[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=PAeQLpfI1BJ1BH76k97oO6Y0vFc_bvG92QoV0uth0HQ-a0ax-oY4BstDqG4DuLTyVX_2jVIZ-xboNZvN2I07iPJe_ak&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=4.43) Hello and welcome to Policy 360. I'm B.J. Rudell, I'm the associate director of POLIS, The Center for Political Leadership Innovation and Service here at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. Political satire isn't new, it's been with us throughout history. Even Shakespeare's works were packed with political commentary. Lately, Political News itself seems more like entertainment television. So how do you make fun of something that already seems like a joke? As my next guest puts it, it's a blessing and a curse to be a Trump era comedian. Zhubin Parang is a producer for the Daily Show with Trevor Noah having previously served as the head writer for three years. Zhubin majored in political science and sociology at Vanderbilt University, he attended Georgetown law school, and was a corporate lawyer before he was hired by the Daily Show. Zhubin welcome to Policy 360.

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=iS-kG9t5aMmi1ylFabtMKbbk6qLDP1XiR6k5kENsSzY63BYdZ7DQeb7Zfv_IR6A1p1i4MWNQNIH4IfJRxiINXlAIDn0&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=49.35) Thank you guys for having me, I’m very honored to be here.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=x-yApJdtzwryWLdqZ5GhoOESCy68-VI2MOhA5mpOyqvcxDvxyvbjx3HMJRq6_dSXJnSDNvp_YpKDsIkxbn6e39oCbTI&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=51.93) Why is it a blessing and a curse to be a Trump era comedian?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=I5UTtZ379t6gfW3Wk2V9i8yM1kntg3F340gVmQBr-GM3hdpJgeQEF4Hq5jLaGP8mRjSPBGy_mLVBYzneCzb7kqgbJ1Y&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=55.13) It is a blessing because there is no want for material in this day and age. It used to be before Trump that the news cycle was daily and that if we had a story in the morning that we wanted to talk about, the odds are very high that would still be the story that we would be talking about at 11 o'clock that night. In the Trump era a news cycle is almost hourly and any script that we write at 9:00 AM will almost certainly be thrown out by 2:00 PM and we'll again be dramatically revised by 5:00 PM and then by the time it airs at 11 PM, it might not even be relevant to what has been going on.

The approach to comedy is much more frantic now. There's a lot more terrified, quick meetings in hallways and a lot of scrambling, which is also how I imagine the Trump White House works, but it's definitely how we work.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=x-yApJdtzwryWLdqZ5GhoOESCy68-VI2MOhA5mpOyqvcxDvxyvbjx3HMJRq6_dSXJnSDNvp_YpKDsIkxbn6e39oCbTI&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=51.93) What's been the most challenging news or political story to joke about during your eight years on the show?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=h6xKKR6GBhS5Uyuu9fuDRhwIKt0C6G1-5sBtIHa8Z_md8HXVrPfe2dN34NEoUsYECvRL_GDiCM4hgba4Kl53BiGoTQQ&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=112.8) The most challenging ones are the ones that have been that way before President Trump was elected, usually school shootings, disasters that are manmade and not natural. There is a certain fate element in a hurricane or an earthquake. When disasters are human, it is very difficult to even address them, much less find comedic angles on them. And I think that will, that has existed before Trump, it certainly will exist after Trump. It is difficult as a comedian to walk through the minefield of a tragic story, both in terms of being afraid that you'll say the wrong thing to someone else and also afraid that you are not going to say what you want to say. Having a lot of emotions yourself and having a lot of feelings and thoughts about the particular issue, being able to turn that into comedic material becomes much harder. It's almost a blessing to talk about whatever Donald Trump has tripped on that day and whatever rant he's made- versus those tragedies, which will out-live him for sure.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Hue1oiVoKSBCsTQFgpcjVu1b6HAea7aBPgt24e-5i3wRZRMdep0oBSjZ_ayGJq9aaktgzkEJicjcBYHuJLmAkV9eAiM&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=183.51) Speaking of Donald Trump, back in 2017 you said to Salon, "We've had to think of Trump as being a fire hydrant that's busted open on the street. Initially- that was a huge thing that everybody on the street was freaking out and like, oh my God, at this fire hydrant that is blasting water everywhere. But it feels the fire hydrant has been going off for two, three years now." Well, it's two years later, so do you feel- the same way?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=rVHuNrqOxInHCWVOGSa_ouuQfNuxJNFBvIHn1rweuHxdsYfaPpNyYTCOgZiPoZdp-WVdGTDL9RJn9MmiLqin7Nupq78&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=204.68) Absolutely. Yeah. The good thing about President Trump is that he is very much a fallback, at the very least. If there is nothing else going on, you can always turn to the fire hydrant and say, oh look, that's still going on. But because that is now so much a part of the background of politics, we are able to look at something else and look for other stories to cover. So it's provided us a very good safety option for discussing the news if there's nothing else to talk about. On the other hand, Trump is still very capable of dominating a headline and ruining something we want to talk about by asserting something on Twitter or making a new announcement, which has become a lot less common now.

