

The United States Election System: How an Outdated Electoral Structure has led to Political
Polarization in the United States

by
Jake Fitzharris

A THESIS

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(Honors Associate)

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Christopher Nichols

Political Polarization in the United States is at a level higher today than at any point in the past few decades. Possible causes of this rise in polarization have been provided from various sources, including explanations such as mass media and income inequality. Through historical analysis and a wide literature review, this thesis explores a major factor in political polarization, the United States election system. The thesis argues that the election system in the United States exacerbates the intensely polarized political climate of the modern day United States in three main ways: the electoral college, which produces the persisting two party system, primary elections, which reinforce extreme candidate views, and districting, which tends to increase politically uniform districts and lead candidates to position themselves at the poles rather than in the center. The thesis concludes that the only way to eliminate political polarization stemming from all of these sources would be to implement a unique proportional representation system for the United States.

Key Words: Political polarization, election system, electoral college, primary elections, districting, gerrymandering.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Jake Fitzharris, Author

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1. Introduction

“One of the most powerful expressions of the nation’s deep political divisions today is the public’s opinion of one man, Donald Trump,” observes Alec Tyson from Pew Research Center¹. In this study, researchers found the divide between the percent of Democrat and Republican approval for Donald Trump is the largest in the past 50 years. But what should we conclude about this information and this current political moment is unclear. A look at political history reveals that the present day United States is one of the most polarized political climates in our history. Are presidents, like Trump or Obama, though, more of a cause or an effect of political polarization?

The answer is likely the latter. President Obama suggests his own answer, claiming political polarization “did not start with Donald Trump. He is a symptom not the cause”². Though explanations vary regarding the causes of high levels of political polarization, there is little disagreement that these are exceptionally polarized times. Obama’s view that there are various sources of polarization that go far beyond any one leader, or party, is a common one. To develop Obama’s metaphor, if polarizing figures are “symptoms,” and the illness is polarization, then determining the sources and course of this illness is crucial to its treatment.

This thesis is an attempt at just this sort of differential diagnosis. By examining causes and effects, highlighting pivotal moments and keeping an eye on changes over time, I emphasize the election system’s exacerbation of political polarization. Variation over time, I argue, reveals

¹ Tyson, Alec. *How Polarizing Is Donald Trump?* Pew Research Center, 14 Nov. 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/14/americas-polarized-views-of-trump-follow-years-of-growing-political-partisanship/.

² “Donald Trump Is a Symptom, Not a Cause’: Obama Urges Big Turnout for Midterms – Video.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 7 Sept. 2018, www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2018/sep/07/donald-trump-is-a-symptom-not-a-cause-barack-obama-video.

how three aspects of the election system in the United States are central and have been the leading catalysts of political polarization.

The three core focuses of this thesis are as follows: first, the electoral college, which I argue produces the persisting two party system; second, primary elections, which I will show reinforce extreme candidate views; third, districting, which I will reveal tends to increase politically uniform districts and lead candidates to position themselves at the poles rather than in the center.

At the same time, it is still important to acknowledge two other key factors that this thesis will only touch upon, the role of the media (particularly given new technologies of communication via the internet) and the role of inequality in aggravating the election system's role in polarization. The media in its many forms creates a cycle for the election system to increase political polarization levels (through means such as political coverage by the media and partisan news sources), and inequality plays important roles in each of my sub-arguments (by widening the partisan gap through both racial inequality and income inequality), especially in districting. Figure 1 displays a visual of these relationships, and summaries of each election-system issue are provided below.

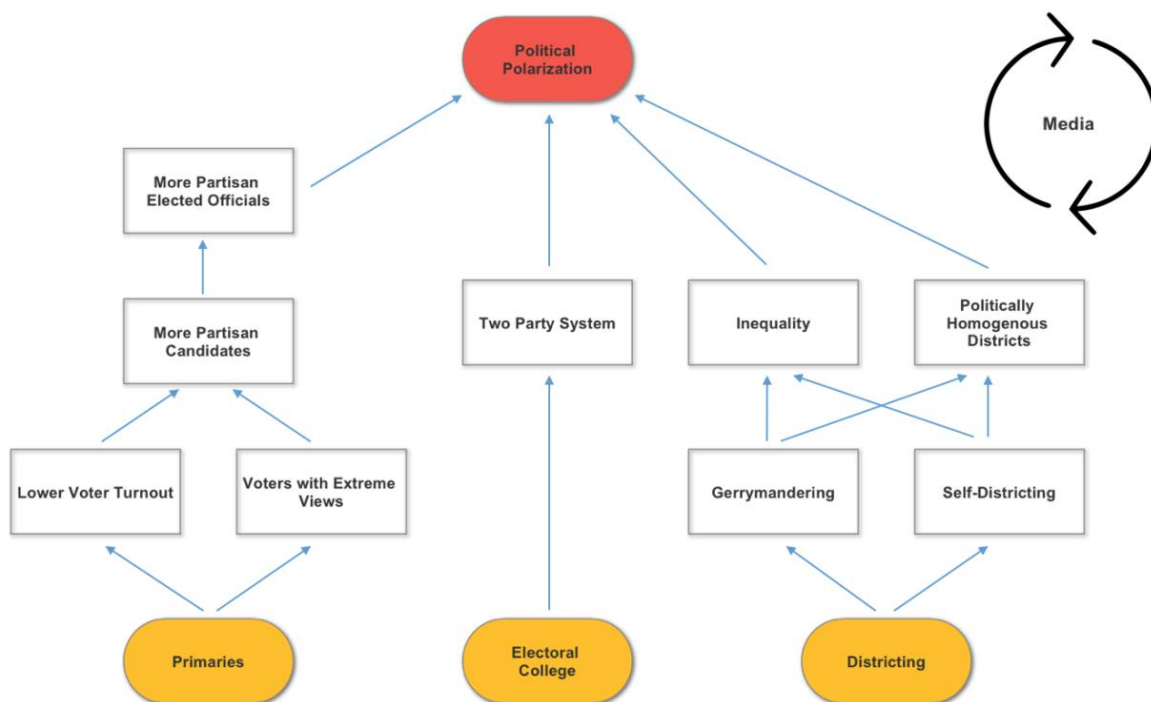


Figure 1: Primaries, the Electoral College, and Districting Lead to Political Polarization

The electoral college does not directly lead to political polarization, but creates the conditions in which the two-party system dominates, which inherently creates political poles. That is, two parties, in order to differentiate themselves, establish a range of positions and thus create a system with two poles. A significant body of evidence has proven the connection between the electoral college and polarization, centered around a phenomenon known as Duverger's Law. Named for French sociologist Maurice Duverger, this law claims that with a single ballot system with a simple-majority, a two-party system is likely to arise. Studies have examined and tested this law in other countries and political systems and found that it is mostly universal (see Schlesinger, 2006, Riker, 1982, Downs, 2003, and Cox, 1991). Along similar lines, social psychological insights and principles help to explain how the two-party system tends

toward generating political polarization such as, “groupthink,” and, “group polarization”.

Groupthink, a phenomenon that occurs when groups make decisions that discourage individuality and responsibility, explains why people seem to slowly mold their views to their party’s, pushing their views towards a respective pole. Group polarization happens when individual views become more extreme than they were previously after a group discusses a topic, again causing individuals to inherit more extreme views.

Another level of the election system, primary elections, reinforce extreme candidate views. Evidence reveals that low voter turnout combined with partisan voting behaviors create a more partisan divide between elected officials. Voter turnouts in primaries tend to include less than a third of the voting population, creating a skew to the poles and thus a misrepresentation away from the more centrist American electorate overall³. Voters that turnout for the primaries often have more extreme views than the average voter in each party; thus, their votes are more extreme than the voting population. Extreme candidates appeal more to these voters, leading to more extreme views in government. Government officials with increasingly partisan views create political polarization⁴.

The structure of the politicized electorate also is vital to how and why polarization has been rising. Districting - structuring and changing legislative districts - leads to political polarization both through gerrymandering and self-districting, creating politically homogenous

³ DeSilver, Drew. “Turnout was high in the 2016 primary season, but just short of 2008 record.” Pew Research Center, 10 June 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/10/turnout-was-high-in-the-2016/06/10/turnout-was-high-in-the-2016-primary-season-but-just-short-of-2008-record/

⁴ “Purple Districts Elect the Most Extreme Legislators, Driving Polarization.” *Princeton University*, The Trustees of Princeton University, www.princeton.edu/news/2018/05/09/purple-districts-elect-most-extreme-legislators-driving-polarization.

districts. Gerrymandering creates particular groupings in districts, leading to increased support for one of the two parties. As districts are drawn to support one party or the other, political homogeneity increases. With political homogeneity, groups both elect more extreme candidates and are likely to adopt more extreme views themselves. Candidates with extreme views become less likely to address issues moderately as there often is no competition for election. Self-districting only leads to more political homogeneity; individuals very often choose to live and spend time in areas with similar political views⁵.

This paper explores how and why these issues lead to political polarization, and provides ideas for changing the system in order to decrease the divide. Possible solutions to the election-system issues are offered in the conclusion, and early arguments for the election system are analyzed in the section following the introduction.

Before examining the issues closely, it is important to establish how politically polarized the U.S. is now, to briefly explore how this has changed over time, and to define political polarization. For the purposes of this paper political polarization is the process in which members of two different parties (both political officials and voting citizens) become increasingly ideologically extreme. Fiorina and Abrams call it a, “bimodal distribution of observations”⁶. In the U.S., specifically, political polarization is members of the Republican party becoming more politically conservative and members of the Democratic party become

⁵ Bishop, Bill, and Robert G. Cushing. *The big sort: why the clustering of like-Minded America is tearing us apart*. Mariner Books (p. 24), 2009.

⁶ Fiorina, Morris P., and Samuel J. Abrams. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2008, pp. 563–588., doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.153836.

more politically liberal. Evidence of political polarization in the U.S. is offered in the following section.

1.1. Evidence of Political Polarization in the United States

Political polarization in the United States is at a higher level today than any point in almost 25 years⁷. According to the Pew Research Center, “the overall share of Americans who express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions has doubled over the past two decades from 10% to 21%... As a result, ideological overlap between the two parties has diminished”⁸. Not only are more people moving closer to each side of the political spectrum, voters with moderate views are decreasing in number. This trend is evident in Figure 2 below, showing the separating ideologies within the House of Representatives (red dots portraying republican representative political views and blue dots showing democrat representative political views).

⁷ Chokshi, Niraj. “U.S. Partisanship Is Highest in Decades, Pew Study Finds.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Dec. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2016/06/24/us/politics/partisanship-republicans-democrats-pew-research.html?mcubz=.

⁸ Suh, Michael. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 11 Oct. 2016, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

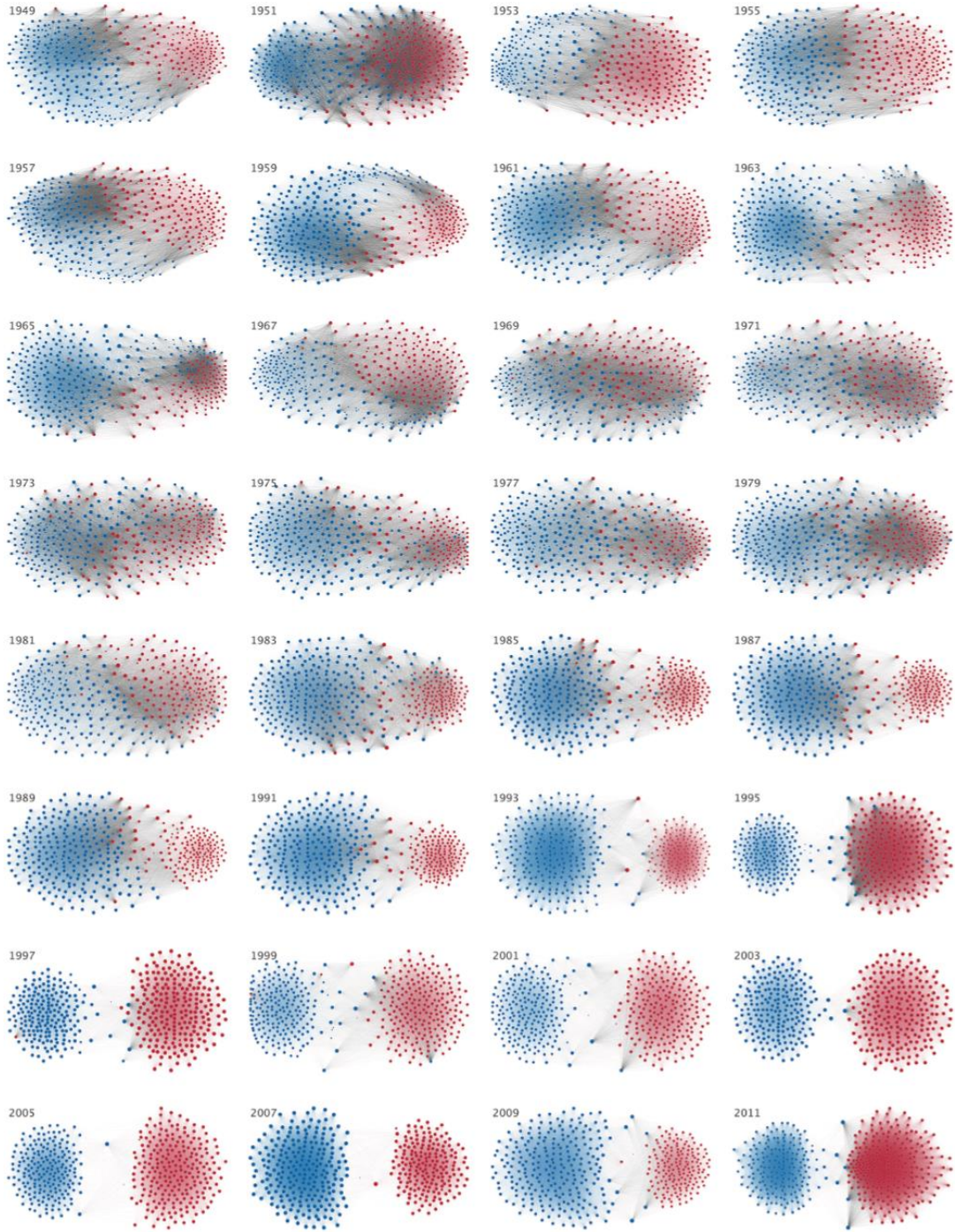


Figure 2: The Rise of Partisanship and Super-Cooperators in the U.S. House of Representatives⁹

⁹ Andris C, Lee D, Hamilton MJ, Martino M, Gunning CE, Selden JA (2015) The Rise of Partisanship and Super-Cooperators in the U.S. House of Representatives. PLoS ONE 10(4): e0123507. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0123507>

Figure 2 displays political views from 1949 until 2011. As you can see in 1949, the share of views in the House of Representatives is divided based on party affiliation, but includes many moderate representatives as well. The group even has some representatives straying from their party's usual political side and having views closer to the opposing party. This grouping seems to stay consistent until the 1980's when the Republican representatives become much more politically uniform (look to 1985) and the Democrats follow suit in the 90's (look to 1993). Since 1993, the figure displays continuing separation of each political party in the House of Representatives, until the 2000's in which there are two evidently separate political groups. So, political polarization in the House of Representatives been increasing since at least the early 1990's according to this figure. The study in which the figure was published found that, "despite-term fluctuations, partisanship or non-cooperation in the U.S. congress has been increasing exponentially for over 60 years with no sign of abating or reversing"¹⁰. Although difficult to see in the figure, the study concludes political polarization has been increasing since the 1950's.

