid. Ted Cruz loaned himself, and everybody can google this, right? Yeah. So, I, I may get the numbers slightly wrong, but I, I, so, but Google me and, and fact check me, Ted Cruz loaned his, his own campaign, a huge amount of personal, I

Kasie Whitener ([20:48](#)):

Remember that.

Chris Yenkey ([20:48](#)):

Yeah. Huge amount of personal money, right? And then when he won the reelection, he paid, he tried to pay himself back with additional campaign donations, right? Right. Now that he's won, and he's in a position of influence, right? He's taking these donations and, and repaying himself. Well, at that time, campaign finance laws said that you could only repay yourself \$250,000. And so he, I think he loaned himself like a million bucks. So

Kasie Whitener ([21:12](#)):

He was out

Chris Yenkey ([21:14](#)):

750, so he was out seven 50 in personal cash, right? Yeah. Well, so six years later he loaned himself \$251,000. He was just over the limit. Right. To push it. Right. And he won the Supreme Court case.

Kasie Whitener ([21:29](#)):

It's a pretty amazing, alright, we're gonna go on the other side of the break, more about corruption and a little bit how close we are to it. We'll be right back.

Kasie Whitener ([21:44](#)):

Tuesday morning. Welcome back into Moore Impact. It's about 9 32, and we've been talking about corruption this morning. As a reminder, the Moore Impact show is the University of South Carolina's Darla Moore School of Business are scholars that come in here to share their research with us and help us to understand sort of the broader impact of what the researchers are doing over there and how they can then inform policymaking here in the state of South Carolina and also nationally speaking. So, Chris Yenkey and I are talking about international business and corruption, and we're gonna kind of get to this definition of like, what are the indicators that a country is corrupt? What are the things that an academic would say, Hey, if you see these, these things, we know that's the, we're we're headed toward banana republic status.

Chris Yenkey (22:29):

Yeah. Yeah. So, absolutely. So 2023. So there's an organization out there called Transparency International, which a lot of people have heard about Transparency. International is kind of one of the leading global organizations in terms of trying to track corruption and its prevalence. And are things getting worse or better? Why are they trying to do that

Kasie Whitener (22:48):

<Laugh>? Yeah. I mean, I'm just saying, like, I understand, I've never been asked that question before. I understand the value of it. Like we all care about it, we're all interested in it, but I'm just wondering, like if they're out there doing this work and just trying to track it mm-hmm <affirmative>. And they're publishing these reports. Yeah. For whom and why? Yeah.

Chris Yenkey (23:03):

It's an advocacy organization. Okay. Right. Under the, under the basic recognition that corruption kills. Okay. And it needs to be controlled then, if you've got to have a good understanding of kind of where it is and is the situation getting worse or better? Okay. Good. Right. So but they are the, they are kind of the global standard in terms of sort of cross country comparisons. So they are their 2023 report called the, it's the annual report's called the Corruption Perceptions Index. Okay. You can look that up if you're, if you're interested. There are 2023 report out of the 180 countries that they collected information in 120 of them, they characterized as having a serious problem with corruption.

Kasie Whitener (23:40):

120 out of how

Chris Yenkey (23:41):

Many? 120 out of 180. Holy cow. Yeah. It's not a, it's no small thing. And it's been around forever, right? Yeah. I mean, it's the, what, the second oldest profession, I guess we could, we could joke, right? You know, so, I mean, corruption is not a, is not a modern problem. Right. it's, it's been with us for, for a long, long time. And so you know it, but again, it's a very hidden, secretive kind of thing. So it's very difficult to get real data on. So I, I won't go into how they try to measure it because it's, you know, it's a, it's, it's like trying to measure drug addicts, you know, <laugh>, they're always, they're, you know, they're hiding. Right? Right. These people don't, don't want to, don't want to be discovered, but they've got their own methodology. So, but if we're looking around the world and we think and we, we want to be on the lookout for countries or location, it doesn't even have to be a country. Right. It could be your city council. Right. Also. Right. We're looking for a couple of key attributes that signal that we, we are a real risk. Okay. Okay. Number one is concentrated power at the top with really few or weakened democratic protections or safeguards. Few checks and balances. A lot of big man politics, right. A lot of patrimonial that kind of thing. Concentrated resources and power at the top.

