The “Green” areas on the map are where both the Obama and Romney campaigns spent their time and money. The “White” areas represent the areas of decreasing political participation and increasing ideological polarization.

1 (The Washington Post 2012)
Part I: Introduction

This paper is an analysis of the health of American Democracy and will specifically look at the role that the Electoral College plays. I will look at the voting numbers from the last three general elections and evaluate whether the Electoral College is bad for democracy because it concentrates time and money in a handful of “purple” states which enjoy high citizen participation while the other 80% of red and blue states see a lot less voter participation.

Red states are non-competitive Republican states; Blue states are non-competitive Democrat states. Purple states are battleground or swing states, the green areas on the map above. Without the Electoral College I estimate that 15 million more votes would have been cast in 2012.

The literature of this paper surveys the true wealth of the United States - social capital, and illuminates the facts that American civic and political participation have been in decline. My research is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches; personal interactions with people from all over the country and literature sources comprise my qualitative approach, with data on campaign spending (both time and money), and voter participation statistics.

My results will show that the Electoral College is an inefficient institution and why it is a hindrance to American democracy today.

Robert F. Kennedy and Robert Griffin III

“Any who seek higher office this year must go before all Americans: not just those who agree with them, but those who disagree; recognizing that it is not just our supporters...but all Americans, who we must lead in the difficult years ahead”


The last campaign of Robert Francis Kennedy electrified America for 82 days until he was tragically assassinated. Kennedy ignored the traditional method of buttering up delegates and campaigning only in primary states. Kennedy sought out Americans that were hurting. Kennedy visited inner city ghettos; he went to Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, Indian Reservations and migrant labor camps etc.

Bobby Kennedy could have unified America by his approach to campaigning. We have not had such a public servant knock on the door of the presidency since. He could have healed partisan gridlock because he made policy decisions using common sense logic, not ironclad political ideology. Also atypical to

2 (The Monterey County Herald 2010)
3 (Clarke 2008,54)
4 (Clarke 2008,178)
Presidential campaigning was the way Kennedy interacted with people. There was no act, no persona, none of the cliché’ kissing babies stuff. Kennedy hit the streets and had real conversations with people. He did not try to be a certain way in front of crowds, it was apparent whenever he was nervous or angry or emotional.\(^5\)

However it is unlikely he would have won the General Election, despite the fact that his victory in California put him in the driver’s seat for the Democratic nomination. The Electoral College was designed to and still does lock out candidates with broad appeal and/or non-mainstream ideologies. Kennedy’s campaign style would not have been conducive to success in a national election in which he would not have been able to go out and touch the people he was running for President to help.

Kennedy was a political rock star. The style and manner in which he took on devastating social issues like poverty, warfare, and racial hatred appealed to Americans of all walks of life, locations and ideology. Wherever he went there were masses that descended upon him just to touch or grab him. In Thurston Clarke’s book The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America, he quotes another well known Kennedy biographer Theodore White; White claimed that sharing a car with Bobby could be a scary experience as RFK’s campaign would reach “a terrifying frenzy” in minority neighborhoods.\(^6\)

Like his brother, the late President John F. Kennedy, Bobby was youthful. But unlike the always calm, cool and collected Jack, Bobby had no reservations wearing his emotions on his sleeve and calling people out.\(^7\)

He was constantly engaging crowds, instead of telling them what they want to hear and challenging Americans to take responsibility and do something about our social ills. He took complete blame for his role in Vietnam as Attorney General, showing uncharacteristic humility for a candidate.\(^8\) Most spend all of their time talking about how they have superior judgment in everything and how much worse their opponent is. Sometimes a stagnant system needs a ringer to shake things up. This brings me to my next point.

Robert Griffin III is the most popular man in Washington, DC - and for good reason. He has done exactly what Obama promised to do: bring hope and change to our nation’s capital.

Ten, fifteen or twenty years ago he would not have made such an impact in the NFL because there was an institution in place that mandated that only certain types of Quarterbacks succeed. Offenses in the National Football League did not want dual threat quarterbacks like RGIII because he did not fit their schematic and ideological mold. NFL offensive ideology mandated that quarterbacks be

\(^{5}\) (Clarke 2008, 64)
\(^{6}\) (Clarke 2008, 59)
\(^{7}\) (Clarke 2008, 183-192)
\(^{8}\) (Clarke 2008, 45)
strictly passers and game managers, not runners.