I think everyone in the country, including him, are beginning to get a little exhausted by the pace and the topics he brings to the table. We've heard ‘build a wall’ now, so much, we've heard the witch hunt, so much, that it's becoming repetitive enough that people are willing to look away from him and the sense that the world is ending is not quite as prevalent in people's minds. It's still there, but it's just not quite as prevalent.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=FRWNdZdYliU1xbC5UBhe2nr1RW79xnYPW0541jRx-EwUmy5VRNhRx2IXdA37nhuTl3ScS5V-3HgXBhmFbhFGZZFS2UA&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=274.09) Do you see a connection between what you do and journalism?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=1_pceE5JSaPbjs6QmVMFUtelq0Hz-vKRNPJ96G5keke-NCxUFxDCnhR0L6xtnhIpRHd9HMVbNNJtRC661T8dWWoghXk&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=277.76) No. Because I think that's insulting journalists. We are not a journalistic enterprise, we don't have reporters, we don't have editorial standards, we don't have sources or practices or codes of conduct. And I think what journalists do is a vital service that is so much more important than what we, for example, do, which- and this is my career I'm talking about, and you can basically take me or leave me and there's no real point to my existence. But what we do is comment on the news of the day, like anybody else would sitting around a table or watching TV and I don't want people to replace or think of us as being a substitute for real journalism, which is as vital as ever now.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=mEstj41nOv0fRlyp9G6nSOQMEHnvpyEfMSoSNX-ovOZaDv_l7U2UnbznqIwuwIpBQXBmyLZCrCLScPZarKh5ytxnU0c&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=327.42) What are the show’s, comedic boundaries, and are they the same as your personal comedic boundaries?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=6EyUcWEiD7Y84kzcfbig_25Ih-Fk3LtvmTJrTSWgz4METW1-EC2goImUw3ZKDAh3uZaE1MRTvG5q0dDGUOsI9YJrx30&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=334.29) I would say the show’s comedic boundaries are different from mine in that Trevor can say the n-word a lot- more than I can, certainly. I think that aside from that, no, I find myself usually very much in agreement with Trevor and the show's comedic boundaries are basically Trevor's comedic boundaries. The show is Trevor's show and we talk about what he wants to talk about and we approach issues with his perspective and his insight. I am very lucky that I think Trevor usually has very good insights and I agree with him both politically and also comedically. So I'm very lucky, a lot of times professional writers will find themselves writing for someone whose voice they don't necessarily agree with, but it's just part of the job. I got lucky that way.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=h1WwOc0Qx4VgFcwVrsDaGdF-AKrA_3ciXOOILb3JNUlLI5c028mMQ0JGxNOBp_HXbyXrG1JeK7ndKIShvCTioeLNNU8&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=380.04) You're part of a large team at the Daily Show, obviously you and Trevor and a host of others, so what is that like in the writer's room?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=KAPORiHMyXOcaxy063qEMCH021EsR52O1wrjcBWfku5uAbLagh7cvYuNeszJn0TLmD-U2aYER1MSt4axzRCED6V4hfA&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=388.59) It's really fun in that we have a lot of varied perspectives and different approaches to comedy. So, any time we have a meeting, there's always so many different jokes flying around from so many different perspectives and senses of humor that it's just a joy to just sit in a meeting and just laugh all day long. It's great to have a team like that because it also forces you to up your game. You have to bring your funniest jokes, you have to be present and quick witted at all hours of the day and it's definitely exhausting and challenging, but it's also very stimulating. You feel like every day you are among the best funniest people in the country and it really makes you feel like you've been part of something that doesn't exist anywhere else.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=t6pVauwd6Ya4fcQcnBuvacAJrARLVckAwG9c9vlfi3ZP2jzLBMm-InHQNpFnm2-Ymxcs1NqADzOWCM4uiS0QF1EJJ38&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=436.11) Your viewers look to the daily show to help them laugh. So, do you ever go into work and just not feel funny?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=7U6YN82aqZxjk2vi7tiRw8qOfZl3kYG--EgS2Ni0SqyBYMF66_mICp_myjUZdokH2Dw6S6RUePDpfZ6xRkJ-FIyRIUQ&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=443.1) Yeah, sometimes. But that's not my job is it? My job is to be funny so the paychecks certainly is a motivation to shrug off whatever it is I'm feeling that day. I mean ultimately the good thing about also having and being with a team of phenomenal writers is that people are able to have a little bit of a down-day and let other ones to pick up the slack. Just like any job, like you have good days and bad days, you are in rhythm sometimes where you're just firing on all cylinders and you are just killing it, and other days where you can't think of anything funny to save your life or you're just saying the words all wrong. And being in a group of people who accept that you are funny and talented and you're gonna have a bad day or a bad joke and they don't mind, they'll just keep going through- is a real joy and a real professional, it's a real excitement to be in a professional setting that mature.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Zzp1XbyYR8dmrFCau0oYJD9W353h-XUslzWuX6fWPSFTliekLPcrPIIyvPAkJfUTtp8Ta813HwlYY1c-cMddN6jzpMY&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=495.2) Outside of the Mueller investigation, which seems all consuming in Washington and beyond-