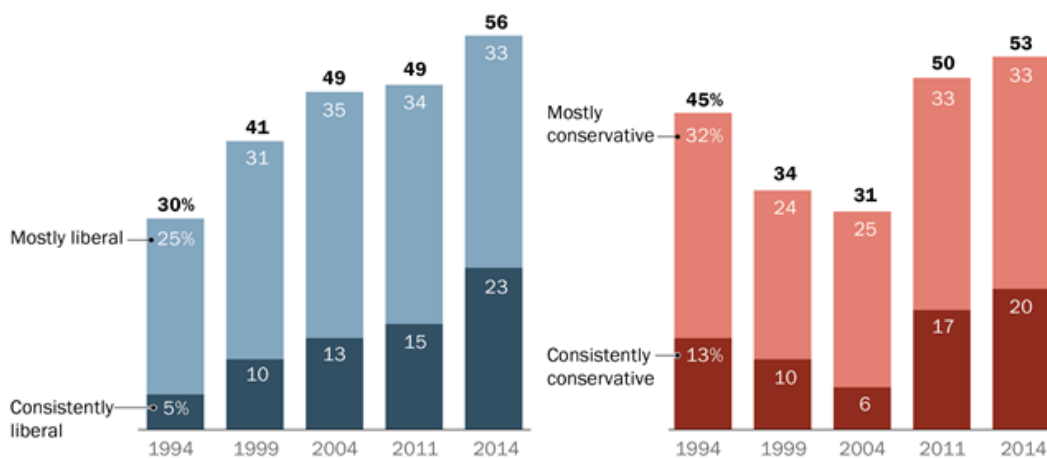
Increasing levels of political polarization has been found in the American population as well. Figure 3 provides a visual of the percent of voters in each party with political values that are either consistently or mostly liberal or conservative.

¹⁰ Andris C, Lee D, Hamilton MJ, Martino M, Gunning CE, Selden JA (2015) The Rise of Partisanship and Super-Cooperators in the U.S. House of Representatives. PLoS ONE 10(4): e0123507. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0123507>

More Democrats Take Liberal Positions, More Republicans Take Conservative Positions

Percent of Democrats with political values that are...

Percent of Republicans with political values that are...



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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Figure 3: More Democrats Take Liberal Positions, More Republicans Take Conservative Positions¹¹

As seen in Figure 3, the Democrats have seen an increase in “consistently liberal” and “mostly liberal” voters since 1994, as the Republicans have seen an increase in “consistently conservative” and “mostly conservative”. Although the Democrats have experienced a larger increase in liberal voters, according to the figure, both parties have had their voters move more towards the liberal (Democratic) and conservative (Republican) sides respectively. Another way to visualize this shift is seen in Figure 4, showing the move of districts around the country to each side of the political spectrum.

¹¹ Suh, Michael. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 11 Oct. 2016, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

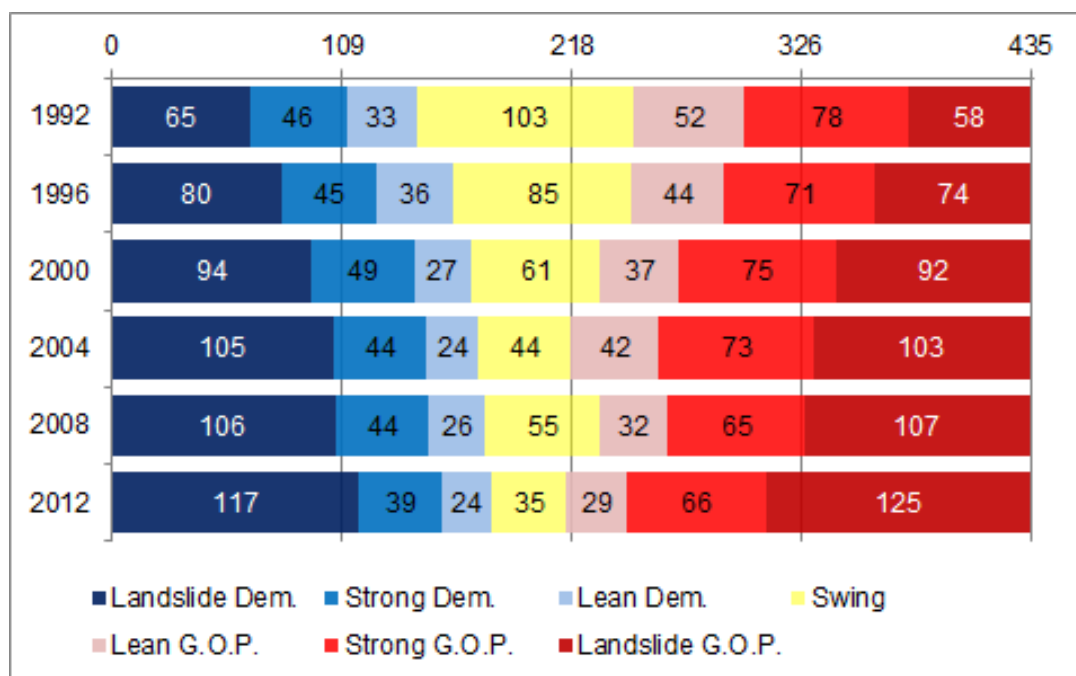


Figure 4: As Swing Districts Dwindle, Can a Divided House Stand?¹²

The difference in Figure 4 between the number of Landslide Democratic districts and Landslide G.O.P. districts between 1992 and 2012 shows that districts are becoming more politically homogenous and people are voting more consistently with one of the parties.

According to the *LA Times*, “the share of the Democratic vote coming from liberals increased from 26% in 1980 to 43% in 2012. The Republican vote drawn from conservatives increased from 39% to 60% over the same time period”¹³. Parties are experiencing more voter extremity as time progresses.

¹² Silver, Nate. “As Swing Districts Dwindle, Can a Divided House Stand?” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 27 Dec. 2012, fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/27/as-swing-districts-dwindle-can-a-divided-house-stand/.

¹³ “The source of America's political polarization? It's us.” *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 2016, www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-campbell-political-polarization-20160627-snap-story.html.

Lastly, Figure 5 shows the median voter political values moving gradually toward each side of the political spectrum in the past 25 years:

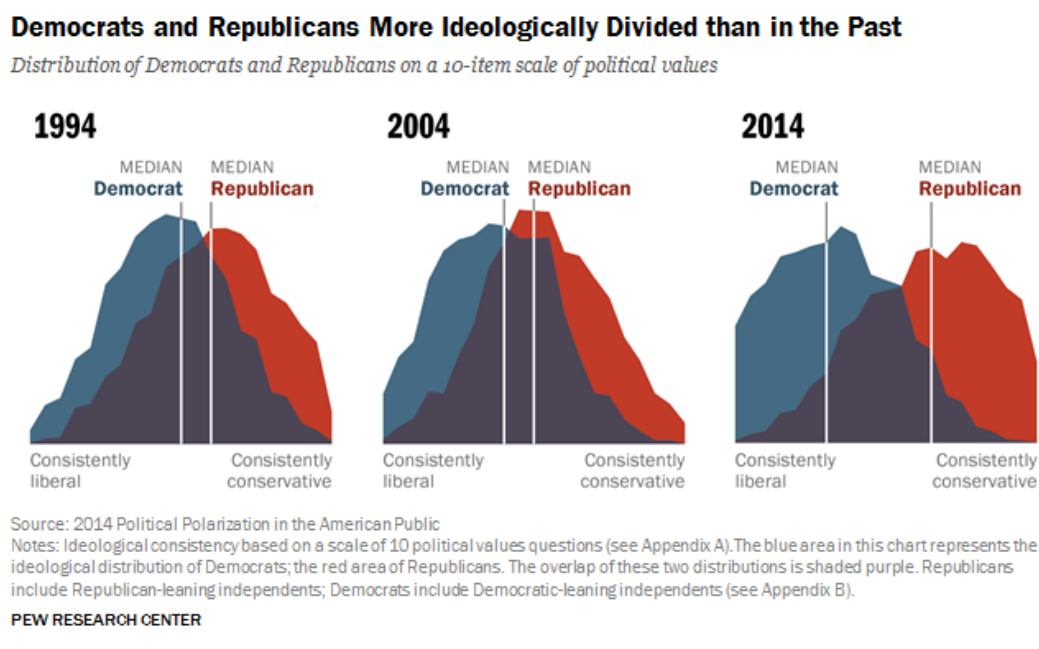


Figure 5: Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past¹⁴

In 1994, the medians were much closer to one another than the medians in 2014. According to the Pew study represented by this figure, this means that the Democratic voting population is becoming more “Consistently liberal” and the Republican voting population is becoming more “Consistently conservative”. As the population becomes consistently more conservative and liberal respective to each party, more individuals move towards each political pole. With the trend given above, it would not be surprising if the median Democrat and median Republican moved even farther from one another in the next 10 years.

¹⁴ Suh, Michael. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 11 Oct. 2016, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

There are a variety of analyses that explore and chronicle political polarization's variation and ascent in recent history (see Gentzkow, 2016, Silver, 2012, Suh, 2014). These studies come to similar conclusions: political polarization has been increasing dramatically since at least the 1990's. The main factor in these polarization level rises is the election system; the electoral college, the primary system, and districting all lead to increasing political polarization in the United States, and now we will turn to explore the early arguments and ideas that became central to the construction of the election system in the 1770s and 1780s.

2. Early Arguments for the Election System

If we have reached such a high level of political polarization today, and that is due in large part to our election system, why did the founders structure the systems in this way? Are there an inherent set of flaws in the system, and how have key aspects of the election system changed since the structures were first established?

For the electoral college: many founders wanted educated individuals making the voting decisions, they wanted smaller states to have equal representation, and it was a way to appease the South: “in a direct election system, the North would outnumber the South, whose many slaves (more than half a million in all) of course could not vote”¹⁵. In an interview with Corrie Goldman from Stanford University (2016), Historian Jack Rakove claims, “If you truly had a popular election, the nation would be one big constituency, and the South would lose the advantage of the 3/5 clause and become a permanent minority”. He provides an additional point as after Washington was president, the nation was still very divided amongst the states; that is, people would likely favor candidates from their states and would thus make it difficult to choose a candidate with a true popular majority. At the time, the electoral college was a largely discussed compromise that convention members hoped would succeed, but had no real evidence to back their claim¹⁶.

For the elections of congress, the following arguments were evident: for the Senate, people wanted representation for the minority in national government (i.e. small states), and their longer terms were to ensure that they were a solid group so that the House did not take control of

¹⁵ Amar, A. R. (2016, November 08). Election 2016: The Real Reason the Electoral College Exists. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4558510/electoral-college-history-slavery/>

¹⁶ Goldman, Corrie. “Why Do We Still Let the Electoral College Pick Our President?” *Stanford News*, 18 Apr. 2016, news.stanford.edu/2012/08/20/rakove-electoral-college-082012/.

the government. Life-long Senate terms were discussed, but, as Melanction Smith stated in the New York Convention in June of 1788, “It is a circumstance strongly in favor of rotation, that it will have a tendency to diffuse a more general spirit of emulation and bring forward into office the genius and abilities of the continent”¹⁷. Here, Smith is claiming that rotating senators will be beneficial for an ever-changing national population. For the House, they wanted proportional representation as they wanted to make sure the entire population was represented (some founders wanted popular representation but had to compromise), and biennial elections were made because, “delegates at the Convention were concerned that Members of the House would grow detached from their constituencies if they did not face regular elections”¹⁸. It is evident, though, that some convention members did not trust that the people would be able to be truly represented with the structure provided, conveyed by George Mason at the Virginia Convention when he stated, “It would be impossible to have a full and adequate representation in the General Government... We are then under the necessity of having this a very inadequate representation”¹⁹. The founders discussed many possible scenarios in which the U.S. finds itself today (i.e. inadequate representation, abuse of power by elected officials, prevalence of sanctions, and others); many of these will be discussed in the following few paragraphs in an attempt to convey the origins of our election system.

On a Summer day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (May 14th), a group of delegates from various states convened for the first time at the Constitutional Convention; more meetings

¹⁷ Elliot, Jonathan. *Debates, Resolutions, and Other Proceedings, in Convention, on the Adoption*. Nabu Press, 2010.