Kasie Whitener (24:50):

And when we think about that, like, let's do it on that, on that local level, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. It this means that your mayor is making decisions unilaterally, city councils just going along with them. And then those resources are being allocated without citizens being able to voice their complaints or voice their concerns. Yeah. Would that mean too, that our elections are unreliable? We're not seeing turnover in these positions as well either. So we've got this concentrated power, but also it's the same people in power for a long period of time. Well,

Chris Yenkey (25:18):

When you say, so I'm gonna be really careful when you use a phrase like, are, are the elections unreliable? Okay. Okay. There's two ways of seeing that. The way that I am very, very uncomfortable discussing it is questioning the integrity of the electoral process. Right. Right, right, right. Okay. Because, you know,

Kasie Whitener (25:36):

I prefer to not do that as

Chris Yenkey (25:37):

Well. Yeah. Good. All right. So so that's fine. Then when the other way that elections are unreliable is basically it's the voter's fault. Okay. Right. And so, so you can have officials who obfuscate and hide information and are non-transparent, that's a problem. Right. Okay. But in a strong democracy, the buck stops with the voters. Right? Right. And so, you know, what was it, the, the, the Trump Biden election had the highest voter turnout of, of all time. Right? Right. More people cast a vote than ever before, and 60% of registered voters went to the polls. Right. Right. We've got a real problem with that. Right. I mean, our local elections, I mean, what are we at? Like 15% show up and, and the

Kasie Whitener (26:16):

Primaries are even worse. I mean,

Chris Yenkey (26:18):

I mean, it's, it's, it's horrible. And so in a democracy, you know, the buck always stops with the voters. And if, and so a way that elections can be unreliable is that voters fail to hold their elected officials accountable. Gotcha. Yeah. So, so now we're headed into the, into the second element of this, which is where I think we'll probably spend a lot more time, which is you know, in addition to this concentrated power at the top and few checks and balances, we've got a high degree of what we might just broadly label identity politics, right? Right. Strong ingroup favoritism, strong outgroup animosity. We, this, this operates under lots of different terms and labels and different manifestations. Right. We often hear this called tribalism. Right. Especially when we're, we're working in in, in African context. But really it's just about identity politics. We can call it fragmentation, we can call it polarization segmentation of the electorate, right? We get an electorate that is divided into a group membership, almost like they're rooting for a sports team, right? Right. And when you have that kind of segmentation, some really powerful social dynamics kick in that that do a lot more to impede the movement of information and impede the informing your electorate, then, then actually help it out. So

Kasie Whitener (27:44):

Let's unpack that just a little bit. So when we think about this tribalism or this identity politics, where we go, okay, an us versus them mm-hmm <affirmative>. Red versus blue kind of mentality would you say that the, some of the sort of symptoms of this are, I refuse to believe that what's happening that the, that what my team is being accused of actually happened? Yeah. <Laugh>, or I'm willing to excuse my group for doing the same things that the other group was doing because my group's doing it for better reasons than the other group was doing it

Chris Yenkey (28:12):

A hundred percent. Right. Right. Okay. We can justify most anything within our group. Okay. So you, you said team, I love it. It's one of my examples of being from Kansas. It's like, what would you have to show a Kansas City Chiefs fan Right. To convince them that calls actually do go their way. Yeah. <laugh>. Right. You know, you're never gonna convince them of that, right? Absolutely not know they've they've got a stake, they've got a stake in this, right? Yeah. And we, we see this all the time. So one of the, the initial questions I ask my students is, you know, what would your brother or your sister, what would your sibling have to do to you before you would call the cops? Right, right. Compared to what a stranger would have to do to you. Right. Right. I mean, they barely gr you know, your, your brother could like, smash your car, you know, wrap it around a tree. Yeah. You're like, ah, you big jerk. You're

Kasie Whitener ([28:52](#)):

Like, yeah, but at least he's safe,

Chris Yenkey ([28:53](#)):

But at least he's safe. Exactly. <laugh>. Whereas, you know, and you know, some stranger could barely put a little nick in your door, call the police, and you're, and you're gonna freak out. Right. We have completely different standards for accountability for people that we are feel close to, or are close to. Right. Compared to those that we feel are strangers. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And that's even with a neutral framing. Right? Right. Not so what, you know, what about people that I consider to be my enemy? Right. So to speak.