But rule changes by the NFL’s governing body that protect the quarterback have allowed more exciting players like Robert Griffin III, Michael Vick, Russell Wilson and Colin Kaepernick to come into the league and inject a new style and a new excitement that have led to greater popularity for the NFL. Even critics of the quarterback protection rules agree; it has led to the NFL becoming one of the most popular aspects of our culture and it is one of the reasons televised prime time professional football games are America’s most watched television programs.¹⁰

RGIII is an outside the box leader who not only is one of the NFL’s best Quarterbacks but a figure that appeals to Americans from all walks of life. It really hit me how rampant RGIII fever was in Washington, DC when I walked into an Ethiopian restaurant/bar one night and saw a series of three framed pictures on the wall; the pictures were of three very special people. The first was of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie; the second was a picture of President John F. Kennedy; and the third was a picture of RGIII.

But why is this important or relevant to the Electoral College and American Democracy? Had the NFL not evolved into the type of game that has use for someone like RGIII, the excitement and social cohesion that he provided DC with last fall would not have happened. He is the kind of leader that nearly everyone can find something to appreciate about him. Democrats and Republicans in DC are constantly demonizing the other party and for this most part struggle to agree on hardly anything. But if there is one thing that the city’s Democrats and Republicans can agree, it’s that everyone loves RGIII.

Commentary on the state of NFL football is hardly the appropriate thing to add to a lengthy Political Science research paper; but this analogy actually serves a purpose in the argument for changes to our national election system. The Electoral College is excluding these unifying figures from making serious White House runs - which was what the institution was created for. It is a mechanism that sifts out populist, mass appeal candidates.

### 21st Century Southern Politics and American Individualism

The Electoral College creates political isolation; the emergence of “swing state” mania has sped up this process, as large swaths of the map are “forgotten” regions of the country. Former Alabama Congressman Glen Browder refers to it as “new American regionalism”¹¹ In these isolated areas Republicans become more

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9 (NFL 2012)

10 (Nagler 2012)

11 (Browder 2009,89)
conservative and Democrats become more liberal. Political isolation has occurred as a result of Presidential campaigns focusing on a small proportion of the electorate, which makes our broader political landscape all the less competitive. This is a problem that strikes us at the core of our American heart and spirit. This soul of America can be embodied by the idea of American individualism.

“American individualism” is a term that can be very broadly defined. President Herbert Hoover writes about it extensively in his pamphlet, which is conveniently titled American Individualism. From reading Hoover’s work it becomes easier to define the idea of American individualism. Simply put the uniqueness and political success of the world’s flagship democracy is defined by the concept of the “equality of opportunity”\textsuperscript{12}. In the words of President Hoover; “while we build our society upon the attainment of the individual, we shall safeguard to every individual an equality of opportunity to take that position in the community to which his intelligence, character, ability and ambition entitle him.”\textsuperscript{13}

The essence of the great democratic experiment is that everyone is guaranteed political equality. To safeguard our right to equality, the citizens of America have a say in their government. A government for the people, by the people - but the Electoral College stands in the way of our “equality of opportunity”. It is outdated and has become a hindrance to our democracy. Our democracy is only as strong as our levels of citizen participation, when citizens become disenchanted with politics and become less involved it is a sign that it is time to check the heart of our democracy.

Institutions must progress with society. The institution in place for choosing our President is incredibly outdated. A mode of electing the Commander in Chief in the 18th Century is not conducive to democratic success. When the Electoral College emerged as a good idea our political leaders also thought it unacceptable to free slaves or give women basic rights. We were a much more homogenized culture occupying thirteen colonies clustered along the eastern seaboard. The Electoral College does allow for the beauty of “the equality of opportunity”, which is the lifeblood of the American democratic system.

Allow me again to quote President Hoover; “the rightfulness of our individualism can rest either on philosophical, political, economic, or spiritual grounds. It can rest on the ground of being the only safe avenue to further human progress.”\textsuperscript{14}

While soaking up the experience of Alabama Political Science Association 2013 in Tuscaloosa, a great analogy of our predicament came to me about how changing the system to match human progress is key to sustaining success over

\textsuperscript{12} (Hoover 2012,8-9)
\textsuperscript{13} (Hoover 2012,9)
\textsuperscript{14} (Hoover 2012,13)
time - so why not cite the most successful college football program over time? Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant won national championships at the University of Alabama in the 1960’s and 1970 are running the “Wishbone” offense. However if Coach Nick Saban’s 2013 edition of the Crimson Tide were to try and run this style of offense it is hard to imagine them making a title run as championship caliber teams today all feature multiple formations and a balance of the run and the pass.