¹⁸ “Biennial Elections.” *US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives*, history.house.gov/Institution/Origins-Development/Biennial-Elections/.

¹⁹ Bailyn, Bernard. *The Debate on the Constitution: Part Two*. Literary Classics of the United States, 1993.

followed that would compose the election system structure we use today. The Avalon Project from the Yale Law School provides helpful notes on the constitutional convention and claims that on May 31, the fourth resolution was brought to the floor as follows: “that the members of the first branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by the people of the several States”. As one of the first debates of the convention, this article brought about central argumentative positions evident throughout the convention. Following a point against a popular vote for the legislature, George Mason, a delegate from Virginia, stated, “our House of Commons - It ought to know & sympathise with every part of the community; and ought therefore to be taken not only from different parts of the whole republic, but also from different districts of the larger members of it... We ought to attend to the rights of every class of people”. Mason was interested in representative democracy, at least for the legislature. He, “often wondered at the indifference of the superior classes of society to this dictate of humanity & policy,” showing his apparent interest in the best regulations for the whole population. James Wilson from Pennsylvania took a different stance and claimed that, “No government could long subsist without the confidence of the people”²⁰. Mason was concerned with the rights of the population while Wilson argued on the grounds of governmental continuation. Both arguments were viable and led to the decision of popular voting for the national legislature, becoming the House of Representatives.

Disagreement with the popular vote was also evident during this debate. Many delegates distrusted the general population to make political decisions. Roger Sherman, a delegate from Connecticut, was, “insisting that it ought to be by the State Legislatures. The people he said,

²⁰ “Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention.” *Avalon Project - Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention*, avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp.

immediately should have as little to do as may be about the Government. They want information and are constantly liable to be misled”²¹. Two sides of a continuing debate emerged from this discussion: one focused on representing the population and the other on electing people to make wiser decisions for the country.

According to the Avalon Project, Article 10, Section 1 was brought to the floor as follows: “The executive power of the U.S. shall be vested in a single person... He shall be elected by ballot by the Legislature”. Discourse ensued and Nathaniel Gorham from Massachusetts claimed the, “public good was the true object to be kept in view. Great delay and confusion would ensue if the two Houses shd. Vote separately, each having a negative choice of the other”. John Langdon brought up the case of New Hampshire’s system of election with both houses providing difficulties, and that, “This general officer ought to be elected by the joint and general voice”. Gouverneur Morris from Pennsylvania used the Legislative tyranny argument in that, “If the Legislature have the Executive dependent on them, they can perpetuate & support their usurpations by the influence of tax-gatherers & other officers, by fleets armies, etc”. Morris was the one who motioned for the electoral system and it read that the President, “shall be chosen by Electors to be chosen by the People of the several States”. If the Legislature chose the president, the executive would be “dependent on them,” and there would not be appropriate checks on the Legislature’s power²¹.

How did the electoral college debates relate to the debates for legislature elections and representation? Although it was not explicitly stated in electoral college debates, both included a general distrust of the public. The motion for replacing electing “by the Legislature” with “by the

²¹ “Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention.” *Avalon Project - Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention*, avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp.

people” lost with an obvious majority of 9 no-votes and only 2 ay-votes. Arguments for governmental unity and cooperation were present in both debates as delegates wanted to promote generativity within congress and between governmental branches. In addition, there was a large amount of debate for direct public representation. It seems confusing that there was so much stated about direct representation and then the electoral system being put into place, but there are two important factors that most likely played large roles in such a decision. First, compromise was a large part of the convention. As stated earlier, there were divides in the convention on various areas throughout the constitutional draft. Rakove claims the constitutional framers, “adopted the Electoral College not because they found it attractive in itself, but simply because it was the least objectionable alternative”²². Second, although it did not necessarily need to be stated, there was a general prestige felt among the delegates that came with doubt in the public’s ability to make correct decisions for the country.

2.1. Factions

Next, we turn to the relationship between factions, polarization, and political parties. A faction can be defined as, “a party or group (as within a government) that is often contentious or self-seeking”²³. Madison, though, defined the, “factious spirit,” as, “a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the

²² Parker, Clifton B. “National Popular Vote Far Better than Electoral College System for Choosing Presidents, Stanford Professors Say.” *Stanford News*, Stanford University, 8 Apr. 2016, news.stanford.edu/2016/04/08/electoral-college-bad-040816/.

²³ “Faction.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faction.

permanent and aggregate interests of the community”²⁴. Factions have been seen throughout history, and faction was inevitable with this construction of the republic according to Madison. But, how do political parties relate to factions? It is difficult to argue that political parties are factions themselves, but, there are various factions within each party.

Specifically, factions, due to the two party system (which is a result of the election system), have played a role in polarization. The Washington post claims, “through much of the 20th century, the Republican and Democratic parties had sizable liberal and conservative factions”²⁵. Journalist Lee Drutman states, “Parties are being pulled to extreme ideological positions by powerful factions within the party”²⁶. It can also be argued that factions exterior to party politics have been pulling either party to sides of the political spectrum (such as social movements, etc.). Drew Penrose sheds a light on factions and founder’s intent: “The design of the republic was intended to accommodate a plurality of factions, so that none could control the government to the detriment of the public good. In U.S. politics, that has taken the form of parties lacking total control over representatives, who instead represent more diverse constituent interests, and form ad hoc coalitions in the Congress”²⁷. Certain groups, such as interest groups and corporations, have large say in the decisions made by elected officials today, arguably more than the party that the official represents.

²⁴ Hamilton, Alexander, et al. “Federalist No. 10.” *The Federalist Papers*, 1787, pp. 49–54., doi:10.1057/9780230102019_6.

²⁵ “How Did Our Politics Get so Polarized?” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-did-our-politics-get-so-polarized/2013/10/05/61d533e6-2c61-11e3-8ade-a1f23cda135e_gallery.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c495528977e4.

²⁶ Drutman, Lee. “We Need New Ideas to Reduce Partisan Polarization.” *Vox*, Vox, 27 June 2017, www.vox.com/polyarchy/2017/6/27/15880328/how-to-reduce-partisan-polarization.

²⁷ “The Violence of Faction: Partisanship Hardens in 2016.” *FairVote*, www.fairvote.org/the_violence_of_faction.

Factions and changing ideas about them are crucial (in both the 1780's and today). An examination of the federalist papers provides evidence that the founders were concerned about factions. Federalist no. 9 includes arguments from Alexander Hamilton in response to two main arguments from critics: that a Republic is not peaceful, and that the United States is too large to function as a Republic. Scholars have interpreted this document work in a variety of ways; Donovan and Bowler discuss the possibility of tyranny by the majority and state that Hamilton thought the, "enlargement of the orbit," would counter such actions by the majority²⁸. Small republics, Hamilton thought, would have more trouble with majority tyranny. Has the tyranny of the majority really been countered by the large nation in which we live, though? The civil rights movement and various other social movements might show otherwise. This helps us realize one of the important foundations of the governmental and election system structure; the country was interested in growth and enlargement and the factors that allowed such expansion were embedded in the constitution (the House of Representatives first met with only around 60 members, and now that number has grown to 435). Ordeshook and Shvetsova shed a light on an additional conclusion from Hamilton in Federalist 9: "In Federalist 9 they express the view that a stable federation is more than a prosperous state in which federal subjects are just additional sets of interests that must contend with the national government for power and influence. Rather, a federal constitution must "make [state governments] constituent parts of the national sovereignty"²⁹. So, founders were interested in the states as a way to keep the federal government stable and for the federal government to recognize states in the national sovereignty.

²⁸ Donovan, Todd, and Shaun Bowler. "Direct Democracy and Minority Rights: An Extension." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1998, p. 1020., doi:10.2307/2991742.

²⁹ Ordeshook, Peter C., and Olga Shvetsova. "Federalism and Constitutional Design." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1997, pp. 27–42., doi:10.1353/jod.1997.0010.

One could argue that although states are given voting rights with senators and representatives, the two party system has led to the minority party not truly being acknowledged as a factor in decisions. Political polarization has led to locked mindsets of many elected officials and the inability to openly discuss issues and bills are essentially just a competition between both parties now.

Federalist 10 also explores factions and explains how governmental structure would defend against such groups. Again, with the notion of success with large republics, Madison, “urged the area of a democracy be extended and warned that in small jurisdictions, ‘more frequently will a majority be found of the same party’ and ‘more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression’³⁰. In a way, Madison and Hamilton seem to be correct in their assertions. As the United States has expanded and diversified, general tyranny by the majority in American society has continually decreased. At the same time, diversification and expansion has also led to increased factions within minorities. Woody Holton brings up another notion in Federalist 10 that can be debated in today’s society: “By November 22, 1787, when Federalist 10 appeared, a host of Madison's contemporaries had already discussed its primary theme: that the quality of legislative decisions depended in large measure on the sizes of election districts and of the polity”³¹. As the United States continues to grow, it could be argued that better decisions are being made due to the increase in diverse views and larger pool from which possible officials will arise. At the same time, it could be argued that consistent growth and growing

³⁰ Hamilton, Alexander, et al. “Federalist No. 10.” *The Federalist Papers*, 1787, pp. 49–54., doi:10.1057/9780230102019_6

³¹ Holton, Woody. “‘Divide Et Impera’: ‘Federalist 10’ in a Wider Sphere.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2, Jan. 2005, p. 175., doi:10.2307/3491599.

diversification has led to less decisions being able to be completed, leading to less, and worse, decisions (as they need to be filled with often unnecessary aspects of compromise).

Early arguments about the election system and factions provide important implications for the election system's effect on political polarization. Although the founders had the possibility of faction and polarization in mind, they were more interested in creating national harmony at the time and finishing the constitution. That being said, it was impossible for them to expect the various changes and manipulations to their system that would come about. The sections following will provide evidence as to how the election system has affected polarization, both while certain aspects change and while others stay the same.

3. The Election System and Polarization

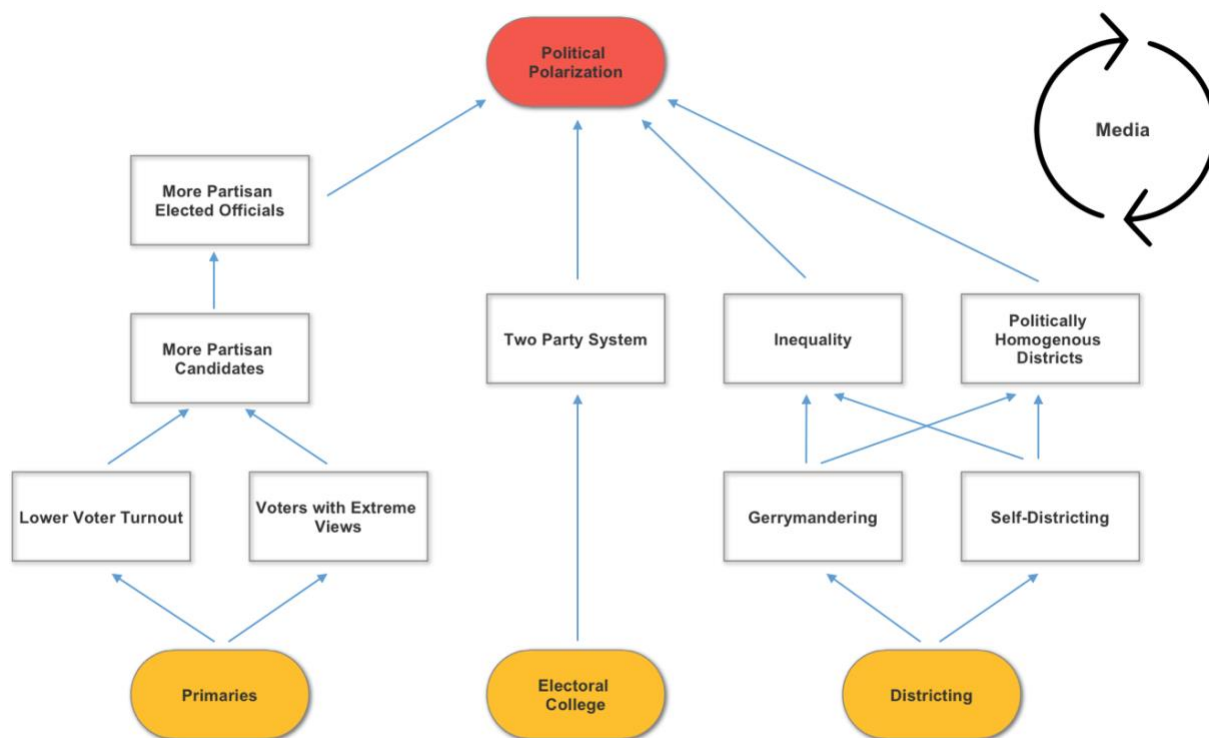


Figure 1: Primaries, the Electoral College, and Districting Lead to Political Polarization

Figure 1 helps visualize how the following sections will approach arguments. Each section will provide explanations of one of the three routes to political polarization shown in Figure 1.

3.1. The Electoral College

“The electoral college is a disaster for a democracy” – Donald J. Trump³²

The electoral college clause in the United States Constitution reads: “The Electors shall meet in their respective states, and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President, one of whom, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves; they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President, and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and of all persons voted for as Vice-President, and of the number of votes for each, which lists they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the seat of the government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate”. The number of votes depends on the state’s population, and each state gets two extra votes, one per senator. Electors in each state are appointed by political parties. Besides Maine and Nebraska, state laws require all electoral votes to go to the candidate that wins the state popular vote³³. In addition, electors cannot vote for candidates of the presidency and vice presidency that are from the elector’s state. In Maine and Nebraska a district system is used in which two electors represent the popular vote in addition to one elector representing each district’s popular vote.

The “Winner-take-all” system evident in most states can create very skewed election results. Discrepancies between the popular vote and the electoral vote have often been topics of

³² Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump). “The electoral college is a disaster for a democracy. 6 Nov 2012, 8:45 PM, Tweet.