Kasie Whitener ([29:18](#)):

So if we think about it, then from a a from a political perspective, I'm willing to accept the most egregious behavior inside my own tribe. Yeah. 'cause I'm in the tribe. Yeah. And I feel connected to them. Yeah. And I feel like the things they're doing, you know, they, they might not necessarily fit exactly my moral code, but they've got reasons for it, and I'm willing to excuse that behavior away versus if it were happening in the other tribe where I know they're bad people mm-hmm <affirmative>. Because I don't like them. That's right. And I haven't liked them ever, the things that they're doing, even if it's the exact same behavior. Yeah. It's much more egregious.

Chris Yenkey ([29:51](#)):

There you go. Within tribes, so to speak. Right. We've got shared interests, and as long as we're pursuing those shared interests, we can also get away with a whole bunch of shenanigans. Wow. Because within the group, we can, we can see this balance. Right. Okay, well, they've done something good for me, so now I'm gonna let 'em go on this thing that's bad. Which

Kasie Whitener ([30:10](#)):

Is in

Chris Yenkey ([30:10](#)):

Itself

Kasie Whitener ([30:11](#)):

Its own corruption <laugh>, which I don't,

Chris Yenkey ([30:12](#)):

Which is his own. Oh, that's, that's exactly why we're, we're here. Yeah. Right now. Right. So so, you know, let's, let's, let's be bipartisan about this, right? I mean, what was the Democrat's response when Joe Biden pardoned Hunter?

Kasie Whitener ([30:26](#)):

Nothing.

Chris Yenkey ([30:27](#)):

Well, I mean, no, no, no, no. It wasn't, it wasn't zero. It was essentially the same response you saw from Republicans when Trump pardoned 1400 rioters who scaled the, the, the walls outside of the Congress on January 6th. Yeah. On both sides you saw the and Google it, right? Yeah. I mean, don't, don't take my word for it. Right. I'm so they both said the same muted things. Like, that's probably not what I would've done. I think that's a little disappointing. I think that action might have gone a little too far. Those were the most extreme reactions Yeah. From either party to either of those events, you saw essentially the same reaction. Yeah. And it's a really good example, right. These are just not good moves for rule of law. Right. but they, they sure do serve their own private interests.

Kasie Whitener ([31:16](#)):

Yeah. To, to, to an extent. Alright, so we've got concentrated power at the top. We've got this segmentation or tribalism happening in the general public. Are there any other sort of like, okay, these are our indicators of corruption. Are those two, the two primary? Those are

Chris Yenkey ([31:31](#)):

Really the two that form the form a huge foundation. Once you have those, you can pretty much get away with lots of stuff. Right? Right. You know, at that point you can start to reduce checks and balances because the, what all of this operates on is the abuse of assumed trust. Okay. So once we join a group, so, so once we get into groups we have a really interesting social evolution that happens with groups. So when you join a party, you join a group, right. A team comes together. Right. The the interesting evolution is that those teams or those groups come together initially because there's a job to be done. Right. There's a purpose. The group is a tool, or it's a means to accomplish something that we believe in. But that changes pretty quickly. Once we join the team or the group, like maybe at the Moore School among the faculty or here at the radio station, we come together to do a job. And because we've all come together to do that job, we have a certain affinity for each other. Right. There's a shared basis for that relationship. Right. Right. And because we orient around that, it's really natural for us to become friends with each other. Right. Right. And, and because we wanna work together

Kasie Whitener ([32:41](#)):

And share mutual respect, share mutual respect and camaraderie, and all these

Chris Yenkey ([32:45](#)):

Camaraderie, and we're all pitching in and heave ho let's go team shoulder to the wheel. Right? Sure. It all starts for a really positive reason. But after that, the value and the safety, the comfort of those relationships themselves become very salient to us. So that when I show up in the Moore School on a Tuesday, and I see Cassie, right? Am I seeing the goal of the Moore school, or am I seeing my friend

whom I've worked with for years? Right? Right. It tends to start to look like the latter. Right. And once those friendships right, or that comfortable social environment, the safety of that group becomes really salient to us. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. That becomes our goal. So instead of the group being a means to achieve a goal, maintaining the group becomes the goal itself. All

Kasie Whitener ([33:33](#)):

Right. So let me just unpack for for the sake of unpacking. So we're in this experience, we were doing it together because we had a goal at the end. Maybe it's to get people elected. Maybe it's to reduce the size of government. Maybe it's to raise money to end polio mm-hmm <affirmative>. Right. March of Dimes. Right? Sure. Or eventually though it's our affinity with that group and our comfort in being part of that group that wants us simply to perpetuate the group itself. Absolutely. And so, as it doesn't matter what sort of challenges we now encounter, or as things start to decay inside our group, we're going to maintain the status of the group because we feel comfortable inside that group itself.