Part II: Literature Review

Origins of the Electoral College

To start at the beginning we need to understand what the Electoral College is exactly. It is explicitly defined in Article II, Section 1, Clause 2-4 of the United States Constitution. This is what it says:

“The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by Ballot for two Persons, of whom one at least shall not be an Inhabitant of the same State with themselves. And they shall make a List of all the Persons voted for, and of the Number of Votes for each; which List 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 President of the Senate shall, in the Presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the Certificates, and the Votes shall then be counted. The Person having the greatest Number of Votes shall be the President, if such Number be a Majority of the whole Number of Electors appointed; and if there be more than one who have such Majority, and have an equal Number of Votes, then the House of Representatives shall immediately chuse by Ballot one of them for President; and if no Person have a Majority, then from the five highest on the List the said House shall in like Manner chuse the President. But in chusing the President, the Votes shall be taken by States, the Representation from each State having one Vote; A quorum for this purpose shall consist of a Member or Members from two thirds of the States, and a Majority of all the States shall be necessary to a Choice. In every Case, after the Choice of the President, the Person having the greatest Number of Votes of the Electors shall be the Vice President. But if there should remain two or more who have equal Votes, the Senate shall chuse from them by Ballot the Vice President.”

Common political dilemmas can often be traced back to the ideological differences of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. All students of politics know that Jefferson was the brainchild of American Republicanism and Hamilton that of American Federalism.

James Madison was more aligned with the Jeffersonian camp, but he worked extensively with Hamilton on the Constitution. The two thinkers were the

15 The Constitution of the United States
architects of the document and both men represented the two most powerful states of the time; Madison, Virginia, which also was the centrifuge of the southern interest and Hamilton, New York, the northern counterpart. Two men with different ideologies representing both geographical interests of the new country formed the foundation for the new representative American democracy.

In defense of and in attempts to stir up support for the ratification of the United States Constitution Madison and Hamilton along with John Jay penned 85 essays that would comprise The Federalist Papers. Madison and Hamilton explicitly defended the institution of the Electoral College in two of these essays.

Federalist No. 39 was written by James Madison. The following is an excerpt.

“The immediate election of the President is to be made by the States in their political characters. The votes allotted to them are in a compound ratio, which considers them partly as distinct and coequal societies, partly as unequal members of the same society. The eventual election, again, is to be made by that branch of the legislature which consists of the national representatives; but in this particular act they are to be thrown into the form of individual delegations, from so many distinct and coequal bodies politic. From this aspect of the government it appears to be of a mixed character, presenting at least as many federal as national features.”

- Federalist No. 39

What Madison is explaining here is that there is a specific design for the Electoral College system. It is a formula that makes states both equal and unequal in certain cases. He is making the case for a representative rather than a direct democracy. As an architect of our government, Madison sought to implement mechanisms that keep the balance in the federal system between the states and the national government.

Today people take the national and federal government to be one in the same. Madison here is addressing the differences between the ideologies of the time that pined for a smaller government or a larger government. If you pay attention to political rhetoric today you know that the same debate is still raging.

In attempting to combine both elements in a government, America was trying something relatively new. This forms the basis of a Republican government. There are three principles that Madison lays out here which define Republicanism and defend the Electoral College.

His three principles are that the government must receive the consent of the United States people; that the people will elect representatives among them to administer the government; and that representatives will be allotted a set time

16 (Federalist No. 39)
frame of service and that they must maintain good behavior and retain the favor of the people.\textsuperscript{17} At the time of conception the Electoral College served this valiant purpose. Can we say this is the case now? Alexander Hamilton wrote eleven essays on the powers of, and the limitations of the powers of, the executive branch. In the second of those eleven essays, Federalist No. 68, he lays out the mode of electing the President and the justification for it. He explains what our modern Electoral College is and explains that in the case of a tie the election would be decided in the House of Representatives. This, as we all know, would happen sooner rather than later in the election of 1800.

Hamilton was vehemently opposed to the idea of a direct election, which in his opinion would surely place an unqualified person in charge of the executive branch of our government. He thought that the people still had their say so in the process; they elect the electors. It adds a democratically elected middleman to the process.

Hamilton’s ideal electors are “Men most capable of analyzing the qualities adapted to the station and acting under circumstances favorable to deliberation, and to a judicious combination of all the reasons and inducements which were proper to govern their choice.”\textsuperscript{18} Hamilton is making the assertion that Presidential elections should be decided not by the voice of the citizens, but an institutional system. Whether or not he was questioning the abilities and intelligence of the people is not the point; but in taking the choice out of the direct hands of the citizenry and outsourcing the choice to an electoral institution, the American people are slighted and underhanded in the process of democracy. This was clearly not the intention of Hamilton and Madison, but it has been a result nonetheless.