³³ “Electoral College Fast Facts.” *US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives*, history.house.gov/Institution/Electoral-College/Electoral-College/.

debate and unrest during presidential elections. There have been a number cases of candidates winning the overall popular vote in the United States but losing the electoral college majority. The 2016 election of Donald Trump was an example of this discrepancy as he won the electoral majority but lost the popular vote by over 2.5 million³⁴.

My argument is that the electoral college and political polarization are not directly tied, but the two-party system provides the connection. The electoral college creates the two party system, and the two party system leads to polarization. With a two-party system, most members of the population are involved with one of the two parties. As more people join the party, those people become more aligned with the party's beliefs and the party slowly becomes more extreme. This phenomenon can be explained by two social psychology phenomena: groupthink and group polarization. Groupthink is, "when a group with a particular agenda makes irrational or problematic decisions because its members value harmony and coherence over accurate analysis and critical evaluation. Individual members of the group are strongly discouraged from any disagreement with the consensus and set aside their own thoughts and feelings to unquestioningly follow the word of the leader and other group members"³⁵. Groupthink explains why people seem to slowly mold their views to their party's, even if some of them seemed irrational or immoral to them previously. The movement towards extremity can be explained by group polarization: "Group polarization is said to occur when, after discussion, the attitudes held by the individual group members become more extreme than they were before the group began discussing the topic... This may seem surprising, given the widespread belief that groups tend to

³⁴ "Hillary Clinton's Final Popular Vote Lead Is 2.8 Million." *Time*, Time, [time.com/4608555/hillary-clinton-popular-vote-final/](https://www.time.com/4608555/hillary-clinton-popular-vote-final/).

³⁵ "Groupthink." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/groupthink.

push people toward consensus and the middle-ground in decision making. Actually, they may often lead to more extreme decisions being made than those that individuals would have taken on their own”³⁶. Another important aspect of both phenomena is the leader of each group; the leader has immense power over group views and decisions. Five-thirty-eight conducted a study in which they measured the conservative and liberal scores for republican and democrat presidents respectively. Since Roosevelt, they found that, “The rightward shift of Republicans is even more apparent in the scores that DW-Nominate assigns to their presidents. George W. Bush was more conservative than his father (although similar to Ronald Reagan); Reagan and both Bushes were more conservative than Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford; and Nixon and Ford were more conservative than Dwight D. Eisenhower, according to those scores”³⁷. Republican presidents have become much more conservative, and Democrats have stayed relatively consistent, but have become slightly more liberal. The figure below provides a visual:

³⁶ Stangor, Charles. “Principles of Social Psychology – 1st International Edition.” *Introduction to Sociology – 1st Canadian Edition*, BCcampus, 26 Sept. 2014, opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/group-decision-making/.

³⁷ “How Liberal Is President Obama?” *FiveThirtyEight*, FiveThirtyEight, 29 Apr. 2011, fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-liberal-is-president-obama/.

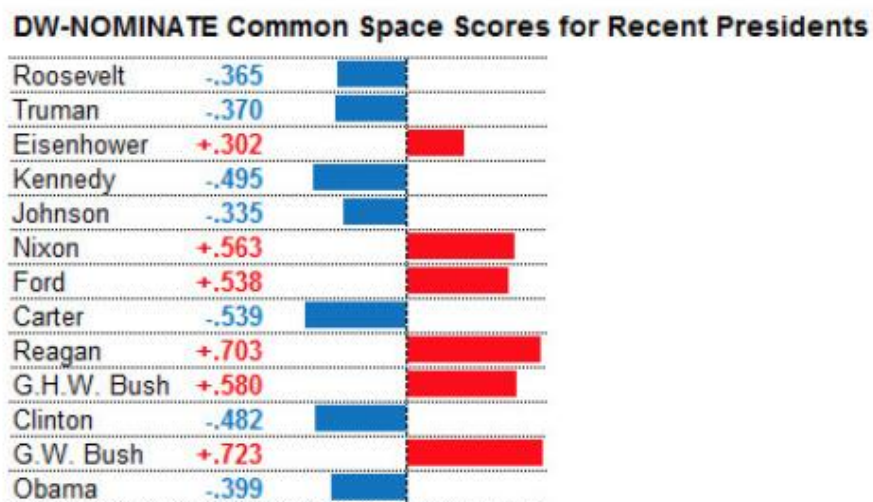


Figure 6: Recent President Political Ideologies³⁸

The two-party system's correlation with the electoral college can be explained by Duverger's law. Although the law was published originally in 1951 in his work, *Political Parties*, much of its content still holds in today's society. Explicitly, Duverger's law states simply, "the simple-majority single-ballot system favors the two-party system,"³⁹. Since his publication, various studies have provided support for his claim (see Schlesinger, 2006, Riker, 1982, Downs, 2003, and Cox, 1991). Benoit provides a summary of the law and claims, "Duverger's comparative survey of party systems investigated the sources of dualism, or the concentration of political party activity in two main parties. National factors explain a great deal, concluded Duverger, but two-party systems are invariably associated with a particular type of institutional arrangement: the single-member district, plurality electoral system"⁴⁰. Benoit adds that Duverger

³⁸ "How Liberal Is President Obama?" *FiveThirtyEight*, FiveThirtyEight, 29 Apr. 2011, fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-liberal-is-president-obama/.

³⁹ Duverger, Maurice, et al. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Science Editions, 1963 (p. 217).

⁴⁰ Benoit, Kenneth. "Duvergers Law and study of Electoral Systems." *French Politics*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, pp. 69-83., doi:10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200092.

also concludes, “proportional representation (PR) electoral systems were a driving force behind the multi-party systems in many such countries he examined. Although he did not claim the proposition about PR to be a ‘law’, Duverger stated that PR favors multi-partism, as does the majority system with a second-round runoff format”. In an essay of Duverger’s law’s application, William H. Riker explores the law and its application in political history. As he discusses various cases, he eventually revises the law to state, “Plurality election rules bring about and maintain two-party competition except in countries where (1) third parties nationally are continually one of two parties locally, and (2) one party among several is almost always the Condorcet winner in elections”⁴¹. Riker goes on to state that he is not stating a causal relationship, but it is a major catalyst in the creation of the two-party system. Using examples from various country systems including structures in Germany, Canada, Britain, and others, Riker concludes that Duverger’s law still applies to society, and probably even more than it did in the mid 20th century.

There is also opposition to Duverger’s law, though; for example, Singer states that, in a study with, “district-level data from 6,745 single-member district election contests from 53 democratic countries,” “the two largest parties typically dominate the districts (generally receiving more than 90 per cent of the vote), and there is very little support for parties finishing fourth or worse. Yet third-place parties do not completely disappear, and ethnic divisions shape party fragmentation levels, even under plurality rule”⁴². Why are there situations in which his

⁴¹ Riker, William H. “The Two-Party System and Duverger's Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science.” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 76, no. 4, 1982, pp. 753–766. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1962968.

⁴² Singer, Matthew M. “Was Duverger Correct? Single-Member District Election Outcomes in Fifty-Three Countries.” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 01, 2012, pp. 201–220., doi:10.1017/s0007123412000233.

theory does not function? Rich provides a possible explanation: “in addition to MMM three factors largely absent in previous research (i.e., fused ballots, the electoral thresholds for PR seats and the presence of compulsory voting laws) appear to influence district competition, highlighting the importance of analysing the many moving parties within mixed systems and the broader electoral environment”⁴³. By MMM, Rich means mixed member majoritarian systems; mixed majoritarian systems do not necessarily even apply to Duverger’s conditions as they are semi-proportional systems (a mixture of first-past-the-post and proportional representation). Fused ballots occur when two parties can support the same candidate, which could lead to the continued success of a third party which simply shares a candidate with a more successful party. Differences in electoral seat number could provide differences in the ability of a third party to succeed (i.e. with 1,000 seats in the House of Representatives it would be more likely for a third party to succeed). Finally, compulsory voting laws could keep a third party in the competition; for example, a law could provide that you have to vote for one party for all elected seats, which could amplify the votes for a third party. Rich provides legitimately possible explanations for the inconsistencies for Duverger’s law that have been seen in other studies.

⁴³ Rich, Timothy S. “Duvergers Law in Mixed Legislative Systems: The Impact of National Electoral Rules on District Competition.” *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2014, pp. 182–196., doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12067.

3.2. The Primary System

“The right of suffrage is a fundamental Article in Republican Constitutions. The regulation of it is, at the same time, a task of peculiar delicacy” – James Madison⁴⁴

The primary election system is a major factor in the continuation of polarization in the United States. Primaries can be difficult to understand as it can vary relative to each state, but the general idea stays consistent. There are both primaries and caucuses that major parties hold in order to choose their preferred candidate for whatever election is taking place. Caucuses are large meetings within parties that help them decide certain things, often pertaining to elections and the processes. Primaries, on the other hand, make important democratic decisions leading to a candidate who will run as that party’s nomination. There are two kinds of primaries, open and closed primaries, and some primaries use aspects of both. An open primary allows votes from any end of the political spectrum to count towards the candidacy, whereas a closed primary is only open to members (registered) of the party.

The primary system was not really used until the early 1900’s, but, according to Encyclopaedia Britannica, “direct primaries were used as early as the 1840s”. State primaries gained popularity and by “1917 all but four states had adopted the direct primary for some or all statewide nominations”⁴⁵. The presidential primary process took longer, and did not become a majority around the country until after the 1970s. But why did the primaries become popular in

⁴⁴ “James Madison, Note to His Speech on the Right of Suffrage.” *The Founders’ Constitution*, press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s26.html.

⁴⁵ “Primary Election.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 5 Jan. 2015, www.britannica.com/topic/primary-election

the first place? Originally, caucuses were the original way that candidates were chosen. Some states still use caucuses today; caucuses function as the political party chooses delegates to represent the party (at the national convention in this case). So, the party has ultimate control over who gets chosen as delegates, not necessarily the voters. This concept led to the surge of primaries in the early 20th century, “in an era of progressiveness as a reaction against strong party organizations and their control over nominations”⁴⁶. The Electoral College Network’s Ace Project states that there were two important developments that led to the primary system in the United States: the, “introduction of secret ballots that enabled free voting for party nominees,” and, “the rejection of the party convention system for candidate selection”⁴⁷. In sum, the primary system was a way for voters to have more control over the elections in the gradual movement throughout the 20th century for more voting rights and popular representation in government.

Compared to general election voter turnouts, primary elections have very low voter turnouts. About one in five of either political party participates in the primary system⁴⁸. The Ace Project claims the last presidential primary only contained 28.5% of the estimated eligible voters. Voters are more interested in the general elections. Figure 6 conveys participation of citizens voting in primary elections.

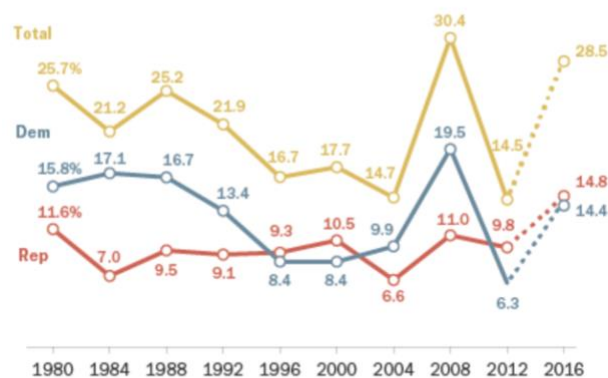
⁴⁶ “United States: Study on Primary Elections -.” *The Voter Identification Card: Advantages and Disadvantages - ACE*, aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/annex/pcy/pcy_usa.

⁴⁷ “Parties and Candidates.” *Ace Project*, aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/pc/pcb/pcb02/pcb02a/pcb02a1.

⁴⁸ DeSilver, Drew. “Turnout was high in the 2016 primary season, but just short of 2008 record.” *Pew Research Center*, 10 June 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/10/turnout-was-high-in-the-2016-primary-season-but-just-short-of-2008-record/.

After a long decline, primary turnout rebounds

Votes cast in Democratic and Republican primaries as a share of eligible voters in primary states



Note: Total turnout does not equal the sum of turnout in Democratic and Republican primaries because some states only held primaries for one or the other party. Data from U.S. territories not included. 2016 figures exclude D.C. Democratic primary, to be held June 14. Eligible voters are defined as U.S. citizens ages 18 and older.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1980-2012 November and January 2016 Current Population Survey data for the share of eligible voters. 1980-2004 and 2013 voting data from "America Votes" (CQ Press); 2008 data from "Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2011-2012" (CQ Press). 2016 data are from state election offices, when available, or as reported by The New York Times.

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Figure 7: Democratic and Republican Voter Turnout in Primary Elections between 1980 and 2016⁴⁹.

As seen in Figure 1, there was a spike in primary turnout for the 2008 elections, and there is an upwards trend between 2012 and 2016. The media and candidates most likely play into the increase in primary turnout during those years, but what is to explain the general downwards trend between 1980 and 2004? One reason could be a general lack of interest in primary systems as media influence increased and citizens did not feel the need to participate directly until the general election. Another could be the trend of moving from open primaries to closed primaries. As closed primaries become more common, in the past few decades, less moderate views are

⁴⁹ Pew Research Center analysis of 1980-2012 November and January 2016 Current Population Survey data for the share of eligible voters. 1980-2004 and 2013 voting data from "America Votes" (CQ Press); 2008 data from "Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2011-2012" (CQ Press). 2016 data are from state election offices, when available, or as reported by the New York Times.

present in the elections. The connection from the downwards trend from 1980 to 2004 to polarization is important to note: as primary voter turnout decreased through those decades, polarization in congress increased (as seen in Figure 1).