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=QgkK5s0U8ejuHsQSe_U5xW1Vo0hN0uITiUv1RxZ7_8WmTyJ-hgTUe20y-axloWM4_DOKHgS23EjKmB9kzpneFEwC7D8&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=502.54) I don't think, yeah, I think by before the sun explodes, we will not get to the end of that-

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=XP9lb-vlHRW0QSiXwCSGZeL1YBT45ZNg-Zxx4UWASvAg4Aij_HnqsUq9RB3_h1-Yllr2Q2cOKmSqHnwmk1ksUL9NbG4&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=510.3) What's an important Trump story that you'll be following in the coming months?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Nki4puMy94Cfx8zzvp-DjyWCRlHnlAjz8lpZ-flaz-czyGecfPHifCN0Cwwku2WtZHf6BBC0wFfnlt-ZrJIV2_Dtwc0&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=514.57) Well, it's honestly up to President Trump and I think that's really more up to his sense of message discipline. I think one of the most enjoyable things for me about the Trump administration has been how they very clearly come up with a very set and detailed plan for what they want to talk about and the president completely obliterates them based on whatever he saw on Fox News that morning or whatever in his head triggers a thought about something he remembers from the 80s that he's still mad about and then the entire administration and the Republican Party have to reshape whatever it is they wanted to talk about to fit what he now thinks. That to me has been probably one of the most fun experiences of this era- is watching people who are forced to speak for the president have to speak for the president.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=osFgk_NxI1F-9dSJrRYqRQTD_qjLnJ60G6PGtpU4RPnXrfDFzJedLN9eOCguuFM5_D0F4UMjbh-Sjf3tAQazYCzeHQQ&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=562.49) You and other writers are immersed in politics and policy day-in day-out. You don't take much of a break. So how does that affect you, if at all?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=N8DT8-Iqv2Ir7I4KlrRViKpViDsOP7lGC3nniUAJyYF2dkgEy1OgE-J92HI5WpkQ57IHcgcG-MiD7TevXdhorBDuicM&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=571.39) On the downside of it, you get numb to a lot of the news. There's a lot of political events and policies that get carried out that when you're first approach is, how do I find a funny angle on this? You can sometimes get numb to the reality of it. But on the other hand, I think as a comedian that would be my first instinct to do anyway. I cope with things by finding out what's funny about it and trying to laugh about it. So, I don't know if I would be any more emotionally healthy than I am now if I wasn't working for the show. I think another negative side of that is that also I tend to be much more cued into ‘inside the beltway’ events than conventional wisdom. And it's hard sometimes to remember that most of the country does not care or know about all the nitty gritty details and essentially high school gossip that goes on in the beltway.