While Hamilton’s words come off more bluntly than Madison’s do, the idea and the gist is the same. The Electoral College was clearly designed to safeguard and ensure the implementation of republican, representative democratic principles in the political process.

Hamilton and the other framers knew what a vital role the President would play in the United States for years to come. They believed the Electoral College would provide the country with a leader that was both capable of fulfilling the duties of the office and representing the interests of the whole electorate.

In clear opposition to the Constitution’s provision for the Electoral College, an anonymous pen that referred to himself or herself as Republicus wrote Anti Federalist No. 72. In that essay the author expresses his or her disdain for a process that removed the direct voice of the people and delegated that power

\textsuperscript{17} (Federalist No. 39)
\textsuperscript{18} (Federalist No. 68)
into the hands of a few. It is clear from reading this essay that there was a strong voice of opposition at the time that feared that the United States Executive Branch would morph into a hereditary monarchial administration. This sent a distress signal that explains the fears of the possibility of a few select congressmen propping up a leader that would be loyal to very select interest.

While the author of Anti Federalist No. 72 and Alexander Hamilton are representing opposite ends of the spectrum, their end goal is the same. To ensure that a capable leader that represents the interests of the American people as a whole is elected President, this is the essence of a healthy democracy.

Even today, one could argue until he or she is blue in the face about how the Electoral College either strengthens or weakens democracy. There are very good arguments today; such as one made by distinguished Political Scientist Gary Glenn regarding something that Alexander Hamilton might say. “Immediately, anyone with a significant numerical following has an incentive to run. The governors of large states are automatic candidates, as are movie stars, rock musicians, and ethnic leaders. The more candidates who run, the more the popular vote will be divided, and the lower the number and percentage of votes needed to win will become.”

This is a problematic critique of direct democracy, but I feel that this statement belittles the American people. In a world with public education and technological breakthrough if we give citizens the equal opportunity to choose our President, the overall political participation will increase.

It is important to realize though that the Electoral College was seemingly logical at time of conception it was created to deny political equality to the electorate to outsource it into more capable hands, in which the founder’s opinions safeguarded the democratic process.

The Electoral College is no longer effective in today’s democracy; it never accounted for a vast 50 state nation spread across the continent, it never accounted for African-Americans or women to vote. We no longer live in a world where, in the words of Senator Thomas Hart Benton we need “men superior, discernment, virtue and information” who act “according to their own will” to choose our leaders.

Is the Electoral College a cancer in today’s American democracy? This is former Illinois Congressman and Presidential candidate John B. Anderson’s answer why: “Our elections, as they are now held, have divided rather than united the country. Battleground states are the focus of both the candidates and the media. In the 2004 campaign, to cite only one example, President Bush bothered to poll in only eighteen states. More importantly, most registration drives were focused

19 (Anti Federalist No. 72)
20 (Glenn 2003)
21 (Edwards III 2004,19)
on battleground states. Is it healthy for the democratic process to see the number of competitive states decreasing? Indeed, if federalism is a principal argument for some last-ditch advocates on the Electoral College in a country where an overwhelming majority of Americans favor direct election but feel increasingly ignored, it is the defenders of the status quo who should feel challenged?“22

An Electoral College cannot continue to serve democracy and exist in a society where campaigns are capable of spending $791.12 million in negative ads in only ten battleground states.23

Social Capital and the Health of American Democracy

“Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types-religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute....Nothing in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations.”
- Alexis de Tocqueville24

The theme of our Senior Seminar class has been nation building; more specifically, we have looked at the concept of social capital. Essentially social capital is the wealth of society in social terms. America has always seen itself as that shining house on the hill; emanating the ideal virtues of liberty and equality. The causality of liberty and equality of course is political and civic participation.

So I decided to look at a key foundation of how our nation is built: how we elect the President of the United States. However, it is not just an examination of how we choose our chief executive, but what that means for, and how it has been affecting, America’s social capital.

If you consider the health of our democracy on the equality of participation, how sick is our democracy? There are two pivotal works on the state of American democracy in terms of our social capital that analyze our stagnant political quagmire. Bowling Alone written by Robert D. Putnam and The Spirit of Democracy written by Larry Diamond.