The primary voters often are the most partisan of the voting population. In regards to the people participating in the primaries, “Candidates with the most strident views tend to appeal to these voters”⁵⁰. Pietro S. Nivola claims, “The electorates in these contests tend to be small (under 18 percent even in the recent presidential primaries) and often unrepresentative. Hence, candidates are frequently forced to protect their flanks by moving away from the center - positioning themselves further to the left or right of the general public”⁵¹. Extreme and underrepresented voters lead to problems in policy: “These weaknesses are interrelated, stemming ultimately from a conception of politics that emphasizes the sway (or lack thereof) of the “median voter” in electoral politics, rather than the influence of organized interests in the process of policy making”. Brady, Han and Pope state, “relative to general-election voters, primary voters favor more ideological extreme candidates”⁵². Richard Pildes claims, “The people who show up for primary elections tend to be much more extreme, much more the activist wings of the political parties”⁵³. In addition, Gerber and Morton claim that closed primaries see

⁵⁰ Greene, David, and Shankar Vedantam. “Is The Primary System To Blame For Partisanship?” *NPR*, NPR, 18 Dec. 2013, www.npr.org/2013/12/18/255185863/is-the-primary-system-to-blame-for-partisanship.

⁵¹ Nivola, Pietro S. “Thinking About Political Polarization.” *Brookings*, Brookings, 28 July 2016, www.brookings.edu/research/thinking-about-political-polarization/.

⁵² Brady, David W., et al. “Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2007, pp. 79–105., doi:10.3162/036298007x201994.

⁵³ Cookson, John. “#25: Abolish Primary Elections.” *Big Think*, Big Think, 26 Aug. 2010, bigthink.com/dangerous-ideas/25-abolish-primary-elections.

candidates with even more extreme views than with open primaries⁵⁴. Examples include the, “upset of a Republican state senator in western Pennsylvania by a conservative insurgent and the defeat of two veteran Democratic state representatives at the hands of candidates endorsed by Democratic Socialists of America”⁵⁵. Another example is a study of primary electorates in the California Bay Area in which the primary electorate is, “far less representative of Americans than the general election; essentially, it is older, white and wealthier”⁵⁶.

At the same time, there is dissent to this often accepted claim. Abramowitz claims that, “there appears to be very little difference between the ideologies of each party’s primary voters and the ideologies of its general election voters”⁵⁷. Sides, Tausanovitch, Vavreck and Warshaw have a similar claim⁵⁸; while these studies hold important conclusions, the accuracy of their reports should be questioned. Both studies involved surveys from primary voters and the latter study includes administrative records; records and surveys are not the best sources from which to draw concrete conclusions. People who fill out such surveys tend to be a specific part of a sample or population which can lead to skewed results.

⁵⁴ Woon, Jonothan. “Primary and Candidate Polarization: Behavioral Theory and Experimental Evidence”. University of Pittsburgh, 2017.

⁵⁵ “Open Primaries Lead to More, Not Less Political Polarization, Studies Show.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-state/2018/05/31/closed-primary-open-primary-pennsylvania-legislature-republican-leaders-more-moderate-research-partisan/stories/201805310200.

⁵⁶ “The 2014 Primaries: Why They Matter, What's Wrong With Them, and How to Fix Them.” *FairVote*, www.fairvote.org/the_2014_primaries_why_they_matter_what_s_wrong_with_them_and_how_to_fix_them.

⁵⁷ Abramowitz, Alan. “Don’t Blame Primary Voters for Polarization.” *The Forum*, vol. 5, no. 4, Jan. 2008, pp. 1-11., doi:10.2202/1540-8884.1210.

⁵⁸ Sides, John, et al. “On the Representativeness of Primary Electorates.” *British Journal of Political Science*, 2018, pp. 1–9., doi:10.1017/s000712341700062x.

Primaries also simply lay groundwork for polarization in the election system. In a discussion on NPR, Shankar Vedantam, a social science correspondent, stated, “the political process has been hijacked by partisans...they’re doing it by having outsized influence during primary elections”⁵⁹. Vedantam claims, “partisans are the ones who know the most about politics. They care the most about politics, and regardless of the rules, they’re the ones who show up and vote”. In addition, the primary is one of the most powerful political events for the United States. “Interest groups have figured out that by controlling the primary,” Vedantam states, “you’re able to control the whole political process”.

Although it could be argued that closed primaries are the main catalyst for the primaries’ influence on polarization in the United States, the closure or opening of primaries does not have a large effect. Closed primaries have voter turnouts that are relatively extreme as, “incumbents from states with closed primaries have reason to be sensitive to inter-party challenges if they stray from the base ideology”⁶⁰. Yet, according to Nolan McCarty, the type of primary system that is used was essentially not connected with polarization levels in the states⁶¹. Whether the primary is closed or opened to independents, “primary election voters are more likely to be ideological purists, more likely to have contributed to a political party, more likely to have tried

⁵⁹ Greene, David, and Shankar Vedantam. “Is The Primary System To Blame For Partisanship?” *NPR*, NPR, 18 Dec. 2013, www.npr.org/2013/12/18/255185863/is-the-primary-system-to-blame-for-partisanship.

⁶⁰ Siegel, Mark A. “How closed primaries further polarize our politics.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 4 Sept. 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-closed-primaries-further-polarize-our-politics/2011/09/02/gIQARBPb2J_story.html?utm_term=.2cb286e1d083.

⁶¹ Barber, Michael J., and Nolan McCarty. “Causes and Consequences of Polarization.” *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*, pp. 15–58., doi:10.1017/cbo9781316091906.002.

convincing someone how to vote, and more likely to be upper-middle class”⁶². All in all, primary voters are more politically extreme, which leads to extreme candidates running for offices.

Republican primaries do not tend to attract Democrat voters, and vice versa.

The United States Justice system has also not seen a problem with closed primaries. In 2017, the New Mexico Supreme Court heard a case involving the constitutionality of closed primaries and held that, “the practice is constitutional and not overly burdensome”⁶³. The Court stated that although closing primaries offers a regulation to the election system, the election can still be free, and that closed primaries promote, “good citizenship and honest government”.

Political science literature involving primaries has been generally supportive of their cause of polarization and a move for each party to extreme ends of the political spectrum. Brady et. al find that, “relative to general-election voters, primary voters favor more ideologically extreme candidates. We show that congressional candidates handle the dilemma by positioning themselves closer to the primary electorate”⁶⁴. Burden states that, “the importance of ideology, costly movement due to candidate reputations and lack of competition - all contribute to candidate divergence in US congressional elections,” and adds, “candidates often diverge, but that the degree of candidate polarization is variable”⁶⁵. Other literature states how primaries push

⁶² King, David. “Congress, Polarization, and Fidelity to the Median Voter.” *Harvard University*, Jan. 2003.

⁶³ Mexican, Rebecca MossThe New. “State Supreme Court upholds closed primaries.” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, 7 Feb. 2017, www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/state-supreme-court-upholds-closed-primaries/article_fd6e50e2-0aaf-5c94-81a9-c32f2e8f8041.html.

⁶⁴ Brady, David W., et al. “Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2007, pp. 79–105., doi:10.3162/036298007x201994.

⁶⁵ Burden, Barry C. “Candidate Positioning in US Congressional Elections.” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2004, pp. 211–227., doi:10.1017/s000712340400002x.

polarized America to become increasingly polarized: “These findings suggest that the polarized state of American politics today reflects the polarized state of the overall American electorate rather than any peculiar characteristics of primary voters. The findings also suggest that even after they secure their party’s nomination, it may be risky for candidates to adopt more moderate policy positions in order to appeal to swing voters, because any such move toward the center would risk alienating a large proportion of their party’s electoral base”⁶⁶.

There is also some opposition to the argument, such as a study at Harvard that found, “little evidence that the introduction of primary elections, the level of primary election turnout, or the threat of primary competition are associated with partisan polarization in congressional roll call voting. We also find little evidence that extreme roll call voting records are positively associated with primary election outcomes”⁶⁷.

What is to make of the mixed conclusions in the literature? A middle ground is found; primaries do not necessarily cause polarization, but keep polarization at its current level. Woon states, “primaries appear to cause a kind of ideological purity rather than greater extremism”⁶⁸. He offers the following explanation: “voters support neither party extremists nor party moderates unconditionally. Instead, they select candidates with intermediate positions—consistent with their own subjective beliefs about optimal candidate positions, which tend to be approximately halfway between the median voter and their own party’s ideal point. This behavior generates a

⁶⁶ Abramowitz, Alan. “Don’t Blame Primary Voters for Polarization.” *The Forum*, vol. 5, no. 4, Jan. 2008, pp. 1-11., doi:10.2202/1540-8884.1210.

⁶⁷ Hirano, Shigeo. “Primary Elections and Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Congress.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2010, pp. 169–191., doi:10.1561/100.00008052.

⁶⁸ Woon, Jonothan. “Primary and Candidate Polarization: Behavioral Theory and Experimental Evidence”. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 112, no. 04, 2018, pp. 826-843., doi:10.1017/s0003055418000515.

greater concentration of candidate positions around an average that diverges from the median voter. Hence, greater ideological purity reinforces, rather than exacerbates, polarization”⁶⁹. So, the primaries reinforce the candidates that are around an average that, yes, is more extreme than the median voter; but, the primaries don’t push that average further and further, thus not increasing polarization. Instead, they keep the candidates at relatively polarized positions and do not allow for much change.

Some states have required primaries to be bipartisan; for example, in Washington and California, they use the top 2 primary system, where nominees are on the same ballot. Some other solutions have been provided; NPR have suggestions such as a national primary, primaries that rotate by region, and randomized primaries⁷⁰. There are legitimate options to change the primary system in order to lessen political polarization.

⁶⁹ Woon, Jonathan. “Primary and Candidate Polarization: Behavioral Theory and Experimental Evidence”. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 112, no. 04, 2018, pp. 826-843., doi:10.1017/s0003055418000515.

⁷⁰ Kurtzleben, Danielle. “No Way To Pick A President? Here Are 6 Other Ways To Do It.” *NPR*, NPR, 26 Jan. 2016, www.npr.org/2016/01/26/463870736/no-way-to-pick-a-president-here-are-6-other-ways-to-do-it.

3.3. Districting

“Were people to mingle only with those of like mind, every man would be an insulate being” –

*Thomas Jefferson*⁷¹

Direct manipulation of voters either in large numbers or on an individual basis has helped parties elect their desired officials; one such process is called gerrymandering and involves directly altering the shape of state districts. Gerrymandering, “is seen as an obvious conflict of interest because there is ample evidence that lawmakers use redistricting to protect both their personal electoral prospects and their party’s legislative advantages”⁷². Gerrymandering in the United States creates groupings within state populations, leading to increased and uniform support for the two major parties and increased polarization; as Lee Drutman states, “Absent competitive districts, the parties will have little incentive to move to their middle and so will move to their extremes, particularly as their geographical centers of power grow further apart”⁷³; the effects of political districting can be seen with Alabama redistricting in 1958, the case of *Shaw v. Reno* in 1993, and project REDMAP executed after the 2010 elections.

Gerrymandering leads to polarization in a variety of ways including creating politically homogenous districts, creating inter-party hostility, and promoting racism and other oppressive notions (see Nivola, 2008, Altman and McDonald, 2015). As a district becomes more unified in

⁷¹ Ferling, John E. *Jefferson and Hamilton the Rivalry That Forged a Nation*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

⁷² Kennedy, Sheila Sues. “Electoral Integrity: How Gerrymandering Matters.” *Public Integrity*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2016, pp. 265–273., doi:10.1080/10999922.2016.1225480.

⁷³ Drutman, Lee. “The clever strategy that could stop the polarization of American politics.” *Quartz*, Quartz, 14 Feb. 2016, qz.com/615630/the-clever-strategy-that-could-stop-the-polarization-of-american-politics/.

its political views, candidates running for positions (i.e. legislators or even local officials) will appeal more to the extreme to that party. A candidate running in an election in a swing district would most likely have more moderate views than that of a candidate running in a “safe” district (safe meaning no likely opponent success). In their book, “Red and Blue Nation? Characteristics and Causes of America’s Polarized Politics,” Nivola and Brady (2008) provide a thorough explanation: “In either case, according to this argument, the lines are drawn in a way that diminishes competition. Incumbents are afforded familiar and compatible electoral terrain, thereby reducing the prospects of potential challengers - and districts become more homogeneous in their partisan composition, making it less likely that a candidate representing the minority party can ever succeed there”. They go on to explain the “second link in the casual chain”: “politicians elected and reelected predictable and comfortable are likely to emerge from - or gravitate toward - the ideological pole of their party”⁷⁴. In a study done on California’s districts, Grainger finds that, “legislatively drawn districts have been, on average, less competitive than panel-drawn districts...legislative redistricting (compared with panel-drawn redistricting) is associated with increased polarization”⁷⁵. Carson and Crespin find relations between gerrymandering and polarization as well⁷⁶.

Project REDMAP provides a perfect example for gerrymandering and its role in polarization. After President Obama’s first term, a Republican strategist, Chris Jankowski,

⁷⁴ Nivola, Pietro S., and Brady, David W. *Red and Blue Nation?: Characteristics and Causes of Americas Polarized Politics*. Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford Univ., 2008.

⁷⁵ Grainger, Corbett A. “Redistricting and Polarization: Who Draws the Lines in California?” *The Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2010, pp. 545–567., doi:10.1086/605724.

⁷⁶ Carson, Jamie L., et al. “Redistricting and Party Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives.” *American Politics Research*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2007, pp. 878–904., doi:10.1177/1532673x07304263.

devised a plan to get Republican power back into congress⁷⁷. Jankowski realized in 2009 that the GOP could use the redistricting opportunities in 2010 to take back some power around the country. If Jankowski was able to raise enough funds to influence districts in certain states around the country, the Republicans would be able to reach a majority in the house. As he began devising this plan, it became REDMAP, the Redistricting Majority Project.