Chris Yenkey ([34:11](#)):

There you go. Let's not be, let's not be, so it's not like we can I was gonna say, it's not like we can just do anything. Right, right. But, but things do get kind of extreme. Right. But, you know, it's, it's, in my opinion, trying to be the objective academic mm-hmm <affirmative>. On the outside. I have my own personal beliefs. Right. But I, I, I try to leave those at the door when I'm looking at the data. Right. It's why I am just dumbfounded when Joe Biden says, we're gonna spend a couple billion dollars in federal money to rebuild the Baltimore Bridge. I'm like, why don't you pay the pe Why don't people who broke the thing fix it? Right. Right. Or when the Trump administration wants to, wants to now, you know, take over UK Ukrainian minerals.

Kasie Whitener ([34:59](#)):

All right. Final segment of the show. We went quick to the last break as Chris was wrapping up his the examples you were giving us of these levels of corruption and the, the things that are happening from a tribalism perspective. When things are happening inside our group, we think they're okay. If the same things are happening in the other group, we're pretty sure that's corruption. And this is a sort of skewed psychological background. And this from your research, from your PhD inside, it's in psychology. Yeah. Sociology. Sociology. So this idea of like recognizing how people behave in groups and the way they're going to move, you know, in this tribalism fashion, I think is a, it's just fascinating. Yeah.

Chris Yenkey ([35:37](#)):

Absolutely. So the, the core of all this, just to, to recap and, and be done with the, this one so we can move on, is that, is that we spend a lot of time and effort initially trying to figure out who we can get along with Okay. And who we need to support individuals, individuals, groups, you know, it, it operates the same on all these different levels. It could be a political party, it could be an interpersonal friendship, it could be the choice of a spouse or partner. We invest a lot initially. Right. And, and as a result, we wanna reap some benefit of that investment. Right. So what is the value of trust? It's that we can save time on due diligence later. Right? Right. I mean, it's like, for crying out loud, we, we dated for years. Right? Right. I mean, I know you, I don't have to keep monitoring you. Right, right. Once I put a ring on the finger. Right. Right. And so there's that assumed trust, right. Once you get into that sphere of assumed trust or into that space, that's where you have risk. Right. And, and vulnerability. Right. Right. Which is why the betrayal of a trusting relationship feels so much worse.

Kasie Whitener (36:39):

So as we're thinking about this on the state level, and then of course the national level, if we are trusting that our values are represented by this particular group, and that what we want out of government or don't want out of government is going to be enacted by this particular group that's in charge mm-hmm <affirmative>. When they stop behaving in the way we expect them to Yeah. We feel betrayed.

Chris Yenkey (37:03):

Yeah. Yep, yep. Yeah. Exactly. They violated the identity. Okay. Yeah. Absolutely. So, so there's different ways you can, you can kind of violate that group membership, right? Right. that shared membership one is by failing to uphold the identity. So if you're a chiefs span, you gotta keep saying, no, no, no. We never get any favorite calls. Right. <Laugh>, you know, because if you, if you say, well, yeah, we get some calls, right? Right. And it's like, you're denigrating your brand, you're denigrating your identity. Right. Right. Nobody wants to do that. So you can, you can, you have to uphold the group's identity. Right? That's if you don't, that's one violation. But then the other is then you just, you, you exploit the, the assumed trust in that group.

Kasie Whitener (37:41):

Alright. And then from a, you know what, we need a whole other conversation to talk about fractures within groups. So let's move into this last piece which is like the most recent examples where we have evidence that there's a potential, I say there's a potential, there's evidence that the United States is in some serious trouble from a corruption perspective. You said 120 out of 180 countries Yeah. Have problems with corruption. So we're not alone in this. Yeah. If they were to rank them, do we come in in the top 10? Are we in the top 20? Like, ooh, yeah. Where's the US as far as these 180 countries are concerned?

Chris Yenkey (38:14):

Yeah. So, again, never take a professor's word for it. Everybody's got Google. So Google, Google this one. But my recollection is that we are ranked number 23. Okay. Worldwide.

Kasie Whitener (38:24):

Okay. So we're the top 80, more towards the top.

