

# TECHONOMY

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## The Role of Tech in a Shifting Electoral Map

**Speaker:**

**Dan Bartlett, Hill+Knowlton Strategies**

**Bartlett:** Wanted to talk a little bit about tonight there will be a lot of conversation about the role that technology played in the victory that President Obama had last week, and a lot of it will focus quite extensively on what we in the previous panel talked about in future of retail and data and platforms and mobility. A lot of those three components were used successfully by President Obama.

But to talk about my 180 and when it comes to technology and the role it has played in partisanship in Washington, D.C., I think the public is kind of left scratching their head. They say they're disgusted with what is going on in Washington, yet there was very little change when it came to not only the White House but the Congress particularly. And my 180 particularly came from having gone up successfully with a politician. And everybody entering into the White House thinks they're going to be the leader that changes the dynamic, that is going to change the tone in Washington. Everybody says, If we just had a great leader to step in and change the tone, we'd all be better. We could work in a more bipartisan way.

What my experience has been working in the White House for eight years is that there is a systemic partisanship now. One of my 180s on that—and I'll speak more about the one with technology in a second—it's really driven by two principal factors. The first one is redistricting. What we have done over the last 20 years, through the gerrymandering of Congressional districts to where we now have, on both sides of the aisle what I call 80/20 districts. Meaning, on the Republican side, the seats are 80 percent Republican and 20 percent Democrat. And on the other side we have 80 percent Democratic seats with only 20 percent Republican. And there are very few toss-up congressional seats that are actually 50/50, 55/45, where the middle really matters.

So every day when a member of Congress is waking up, they're more worried about their left flank if they're a Democrat or their right flank if they're a Republican. There's no incentive for there to be compromise in the middle.

So when you have that dynamic, when there's fewer and fewer—you know, 20 years ago you had about 50 or 60 swing districts. We no longer have that.

What was counter-intuitive for me is the second one. That is, you would think that technology and access to information would help the environment in Washington by exposing people to more information.

When Ronald Reagan ran for re-election in 1984, nearly 70 million Americans got their news from NBC, CBS, and ABC. In 2000, that number had dropped to about 35 million, and now that number sits at about 20 million. So when that number came down, there's been obviously this explosion of information being found elsewhere. And the conclusion you would draw is to say, if people were being exposed to more opinion, more information, that that would lead to a more thoughtful dialogue and hopefully consensus on the big issues of the day.

But what I have found and what the people in the practice have found is that technology has turned out to be an accelerant to the partisanship. Because if you think about it, maybe in your own viewing habits, your own habits, in mine it's, if you're politically inclined, now you go to blog posts or websites that reinforce your views first. And then you get your talking points and then you go and have the debate with friends maybe on the other side of the aisle or maybe who come from a different political persuasion. So if you're center right, you're going to redstate.com or to drudgereport or those sources. And if you're center left you're going to dailykos or Huff Post or those places.

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So we've made it far more efficient to be partisan. And that is something that—technology is not to blame, but it's a factor in the sense that it's definitely playing a role in making it easier for people to reinforce their own political views, not question them.

Thank you very much.