REDMAP spread its influence to states that were expected to have certain shifts in their house electorate compositions. With a 30\$ million budget, the GOP spread its influence to states such as Ohio, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin⁷⁸. As REDMAP began, representatives that had been comfortably and consistently reelected started to see their support dropping. In Pennsylvania, a Democratic legislator named Dave Levdansky experienced firsthand the effects of the GOP's plan. He claimed that there had been countless mail letters and flyers sent to him and others making claims against his campaign. He stated, "I wouldn't have voted for myself either if I was getting all of this stuff"⁷⁹. Specifically, the mail, which are called "mailers", claimed that Levdansky had supported projects such as spending \$600 million on the creation of a new library for Arlen Specter. The towns within Levdansky's district were experiencing economic difficulties, so they did not appreciate the idea of their legislator

⁷⁷ Daley, David. "Understanding Congressional Gerrymandering: 'It's Moneyball Applied To Politics'." *NPR*, NPR, 15 June 2016, www.npr.org/2016/06/15/482150951/understanding-congressional-gerrymandering-its-moneyball-applied-to-politics.

⁷⁸ Ingraham, Christopher. "Analysis | Why the Supreme Court's decision to review Wisconsin's gerrymandering is such a big deal." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 19 June 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/06/19/why-the-supreme-courts-decision-to-review-wisconsins-gerrymandering-is-such-a-big-deal/?utm_term=.86531a1d9139.

⁷⁹ Daley, David. "Understanding Congressional Gerrymandering: 'It's Moneyball Applied To Politics'." *NPR*, NPR, 15 June 2016, www.npr.org/2016/06/15/482150951/understanding-congressional-gerrymandering-its-moneyball-applied-to-politics.

spending that much on a library for an individual. The truth was that Levdansky had supported \$2 million for a library on a college campus for a Specter library.

Legislators around the United States had similar experiences to Levdansky, and realized how brutal but determined the GOP was to take back power. Once the Republicans had enough power around the country, they were able to take relative control over redistricting projects. They used two types of redistricting, “packing” and “cracking”. “Packing” includes forcing the opposing party into very few districts, and “cracking” includes distributing opposition voters into many districts. In Pennsylvania, the Republican majority packed democrat leaning voters specifically around Philadelphia and Pittsburgh⁸⁰. The remaining districts were then composed of mostly Republicans.

REDMAP led to political polarization in a number of ways. It first created more politically homogenous districts; Splitting Democratic and Republican leaning voters into districts led to very unified districts and a decreasing number of moderate districts. It increased hostility between the Democratic and Republican party as well. Deceptive and effective, strategies were used to specifically get Democrats out of power in certain states. REDMAP led to increasing numbers of Republicans assuming power in congress, leading to the political gridlock that occurred during Obama’s second term. Political opposition within government portrayed partisan divide leading to inability to cooperate and produce results. In addition, projects like REDMAP can lead to polarization through voter default voting. According to McKee, “these

⁸⁰ Kolbert, Elizabeth. “The G.O.P. Plan That Turned America Red.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 18 June 2017, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/27/ratfcked-the-influence-of-redistricting.

redrawn constituents rely more on their partisanship and prevailing political conditions because they lack familiarity with their new representative”⁸¹.

In addition to specific political effects, gerrymandering has catalyzed discrimination throughout history, leading to polarization between state districts; In 1958, a specific case in Alabama conveyed the influence the redistricting can have on political unity. The information is drawn from “The Tuskegee Voting Story” by C.G. Gomillion. In the town of Tuskagee, a social, legal, and political battle began between public officials and the Tuskagee Civic Association over the shaping of the district. Although whites attempted to prevent the black vote, the black voting population had begun quickly increasing. Once officials realized that there were around 1,000 black voters, they began submitting redistricting bills to the Alabama legislature.

Polarization was soon seen with the aggressive reaction from the black voting population. By taking their views and complaints to national media sources, they were able to create a national interest in the events. In 1958, some members of the black community filed suit in federal court against the Alabama officials. The case went to the Supreme Court, which sent it back to the district for trial. The trial was heard by 1961 and Federal Judge Frank M. Johnson ordered the boundaries of Tuskagee to return to the original orientation. In addition to the districting, the US Department of Justice filed a suit against the board of registrars in a declaration to stop the discriminatory policies. Polarization quickly ensued as the mostly conservative white population became a quick enemy of the black population.

The incident led to a rapid increase in black population voter turnout (more than double). In 1962, there were more black voting citizens in Tuskagee than there were whites. A civic

⁸¹ Mckee, Seth C. “Political Conditions and the Electoral Effects of Redistricting.” *American Politics Research*, vol. 41, no. 4, May 2012, pp. 623–650., doi:10.1177/1532673x12464545.

education program was also used after the districting incident to educate black voters. As white voters attempted to compete with the growing population of black voters, the Tuskagee Civic Association helped inspire more black voters through education. The case was significant as Republicans, which in this case was the main party of the white opposition, have historically controlled much of the political districting, shown in current times by Goedert: “a persistent pro-Republican bias is also present even when maps are drawn by courts or bipartisan agreement”.

Shaw v. Reno is another example of racial gerrymandering leading to polarization. In 1993 officials in North Carolina submitted a redistricting plan to the Attorney General⁸². Included in the plan was one majority black district; the Attorney General decided that it would be allowed if a second majority-black district was also created in the Southern part of the state. North Carolina revised the plan and included another black-majority district although it was placed in the north-central region. In addition, the district was very oddly shaped and at some points was no wider than the highway it was placed beside: “It is approximately 160 miles long and, for much of its length, no wider than the I-85 corridor. It winds in a snakelike fashion through tobacco country, financial centers, and manufacturing areas”⁸³. Five residents of North Carolina argued the gerrymandering had racial aspects and violated the Fourteenth Amendment; they stated the new districts did not coincide with concepts of, “compactness, contiguousness, geographical boundaries, or political subdivisions”⁸⁴.

⁸² Goedert, Nicholas. “Gerrymandering or geography? How Democrats won the popular vote but lost the Congress in 2012.” *Research & Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-8., doi:10.1177/2053168014528683.

⁸³ *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630 (1993).

⁸⁴ “*Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630 (1993).” *Justia Law*, supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/509/630/.

The court decided that the citizen's challenge was viable as the district structure was unusual and based on race. The Supreme Court stated, "Redistricting legislation that is alleged to be so bizarre on its face that it is unexplainable on grounds other than race demands the same close scrutiny, regardless of the motivations underlying its adoption". The opinion was decided on a close 5-4 vote. Dissenting opinions argued that it is the fairness of the influence on the political system was hindered due to the Court's decision to further examine the new districts.

Although the *Shaw v. Reno* case did not have as great a direct effect on the population as did the redistricting in Alabama, it provided important implications for future redistricting. In 1965 the population of North Carolina was about, "78% white, 20% black, and 1% Native American"⁸⁵. The opinion of the court stated that blacks were relatively distributed around the state, so their true population was not necessarily getting represented in congress. The court decision led to further political polarization as politicians needed to find ways to draw districts to secure votes. In addition, the odd shape of the districts had not been under much scrutiny until recently before the 1990's, but once blacks tried to create majority districts, the Court began to pay more attention, seen in later policy.

Opposition arguments often claim that gerrymandering is not "to blame" for polarization or that it does not have a significant effect on polarization; yet, none of the articles state that there is no relation between gerrymandering and polarization. Most of the articles even acknowledge that there is likely a small relationship. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006) claim that, "Gerrymandering has increased the Republican seat share in the House, however this increase is not an important source of polarization". Yes, gerrymandering has increased the

⁸⁵ O'Connor. "Shaw v. Reno, 113 S. Ct. 2816, 113 S. Ct. 2816, 125 L. Ed. 2d 511 (1993)." *Legal Information Institute*, Legal Information Institute, 28 June 1993, www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/92-357.ZO.html.

Republican seat share in the house, seen throughout the United States in project REDMAP (which led to mass polarization). They conduct simulations that represent neutral districting options, and find, “the actual levels of polarization are not much higher than those produced by the simulations”⁸⁶. First, there are issues with conducting simulations. As was already found in an article cited earlier, California has used neutral district drawing mechanisms and has found less polarization. Second, they acknowledge that gerrymandering does produce higher polarization, just not a significant amount. Another argument cited in a Vox article claims that because the Senate has followed a similar polarization trajectory, that means that the House districts are not the reason for the house polarization⁸⁷. The logic in that argument seems flawed as the house and senate elections are not directly connected. A Five-Thirty-Eight article claims that, “gerrymandering contributes to issues like the drop in competitive elections, extremism and gridlock, but it’s far from their sole cause”⁸⁸. Again, the source acknowledges the relationship. My argument is not that gerrymandering is the sole cause of polarization, it is that it is a player in the main cause of polarization: the election system.

So, why does gerrymandering still occur if it creates such societal divides? The United States has not found a legitimate reason to stop gerrymandering if it is not based off some sort of oppression. In various court cases, such as *White v. Regester*, *Burns v. Richardson*, and *Abate v. Mundt*, the court has defended the reasons for gerrymandering. In short, it creates, “a more

⁸⁶ McCarty, Nolan M., et al. “Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2006, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1154054.

⁸⁷ Prokop, Andrew. “Does Gerrymandering Cause Political Polarization?” *Vox*, Vox, 15 Apr. 2014, www.vox.com/cards/gerrymandering-explained/does-gerrymandering-cause-political-polarization.

⁸⁸ Forecasterenten. “Ending Gerrymandering Wont Fix What Ails America.” *FiveThirtyEight*, FiveThirtyEight, 26 Jan. 2018, fivethirtyeight.com/features/ending-gerrymandering-wont-fix-what-ails-america/.

‘politically fair’ - result than would be reached with elections at large, in which the winning party would take 100% of the legislative seats”⁸⁹. Gerrymandering itself is constitutional, based on precedent. According to Supreme Court Justice Kennedy in the case *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, “A determination that a gerrymander violates the law must rest on something more than the conclusion that political classifications were applied. It must rest instead on a conclusion that the classifications, though generally permissible, were applied in an invidious manner or in a way unrelated to any legitimate legislative objective”⁹⁰. In the case about Wisconsin’s districts, the “court unanimously said that the plaintiffs had not proved that they had suffered the sort of direct injury that would give them standing to sue”⁹¹. In the Maryland case, “the court said in an unsigned opinion that the status of the Maryland challenge — there has been no trial in the case — counseled against a definitive ruling. They returned the case to a lower court for more work”⁹². In Texas, the Supreme Court, “largely upheld an array of congressional and state legislative districts in Texas, reversing trial court rulings that said the districts violated the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act by discriminating against voters on the basis of race”⁹³. The court is recently avoiding making any large decisions regarding gerrymandering and has not provided support for its unconstitutionality.

⁸⁹ *Gaffney v. Cummings*, 412 U.S. 735 (1973)

⁹⁰ *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, 541 U.S. 267 (2004)

⁹¹ Liptak, Adam. “Supreme Court Avoids an Answer on Partisan Gerrymandering.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 June 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/us/politics/supreme-court-wisconsin-maryland-gerrymander-vote.html.

⁹² “Efforts to Limit Partisan Gerrymandering Falter at Supreme Court.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 18 June 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/supreme-court-sidesteps-decision-on-partisan-gerrymandering/2018/06/18/c909bf26-7303-11e8-805c-4b67019fcfe4_story.html?utm_term=.7f031060a3c4.

⁹³ Liptak, Adam. “Supreme Court Upholds Texas Voting Maps That Were Called Discriminatory.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 25 June 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/us/politics/supreme-court-texas-gerrymandering.html.

3.4. Self-Districting

Self-districting also plays a major role in polarization both with and without gerrymandering. Other common terms for self-districting include, “sorting” and “self-selecting”; it refers to citizen’s migration to places that contain similar political views.

A case study of the Chabot family, presented by Emily Badger of the New York Times (2017), presents self-districting evidence. Paul Chabot has made a career out of assisting individuals self-district around the United States. After moving from California, where Conservatives have written that they feel “stifled,” and “oppressed,” Chabot felt much more comfortable in McKinney, Texas, and realized that he could help others do the same. “I see it even more boldly — as escaping,” stated Mr. Chabot. His diction emphasizes how polarizing political aspects are literally pushing people out of certain districts to get to others. Helping people relocate to Conservative areas led to his company entitled Conservative Move, which has been contacted by around 2,500 people since its start-up in mid-2017. Interestingly enough, the people that ask for assistance are looking for, “good schools, a really safe community, an affordable house, low crime and a place to raise their kids,” which he claims are supported by Conservative Policies⁹⁴. Although it could be claimed that the individuals are not selecting based on political view in this case, the company is entitled “Conservative Move,” so the people who use his service are most likely politically driven.

⁹⁴ Badger, Emily. “Political Migration: A New Business of Moving Out to Fit In.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/upshot/political-migration-a-new-business-of-moving-out-to-fit-in.html.

The case presented is on a very small scale, and does not represent the entire United States population; the question is whether self-districting is occurring for a significant number of United States residents. Badger relates her discussion of the Chabot family to a book by Bill Bishop entitled *The Big Sort*, “which posited that Americans have been self-selecting since the 1970s into like-minded communities that are less likely to hold competitive elections”⁹⁵. Do Americans actually self-district? The Pew Research Center found that 50% of citizens who had consistent conservative views agreed with the prompt, “It’s important to me to live in a place where most people share my political views”⁹⁶, while consistently liberal citizens had a 35% agreement rate. Although there are not 100% rates among both groups, it is obvious that parts of the groups are interested in living places in which their views are common. Other research shares similar conclusions; Cho, Gimpel and Hui conclude that political views are not necessarily central to relocation decisions, but hold some value: “partisans relocate based on destination characteristics such as racial composition, income, and population density but additionally prefer to relocate in areas populated with copartisans. This tendency is stronger among Republicans but is also true of Democratic registrants. Whether the role of partisanship is central or ancillary, if it is any part of the decision process it has the potential to make important imprints on the political landscape of the United States”⁹⁷. McDonald finds that, “migrants are more likely to move into a

⁹⁵ Badger, Emily. “Political Migration: A New Business of Moving Out to Fit In.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/upshot/political-migration-a-new-business-of-moving-out-to-fit-in.html.