That requires a constant vigilance as a writer to always be aware of what your audience is coming to the table with and not to assume that they know all the things you know, just because you happen to be swimming in this pool.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=y_GJeW_RYZbWKcJYlCEegIQFve33JiYJAcshRqyvjM-GN2NyU0YdIcdjYnJttVZ6euDKVAbUBCe-KY09NCaxIbqYzzI&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=633.97) And finally, what would you say to others, let's say public policy students who are looking to follow in your footsteps?

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=SZoEVIXXqJ1eUNMmj-BAL1qFlE6L6y2LQYukWLbJedz5SZTHzxubgZj9FdAuLS2JNWuvNja2gm7D3GOUmX-BBtiRyC4&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=640.5) Public Policy Students? Well, I would say if you want to be a comedy writer, it's much more important to be funny than it is to have a detailed knowledge of public policy. So I would say you definitely want to exercise your comedic writing muscles much more, you can trust that you're a public policy muscles and that knowledge is set. What I would advise you to do is to find venues where you can test out your comedy ideas, whether that's stand up venues or taking an improv class or doing a sketch workshop, finding places where you can get your jokes in front of a live audience is what I would highly recommend. That's the only way you can learn whether you're funny and get better at being funny is by seeing what jokes of yours work and don't

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=1I1fp76E4t7w6GhefiWTY7xfrBU29KGkTCPERh6dCkrhfFUmbp1bu7FthnTQhdc4FSfJ0UGJ-QIMOSrtPJrRDmqUOLA&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=682.98) Zhubin thank you very much for joining me today.

[Zhubin Parang:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=eytTwKegvqqitoot7E5T_P0kQeeDQTnRnsj2mpvCcZ28H-RIIeGb8FLrefZJyA3IrCLl6AgaaiWdmO-VZfqKqksr9Fo&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=684.95) Thank you for having me.

[B.J. Rudell:](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=QhIsWxL9AKmbCg0FfX1c8f7fr6LHf-iI0dhjlxEtBND6Hmqm6aRZdQwtzMPncmAGPNiPkaRsQBbGwWzlenKgxfuEAJ4&loadFrom=DocumentSpeakerNameDeeplink&ts=685.86) Zhubin Parang has won multiple primetime Emmy awards for his work on the Daily Show. His trip to Duke was sponsored by POLIS, the Center for Political Leadership, Innovation and Service, as well as the Dewitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy, the Sanford School of Public Policy, and the Graduate Student Association of Iranians at Duke. The Daily Show with Trevor Noah airs nightly at 11:00 PM Eastern on Comedy Central. We’ll be back in two weeks with another edition of Policy 360, once again I'm B.J. Rudell. Thanks for being with us.