Chris Yenkey (38:26):

You are not in the top 20. Yeah. <Laugh>, <laugh>. I mean, you can phrase it out, however you want to phrase it. You phrase it. But I think we're at 23. Yeah. All right. Yeah. So but, but this is a, this is a really interesting one. If I, if I may on the same, same topic in, in just January of this year, just last month, the National Opinion Research Council that's run outta the University of Chicago, right. A leading academic non-partisan survey research organization run outta the University of Chicago. Pardon me. Did a national, a nationally representative poll. Right. What percentage of Americans do you think rate corruption as a major problem in our federal government?

Kasie Whitener (39:09):

I mean, I would put it at less than 30%. Mm-Hmm

Chris Yenkey (39:12):

<Affirmative>. 70, yeah.

Kasie Whitener ([39:13](#)):

Is the average 70%,

Chris Yenkey ([39:14](#)):

78% of Republicans, 63% of Democrats, 72% of independents

Kasie Whitener ([39:20](#)):

Think the corruption in our country is, is huge, is a major problem, major problem

Chris Yenkey ([39:24](#)):

In our federal government.

Kasie Whitener ([39:25](#)):

Isn't that interesting? Isn't

Chris Yenkey ([39:26](#)):

That interesting? Now, if we want to go to the transparency international numbers, I'm

Kasie Whitener ([39:31](#)):

Actually, let, lemme just say really quickly, I'm actually really impressed that that many people in our country seem to be paying attention and are concerned about the level of corruption, the federal government. But I really was thinking it was closer to 30% because I was thinking a lot of people think things are just fine. Yeah, exactly.

Chris Yenkey ([39:45](#)):

No, I I, I I hear you. Right. Okay. And so, but what puts this now even along that, that kinda lines us up with the Kenyas and the Nigerias of the world, is if you ask these people, these 70% of Americans who think that corruption is a major problem in our government. Right. Who's gonna fix the problem for you? Right. It's gonna be their candidate.

Kasie Whitener ([40:02](#)):

Of course it is. Right? Oh,

Chris Yenkey ([40:03](#)):

Kamala is the one who's can fix it. No, Trump is gonna drain the swamp. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Everybody's just gonna go, boop. You're gonna swish right off into your own little tribal group again. Yeah. And away, and away we go. All right. I want to compare these numbers though. So the best comparison I have, once again, going back to the transparency international data, is we have a, a globally asked question. Right. The percentage of citizens in a country who think their government is doing badly versus doing well in tackling corruption.

Kasie Whitener ([40:32](#)):

Okay. So, so whether or not we think that our country is intentionally going after this corruption

Chris Yenkey (40:36):

Yeah. Yeah. Is, is actually, is actually working

Kasie Whitener (40:39):

You putting out the fire from inside the house. Yeah.

Chris Yenkey (40:40):

So it's, it's not exactly an apples to apples comparison, but let's work on this average of 70% of Americans think that corruption is a serious problem. Right. Which I think it's okay to line that up with saying, you know, we're not doing very well combating it. Right. Right. What does this make us look like? We are exactly dead, even with Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa, Mali, Zambia, slightly better than Togo, slightly better than Namibia, slightly better than Cameroon and Tunisia.

Kasie Whitener (41:10):

Wow. Ouch. Is this, do you think, because this, again, this data is coming from people's perceptions, right? Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. From the voters being asked themselves. Yeah. Do you think this has, where, where is this coming from? Do you think it's that there's this glut of data in the is it the internet? Is it podcasts? Is it every Joe Schmo with a, with a microphone can now start talking about the corruption that they saw when they worked for the State Department? Yeah. Like, where is it coming from? Why do Americans seem to have this view and why do they believe the government's not doing anything about it?

Chris Yenkey (41:43):

Ooh, wow. You're asking me to interpret a number, which is an academic, I'm really hesitant to do <laugh>. I'm saying, I mean, I think we're, I, I think that we, I think that we, there's enough examples of things that are going on around us that we can see things within our own tribe and, and in other people's tribes, and use that to develop a sense. I also, my hunch is, and now I'm just speculating, right? Right. This, this is also really correlated with just a general sense of distrust. Right? Right. And when you distrust your, your officials, then what, what is there to distrust? Right? So, so trust has, this is interesting. Trust has two different fundamental components. One is competency and the other is integrity. Okay. Right. And so if I think you're incompetent, I don't trust you to do the job. Right? Right. Okay. You went to law school, but you're a crappy lawyer. I don't want you to represent me. Right. Right. So that's competence. But then you've got integrity, which is do I trust that you're gonna do what you say you're gonna do? Right. Right. And so it's not clear to me which of those would be more likely to result in concerns about corruption, right. Or not. I'd have to think a little bit more carefully about