⁹⁶ Suh, Michael. “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, 12 June 2014, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

⁹⁷ Cho, Wendy K. Tam, et al. “Voter Migration and the Geographic Sorting of the American Electorate.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 103, no. 4, 2013, pp. 856–870., doi:10.1080/00045608.2012.720229.

congressional district that matches their ideological preferences even after controlling for the partisanship in the district of origin”⁹⁸.

Some argue that self-districting is less evident than suggested. Eitan Hersh from Yale showed in his “Most Precincts are Competitive” graph that, “campaigns cannot easily target based on precincts. They’re simply too heterogeneous”⁹⁹. Abrams and Fiorina do, “not find evidence of geographic sorting,”¹⁰⁰ in their large-scale exploration. Although some of the opposition is viable, there is enough evidence to prove that geographic sorting is occurring to outweigh the opposition. The degree to its occurrence can be debated, but its occurrence cannot be debated; self-districting is happening all over the United States.

Self-districting is leading to polarization in a variety of ways in the United States. As Bill Bishop argues in *The Big Sort*, parts of districts are becoming increasingly homogeneous: “People seek out the social settings they prefer—as they choose the group that makes them feel the most comfortable... and the benefit that ought to come with having a variety of opinions is lost to the righteousness that is the special entitlement of homogeneous groups”¹⁰¹. Here, Bishop goes further to state that the politically alike districts creates a lack of diverse views, which can be detrimental. The Pew Research Center claims that self-districting is even more common

⁹⁸ McDonald, Ian. “Migration and Sorting in the American Electorate: Evidence From the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study.” *American Politics Research*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2011, pp. 512–533., doi:10.1177/1532673x10396303.

⁹⁹ Sides, John. “Most Americans are not like Antonin Scalia.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 18 Oct. 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2013/10/18/most-americans-are-not-like-antonin-scalia/?utm_term=.6aaead9fe58a.

¹⁰⁰ Fiorina, Morris P., et al. “Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings.” *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 70, no. 2, 2008, pp. 556–560., doi:10.1017/s002238160808050x.

¹⁰¹ Bishop, Bill, and Robert G. Cushing. *The big sort: why the clustering of like-Minded America is tearing us apart*. Mariner Books, 2009, p. 19.

among individuals with extreme views: “The more polarized Republicans and Democrats are also substantially more likely to say they prefer living in a community where most people share their political views”¹⁰². They continue and claim that self-districting, “is also tightly entwined with the growing level of partisan antipathy. In both political parties, those with strongly negative views of the other side are more likely to be those who seek out compatible viewpoints”. Other factors play into self-districting and its effects on polarization, such as the media. District media relies on ratings in order to stay in business; as citizens become increasingly one-sided, so do their news sources. Journalist David Carr stated such a notion in saying, “The polarized political map is now accompanied by a media ecosystem that is equally gerrymandered into districts of self-reinforcing discourse”¹⁰³. James Carville stated a similar claim when he stated, “Today, conservatives can get all their information from conservative outlets, and liberals can get all their information from liberal outfits. And you can spend your whole life never being challenged, never having to hear or think about or confront viewpoints that are different from your own”¹⁰⁴. The process of self-districting is leading to more extreme views in areas on both sides of the political spectrum.

¹⁰² Suh, Michael. “Section 3: Political Polarization and Personal Life.” *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, 12 June 2014, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-3-political-polarization-and-personal-life/.

¹⁰³ Carr, David. “It’s Not Just Political Districts. Our News Is Gerrymandered, Too.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Oct. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/10/12/business/media/when-our-news-is-gerrymandered-too.html.

¹⁰⁴ Sides, John. “Most Americans are not like Antonin Scalia.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 18 Oct. 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2013/10/18/most-americans-are-not-like-antonin-scalia/?utm_term=.b1bbb889f246.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Other Notable Causes of Polarization

Although I argue the election system is the main factor leading to political polarization in the United States, it would be foolish to claim that there are no other causes of political polarization; there are various factors that have led into the high levels of political polarization today. Outside of political processes, media influence and inequality in the United States are the most probable causes. Media can influence polarization according to Bernhardt et. al. through the following process: “While voters are rational, understand the nature of the news suppression bias and update appropriately, important information is lost through bias and can lead to electoral mistakes”¹⁰⁵. The conclusion is straightforward: biased information leads to biased voting populations and more extreme views. Other research has found similar results; Iyengar and Hahn, for instance, assert, “demand for news varies with the perceived affinity of the news organization to the consumer’s political preferences,” and that, “further proliferation of new media and enhanced media choices may contribute to the further polarization of the news audience”¹⁰⁶. Other scholars do not seem as convinced. Markus Prior claims, “there is no firm evidence that partisan media are making ordinary Americans more partisan”¹⁰⁷. Studies relating inequality and polarization have had more consistent findings. Duca and Jason carry that, “there

¹⁰⁵ Bernhardt, Dan, et al. “Political polarization and the electoral effects of media bias.” *Journal of Public Economics*, vol. 92, no. 5-6, June 2008, pp. 1092–1104., doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2008.01.006.

¹⁰⁶ Iyengar, Shanto, and Kyu S Hahn. “Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity in Media Use.” *Journal of Communication*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2009, pp. 19–39., doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.01402.x.

¹⁰⁷ Prior, Markus. “Media and Political Polarization.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 101, ser. 127, Feb. 2013, pp. 101-127., doi:10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242.

are bi-directional feedbacks between polarization and inequality”¹⁰⁸. McCarty et. al argue that inequality has a direct effect on polarization and that the correlation is, “a consequence both of polarization of the parties on economic issues and increased economic inequality”¹⁰⁹. Voorheis et. al. made similar conclusions: “We find that income inequality has a large, positive, and statistically significant effect on political polarization. Economic inequality appears to cause state Democratic parties to become more liberal. Inequality, however moves state legislatures to the right overall”¹¹⁰.

Various other causes of polarization have been posed in literature. Pietro S. Nivola (2016) summarizes the most discussed causes; those not included in this paper are as follows: electorate realignment, religion, technology, institutional norms. Electorate realignment refers to the Democrat’s loss of voters in the South in addition to the Republicans losing voters in areas like New England, religion causes individuals to gravitate towards either side of the political spectrum, technology provides a platform in which media can operate and like-minded individuals can easily communicate, and new institutional norms create a hostile environment in politics with high levels of discord¹¹¹. Although all of these are viable causes, they play less of a part in political polarization when compared to the election system. Again, the election system stimulates political polarization through the electoral college creating the two-party system,

¹⁰⁸ Duca, John V., and Jason L. Saving. “Income Inequality and Political Polarization: Time Series Evidence Over Nine Decades.” *Review of Income and Wealth*, vol. 62, no. 3, Aug. 2015, pp. 445–466., doi:10.1111/roiw.12162.

¹⁰⁹ McCarty, Nolan, et al. “Political Polarization and Income Inequality.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2003, pp. 1-41., doi:10.2139/ssrn.1154098.

¹¹⁰ Voorheis, John, et al. “Unequal Incomes, Ideology and Gridlock: How Rising Inequality Increases Political Polarization.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2015, pp. 1-52., doi:10.2139/ssrn.2649215.

¹¹¹ Nivola, Pietro S. “Thinking About Political Polarization.” *Brookings*, Brookings, 28 July 2016, www.brookings.edu/research/thinking-about-political-polarization/.

primaries leading to elected officials with extreme views, and gerrymandering creating politically homogenous districts.

4.2. The Founder's Election System, Updating Ideas for the Present

As the election system generated issues such as those detailed in this thesis thus far (i.e. continuation of the two-party system, extreme candidate views, homogenous legislative districts, etc.), it clearly has not functioned as many founders had envisioned. Individuals like Madison and Hamilton aimed to build an election system that, in their time, worked very well, although it was inherently restrictive; it included an inequality embodied by the 3/5ths clause and the disfranchisement of people of color and women. The U.S. is not and was never a “pure” or “complete” democracy: “The only part of the federal government elected by the people was the House of Representatives, yet even that chamber was skewed in favor of a minority”¹¹². In regard to the current political climate and its polarizing effects in the United States, many of the arguments posed at the time of the nation's founding either hold less weight or are almost inapplicable today. For example, the electoral college was created in part to let people that had sufficient political information make decisions for the country. In other words, political elites did not think the United States population had enough political knowledge to vote in their best interest.

But, in today's era of mass media, rapid news cycles, and the incredibly rapid distribution of information, any issues or detail is only a click away (including extremist views, conspiracy

¹¹² Landis, Michael Todd. “The United States Isn't a Democracy - and Was Never Intended to Be.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 6 Nov. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/11/06/united-states-isnt-democracy-and-was-never-intended-be/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.50659305d86e.

theories, and a shutting out of contradictory information that might tend to have a moderating effect). Also, according to Akhil Amar (2016), “the early emergence of national presidential parties rendered the objection obsolete by linking presidential candidates to slates of local candidates and national platforms, which explained to voters who stood for what”⁸. It is important to note here the ratification of the 12th Amendment, which, “was framed with [a national presidential party] in mind”. What about the equal representation for small states? Amar claims, “the deepest political divisions in America have always run not between big and small states, but between the North and the South, and between the coasts and the interior”¹¹³.

Primaries and gerrymandering both were not specifically envisioned at the Constitutional Conventions. Both, however, as we have seen, are and were closely tied to the rise of factions, which was a worry of the founders. George Washington famously warned about the rise of factions that he was witnessing as the nation’s first president. In his 1796 Farewell Address he observed that the, “alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to the party dissention, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, it itself a frightful despotism.” Despotism was his main worry, but there were others, including the “disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty.”¹¹⁴ As time went

¹¹³ Amar, Akhil Reed. “Election 2016: The Real Reason the Electoral College Exists.” *Time*, Time, 8 Nov. 2016, time.com/4558510/electoral-college-history-slavery/.

¹¹⁴ “Washington's Farewell Address 1796.” *The Avalon Project - Laws of War : Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907*, avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp.

on past examples of factions within and alongside the main two parties included rise of populists in the 1870s and 1880s, the “Religious,” or, “Christian,” Right of the 1970’s¹¹⁵, “Progressive Republicans in 1912, Southern Democrats at mid-century, and New Democrats in the 1990s”¹¹⁶. These factions each pulled their party or pushed an existing party towards one end of the political spectrum. Today, political factions are prevalent; examples include the Freedom Caucus and the Progressive Caucus. According to Andrew Clarke, “ideological factions in the U.S. House of Representatives provide candidates with complementary party sub-brands, and candidates use these sub-brands to appeal to party activists, media officials, and political donors”¹¹⁷. Primaries promote the extreme ideals mirrored by certain factions, and gerrymandering allows for extreme candidates to continue to be elected (and factions to continue their influence).

As the election system has not functioned as the founders had envisioned, if they could make the decision in modern times, they would likely be open to change. Jack Rakove states in an interview at Stanford University, “Framers were experimental politicians, and they were open to the evidence of how things were operating... they really had no good idea of how the system would work”¹¹⁸. There is reason that the constitutional convention took many months: the framers were attempting to create the most beneficial system of government for the U.S., but

¹¹⁵ McVicar, Michael J. “The Religious Right in America.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, 19 Feb. 2018, oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-97.

¹¹⁶ DiSalvo, D. (2012, January 4). Factions Have a Role to Play. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/01/04/for-gop-one-party-but-three-platforms/factions-have-a-role-to-play>.

¹¹⁷ Andres, G. (2017, December 12). The growing power of factions in Congress. Retrieved from <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/363972-the-growing-power-of-factions-in-congress>

¹¹⁸ Goldman, Corrie. “Why Do We Still Let the Electoral College Pick Our President?” *Stanford News*, 18 Apr. 2016, news.stanford.edu/2012/08/20/rakove-electoral-college-082012/.

they were wading into unfamiliar waters. That is, the evidence of past governmental systems from which they were drawing included mainly dictatorships and Monarchies. The following section provides ideas as to how to reduce political polarization by mitigating detrimental factors resulting from the election system.

4.3. Solutions

The United States election system has both its supporters and its opponents in modern times. With the increased political polarization, though, in addition to increased media attention on politics and polarization, more people are striving for change in the system. So, what are possible solutions to the problems within the election system? In order to fully address each issue argued in this paper, multiple different solutions are provided, with a final, tentative over-arching solution to culminate the thesis by provoking thought.

First, the electoral college. There are a few ways to change the system to generate less polarization. One logical change would be a simple removal of the electoral college. In its place it would not be difficult to envision implementing a direct popular vote across the country for the presidential election. This solution is already embodied by a movement around the country called the “National Popular Vote” campaign. According to their mission statement: “The National Popular Vote interstate compact would guarantee the Presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia”¹¹⁹. With a direct popular vote, there would be no, “simple-majority single-ballot system,” that, “favors the two-party

¹¹⁹ “Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote.” *National Popular Vote*, 7 Mar. 2019, www.nationalpopularvote.com/written-explanation.

system”¹²⁰. Author and advocate Lee Drutman (2018) claims, “In parliamentary democracies with proportional voting, there has been no consistent erosion in support for democracy”.

Drutman quotes professor Pippa Norris who claims, “Parliamentary democracies with [Proportional Representation] elections and stable multiparty coalition governments, typical of the Nordic region, generate a broader consensus about welfare policies addressing inequality, exclusion, and social justice, and this avoids the adversarial winner-take-all divisive politics and social inequality more characteristic of majoritarian systems”¹²¹.

Proportional voting seems to lead to governmental support and promote less divisiveness when compared to winner-take-all systems. Another possible solution is to divide America into new electoral districts that match the population regardless of states. Neil Freeman pushes this even further, promoting a completely new drawing of states: “Recut the American pie. Redivide America into 50 new units of equal population. Each new state will have roughly 6,175,000 inhabitants — which is our 2010 population divided by 50”¹²². Maine and Nebraska, the two states not using the winner-take-all system, have found their own way to use the electoral college. They, “[dole] out their electoral votes in pieces rather than as a whole, giving two electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote statewide and then one apiece to the winner in

¹²⁰ Duverger, Maurice. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Science Editions, 1963, p. 239.