Kasie Whitener (42:46):

That. I'm interested in that. I'm interested in where this distrust comes from mm-hmm <affirmative>. And whether it is about competency. 'cause We talk, there are a lot, a lot, a lot of reports out there about just basic incompetence. Yeah. And that seems to be the driving sort of conversation in social circles, in the social media circles is these are people that are employed that are simply not doing the job. Right. Right. And then there's this other side of it, which is like, okay, and yet is this, is this an integrity thing? Yeah. Which is I elected you to go to Washington and, and do the right thing Yeah. And, and represent us. Yeah. And I don't feel that may that necessarily that's the case.

Chris Yenkey (43:24):

A hundred percent. Has anybody ever asked to come back

Kasie Whitener (43:28):

<Laugh> to be part of the show again?

Chris Yenkey (43:29):

Yeah. Because because you're, you're hitting on a conversation that I really have an outstanding conversation, especially with my professional MBA students Sure. Who are all like, you know, thirties, early forties, middle managers kinds of, you know, talking about regulations. Sure. Right. And it's like, on the one hand, we want low taxes and we want the government out of our lives. On the other hand, when an airplane falls outta the sky or a car starts blowing up and killing people mm-hmm <affirmative>. Right. We're like, holy cow. Where were the regulators? Right. And so there's a really important tension going on there that is a society I think we need to wrestle with. I think there's, I'd be happy to come back and talk. You should some

Kasie Whitener (44:02):

Other time. You should absolutely come back. 'cause I think there's absolutely a a, the other part of that conversation is like we're, when we think about the size of the federal government mm-hmm <affirmative>. You know, as much as we might be reducing workforce, we're not getting rid of those regulations. Right. Like, they still need to be enforced. So there's still work that needs to be done. Yeah. Even if those people aren't there to do it. Yeah. And, and there's a lot of really good ideas out there about what to do about that. Amen. In terms of creating sunset laws and stuff like that and, and reviewing these regulations on an annual basis. Like there's a lot of ways to do a better job managing this behemoth. But right now we're in this like flood the zone sort of scenario where it's just like all the things, like, let's just do all the things

Chris Yenkey (44:40):

For sure. You bet. And, and, and what are we willing to pay these people? Right. Right. I mean, if you want somebody who's good at their job and you want 'em committed to do it, you gotta pay 'em a reasonable way.

Kasie Whitener (44:49):

And you can't be thinking about convers, they're never gonna have another role ever. Right. Like Yeah. Exactly. Like, thank you. Congratulations. You have a directorship and this is where you will retire. And they're like, yeah, but why would I wanna stay here? Yeah. And do this job for the next 25 years.

Chris Yenkey (45:01):

Sound like the Ukraine where you started, started

Kasie Whitener (45:03):

Exactly. In our, in our socialism conversation. Ouch. Yeah. Okay. So, alright. We're just down to like the last two minutes. Sure. So if there's a, a thing that you would like to leave our listeners with in terms of where they should or how they could take action. We're talking about in the state of South Carolina organizing something similar to that federal level DOGE, which is to go through and look at things and

say, are they what we think they are? Is there something you would say, Hey, hey guys, be be diligent about this? Yeah. Or

Chris Yenkey ([45:33](#)):

Vigilant I should say. Oh, I'm not gonna equate this to the DOGE effort. This is not Yeah. That no, I'm not, I'm not at all comfortable. That's

Kasie Whitener ([45:41](#)):

For a different, for a different episode.

Chris Yenkey ([45:43](#)):

I'm remotely comfortable equating any advice I would give to how people are doing it with DOGE. You know, it's, it's as simple as it is fundamentally important, y'all, we just have to pay more attention. Right. Right. You, you cannot take the talking points from a radio show in the morning. Right. Or an infotainment commentator in the evening. Right. Right. There are really good sources of information that are available directly to all of us, but gosh darn it, it takes a little bit more work. Yeah. These things don't just show up in your Facebook feed. You've gotta actually

Kasie Whitener ([46:22](#)):

Gotta go find them.

Chris Yenkey ([46:23](#)):

You gotta find it. Get yourself informed everybody. That's your only protection.

Kasie Whitener ([46:26](#)):

This has been more impact. When you learn more, you know more, when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.