¹²¹ Drutman, Lee. “Why America’s 2-Party System Is on a Collision Course with Our Constitutional Democracy.” *Vox.com*, Vox Media, 26 Mar. 2018, www.vox.com/polyarchy/2018/3/26/17163960/america-two-party-system-constitutional-democracy).

¹²² Krulwich, R. (2013, February 15). A Crazy But Rational Solution To Our Electoral College Problem. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2013/02/14/172029048/a-crazy-but-rational-solution-to-our-electoral-college-problem>.

each congressional district”¹²³. This replaces the winner-take-all function in the process, allowing some other parties to gain representation, and slowly breaking down the two-party system.

The next round of possible solutions is for the primaries. Primaries originally surfaced as a way for voters to participate more in the election process, but, today, parties still largely have control of the process¹²⁴. A major shift occurred in 1968 with the Democratic primary; party elites, who arguably still have too much power in the primary system¹²⁵, nominated Hubert Humphrey, who had not won a primary¹²⁶. Republican success in that election, and Democrats realization of their mistake, led to a change in the primaries lending more power to the voters.

Ironically, though, one of the main problems in the primary system is voter participation, with only one in five election voters participating in primaries from either party¹²⁷. A solution could be the same primary date throughout the nation. According to Preston Picus, “This will help in two ways. First, it eliminates the voting advantage of the states that go first for the presidential election, making voters in California and New Jersey as important to candidates as

¹²³ Dann, C. (2016, November 18). Why Do Maine and Nebraska Split Their Electoral Votes? Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/card/why-do-maine-nebraska-split-their-electoral-votes-n679226>

¹²⁴ Hassell, Hans J. G. “Party Control of Party Primaries: Party Influence in Nominations for the US Senate.” *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 78, no. 1, 9 Sept. 2015, pp. 75–87., doi:10.1086/683072.

¹²⁵ Mudde, Cas. “Do Party Elites and Big Donors Still Rule US Elections? | Cas Mudde.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 May 2018, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/04/party-elites-big-donors-us-elections.

¹²⁶ “The Primaries Scandal in 1968 That Changed Everything | Guide to the Presidential Primaries.” *Vox.com*, Vox Media, www.vox.com/a/presidential-primaries-2016-republican-democrat/1968-scandal.

¹²⁷ DeSilver, Drew. “Turnout was high in the 2016 primary season, but just short of 2008 record.” *Pew Research Center*, 10 June 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/10/turnout-was-high-in-the-2016-primary-season-but-just-short-of-2008-record/.

voters in Iowa. Second, it will improve voter turnout. We all know about election day in November, but with more than 20 dates for primary elections, it's difficult to keep the population informed on a state-by-state basis"¹²⁸. A major problem with voter turnout in U.S. elections (including primaries) is ease-of-access. According to historian Brian Rosenwald, "These should be the goals of our election system- fairness and ease of use – and they are readily achievable if we prioritize them"¹²⁹. By eliminating confusion and restrictions, the primary elections will likely see much higher turnout, and thus a more moderate voting pool.

It is possible that mandated open primaries throughout the country could provide much more voter participation. Although there are not large current differences in candidates emerging from open versus closed primaries, that could change if every primary became open around the country. This is not promising, however, as McGhee et. al. found, "the openness of a primary election has little, if any, effect on the extremism of the politicians it produces"¹³⁰. Another possible solution to the primary system is a revert back to the caucus system. Yes, parties would have direct control over candidates again, but they would want to appeal to the median voter in their party. With primary voters being more ideological extreme than median voters in each party, candidates would likely be less extreme with the caucus system. Although literature might show otherwise, as Karpowitz and Pope (2013) claim, "Caucuses produce a more ideologically

¹²⁸ Griffiths, S. M., Messamore, W. E., & Picus, P. (2015, December 14). 5 Common Sense Solutions to Fixing Our Broken Primary System. Retrieved from <https://ivn.us/2015/12/14/5-common-sense-solutions-fixing-broken-primary-system/>.

¹²⁹ Rosenwald, Brian. "America's Elections Are Broken. Here's How to Fix Them." *The Week - All You Need to Know about Everything That Matters*, The Week, 16 Nov. 2018, theweek.com/articles/807218/americas-elections-are-broken-heres-how-fix.

¹³⁰ McGhee, Eric, et al. "A Primary Cause of Partisanship? Nomination Systems and Legislator Ideology." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1674091.

consistent electorate than do primaries, because policy centrists appear to avoid caucuses”¹³¹. While this might be true in the current political climate, in a more moderately voting (i.e. centrist) population, party Caucuses would likely present moderate candidates.

Lastly, there are a variety of possible solutions for the detriments caused by gerrymandering, some that have even proven already successful. Since the mid-19th century, gerrymandering has been plaguing United States politics, and has increased in intensity (see journalist Christopher Ingraham’s figure in “What 60 years of political gerrymandering looks like”)¹³². Political parties have been able to manipulate the voting pool to benefit their party, limiting the purity of American democracy¹³³.

One solution would be to amend the constitution to make gerrymandering unconstitutional. As of now, the courts cannot find any language within the constitution to stop political gerrymandering (unless it relates to an oppressive purpose) as seen in various court cases such as *Vieth v. Jubelirer*¹³⁴. A possible solution is to amend the constitution to stop political gerrymandering. The likelihood of that happening, though, is very low, due to gerrymandering’s intensive connection with U.S. political parties. Another option is to have neutral, districting commissions make the drawing decisions. Some states such as Alaska,

¹³¹ Karpowitz, Christopher F., and Jeremy C. Pope. “Who Caucuses? An Experimental Approach to Institutional Design and Electoral Participation.” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 02, 2013, pp. 329–351., doi:10.1017/s0007123413000288.

¹³² Ingraham, Christopher. “What 60 Years of Political Gerrymandering Looks Like.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 21 May 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/05/21/what-60-years-of-political-gerrymandering-looks-like/?utm_term=.8fc3506a589d.

¹³³ Landis, Michael Todd. “The United States Isn’t a Democracy - and Was Never Intended to Be.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 6 Nov. 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/11/06/united-states-isnt-democracy-and-was-never-intended-be/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.50659305d86e.

¹³⁴ *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, 541 U.S. 267 (2004)

Arizona, and California already practice this¹³⁵. Unfortunately, it is still almost impossible to find a truly neutral group of individuals to do such a task, as, “everyone carries with them implicit biases”¹³⁶. Another idea is computerization; algorithms could provide fair, equal, and successful electoral districts. This has also already been posed, an example being Brian Olson, a software engineer, writing a program for, “US House and state legislatures that have been optimized for equal population and compactness only”¹³⁷. Now, it is occasionally required by the Voting Rights Act that certain Majority-Minority districts be drawn, which could also be worked into an algorithm, but currently Olson’s work does not include such situations¹³⁸. Another possible solution is a complete removal of the districting process; but how would this work when the country needs districts with the other parts of its election system? An entire election system reform would provide that ability.

A solution that could address each election system issue presented in this paper is the following: rid the country of both the electoral college and districts and revert to the caucus system for political parties; this solution would become the United States’ own version of proportional representation. Each state would be one electoral zone and they would vote on their elected officials through ranked-choice voting. Each state would have a number of representatives based on population, in this regard the same as the current system, but

¹³⁵ Payne-Riley, L. (2017, August 07). Solutions to Gerrymandering. Retrieved from <https://www.policymap.com/2017/08/solutions-to-gerrymandering/>.

¹³⁶ Johnson, Carolyn Y. “Everyone Is Biased: Harvard Professor's Work Reveals We Barely Know Our Own Minds.” *Boston.com*, The Boston Globe, 5 Feb. 2013, www.boston.com/news/science/2013/02/05/everyone-is-biased-harvard-professors-work-reveals-we-barely-know-our-own-minds.

¹³⁷ “Impartial Automatic Redistricting.” *2010 Redistricting Results*, bdistricting.com/2010/.

¹³⁸ “Frequently Asked Questions.” *The United States Department of Justice*, 8 Aug. 2015, www.justice.gov/crt/frequently-asked-questions-2#faq05.

representatives from each state would be representing essentially the entire state (although their voting population would likely stem from certain areas that they would want to represent in congress). Matthew Yglesias, co-founder of the news and opinion website “Vox”, claims, “It would be better to have a country where everyone is voting for a party that they are genuinely enthusiastic about, and then because no party commands majority support, the leaders need to do some bargaining”¹³⁹. Ideally, the solution would eventually stop political polarization stemming from the electoral college, the primaries, and gerrymandering. Figure 1 is helpful to understand how these solutions will cut the ties between each issue and political polarization; this solution would ideally rid the diagram of all the bases in the diagram (Primaries, Electoral College, and Districting), eventually, ideally, leaving only the media in this depiction:

¹³⁹ Yglesias, Matthew. “Proportional Representation Could Save America.” *Vox.com*, Vox Media, 15 Oct. 2018, www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/15/17979210/proportional-representation-could-save-america.

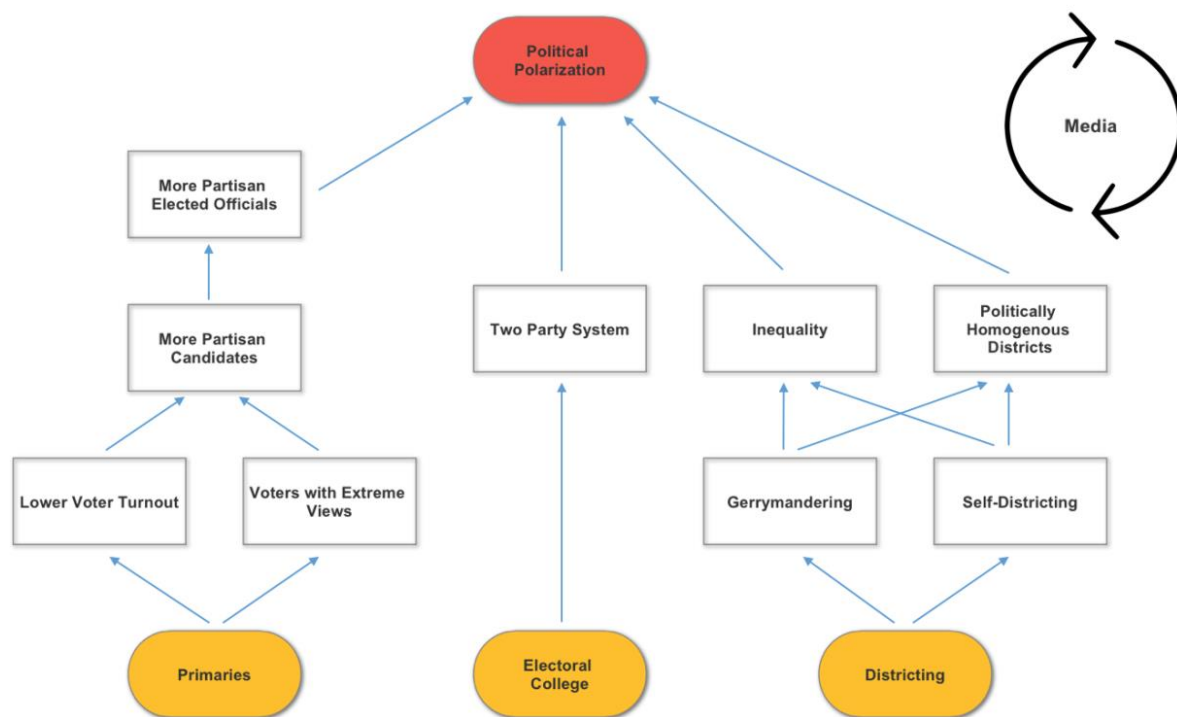


Figure 1: Primaries, the Electoral College, and Districting Lead to Political Polarization

Instead of the electoral college, a direct election would decide the presidency. This would be done through a first-past-the-post system, where citizens vote for one candidate; simply, the candidate with the most votes wins the election. That would rid the detrimental cycle of the electoral college and the two-party system. Third parties would likely have a chance with proportional representation replacing the electoral college, as, “proportional representation favors multi-partism”¹⁴⁰. To display the lack of third party success in the United States:

Theodore Roosevelt was the most successful third party candidate in United States history with a

¹⁴⁰ Duverger, Maurice, et al. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Science Editions, 1963, p. 239.

mere 27% of the electoral vote in 1912¹⁴¹. All voting for elected, political officials (except the Senate) would become proportional representation (on a national, state, and local level). There would be no need for districts, thus, no need for gerrymandering. Self-redistricting might still occur, but would likely become less and less evident as the district barriers break down and states become more politically moderate. Primaries would turn into caucuses. Although parties would have control over their candidates for the presidency and other positions, they would be appealing to the median voter in each party, which would get more and more moderate with the other changes of the election system. Not only could this lead to a shift towards moderate views in both parties with this solution, it could provide a rise in third party success, both at the congressional level and possibly the presidential level.

This might seem like a very logical solution on paper, but the implementation of this would take immense amounts of time, effort, and luck. I acknowledge that it is an ambitious solution to pose, but, it is the only complete solution that could cure political polarization in all three areas addressed in this paper. Many Americans are still set on staying true to the constitution and founder's intent. Americans need to acknowledge that America is so politically polarized that the government occasionally ceases to function (note that other reasons are evident for government shutdowns, but political polarization plays a large role). It is possible for the country to separate from the current governmental system and create beneficial and important change, if sufficiently motivated. Let's remember the beginning of the Declaration of Independence (US 1776) as we process the vast amount of benefits and opportunities that an election system change would provide: "When in the Course of human events it becomes

¹⁴¹ Nag, Oishimaya Sen. "Most Successful Third Party US Presidential Candidates." *World Atlas*, Worldatlas, 10 Mar. 2016, www.worldatlas.com/articles/most-successful-third-party-us-presidential-candidates.html.

necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation".

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