Putnam wrote Bowling Alone in 2000; the reason that this work is so important to us now is because it explains in societal and political terms how we have gotten to the place we are; his work in analyzing trends in political participation and civic engagement in the decades leading up to the turn on the 21st Century.

22 (Anderson 2005)
23 (The Washington Post 2012)
24 de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America
Putnam explicitly lays out the raw numbers of how involved Americans have been in civic and political matters. The prevalent theme of Bowling Alone is the focus on social change in America. I believe that looking at the Electoral College and making improvements to our trends of gross imbalance of money and resources concentrated in national elections could be a vehicle for social change.

To support his arguments in this work Putnam almost exclusively takes a quantitative approach, showing how politics has taken on an increasingly “corporate” identity. Now let me clear up the use of the term “corporate”. The term “corporate” is not a synonym for business, but it is an attitude change in American politics. I believe that politics have become more corporate because of the increase of money that flows into political machines. Dominant political parties (Democrats and Republicans) are now more organized, more powerful, wealthier, more expansive, and employ more people than they ever have. Putnam’s work exposes this.

The most staggering part of this is that while these changes have occurred, Americans are becoming less politically involved. On page 35 Putnam explains, “political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement.” This reminds me of a particular quote from Thomas Jefferson; “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people...they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

As a nation we are seeing gigantic amounts of money being spent in politics; but we are educating and informing the mass of our people. Political organizations have been employing a steadily increasing rate of paid staff; from 1977-1996 the number of party employees went from six million to ten million. However, the percentages of citizens that got involved with political parties have declined substantially. Roper Social and Political Trends surveys show some starting trends that took place between 1973 and 1994. These surveys report that community and political participation have dropped by significant percentages.

Important factors such as people who volunteered for a political party dropped 42 percent, Americans that served as an officer of some club or organization dropped 42 percent, and those that attended a public meeting plummeted 35 percent. In the latter portion of the 20th century it has been these actions by citizens that define social capital, that have declined most rapidly.

Walter Dean Burnham concluded in 1987 that America was in its longest period of declining voting percentages. Political participation since then has sta-

25 (Putnam 2000,37)
26 (Putnam 2000,38)
28 (Knack 1992)
29 (Burnham 1987,113-114)
bilized, but not gotten any better. The 1992, 2004 and 2008 elections brought out voting percentages just over 55% - but the 1996 election saw a turnout of fewer than 50% and 2012 was almost four percentage points below 2008. However, it is important to note that Pew Research Center statistics show that American politics have become much more divided ideologically in that time. The political isolation that is created by the Electoral College creates greater ideological partisanship and divide.

I believe that the institution of the Electoral College has been hijacked and enables the use of political inequality by creating a gross imbalance of competitive, purple states and non-competitive, red or blue states made possible by a corporate political landscape. I do not believe that the Electoral College is the sole culprit for these problems that plague our politics, but it is definitely an enabler.

The de Tocqueville quote, from Democracy in America, at the beginning of this section makes two assertive statements that are pillars to a healthy democratic society. He states that the glory of democracy is in the “intellectual and moral associations.” In de Tocqueville’s context, associations are civic groups that are politically involved at some level. The second statement here that is linked to Putnam’s argument is the case against “commercial and industrial” organizations. So it is no surprise that when politics in America have become more commercial and industrial, civic and political participation go down.

In modern times, becoming a member of a mass civic organization is less about meeting, and is more about sending money to a national cause and being on a mailing list, which means less social involvement. In Putnam’s words “active involvement in local clubs and organizations of all sorts fell by more than half in the last several decades of the 20th century.” This means that the American public is becoming less cohesive and more fragmented. This makes the fostering of positive social change all the more difficult.

Putnam’s work, beyond the shadow of a doubt, identifies our problems of political and civic participation decline. What are some of the solutions to gaining social capital and once again providing democratic equality? Cures to our current democratic maladies can be found in Larry Diamond’s The Spirit of Democracy.

The overall gist of Diamond’s book is about nation building and the spread of democracy worldwide. He does however examine how the world’s beacon for liberty and democracy does itself. The author lays out specific reasons why citizens of the United States are becoming more alienated from, more disenchant-ed and distressed with politics at home.

So how do we cure the sickness? What can be done to address “a decline

30 (George Mason University 2013)
31 (Pew Research 2012)
32 (Putnam 2000,51)
33 (Putnam 2000,61)
in civil society and sense of civic responsibility”? We can start by reducing the purchase of influence, redistributing campaign finance, enhancing participation and bridging the partisan divide.

This is where we begin to see the Electoral College as having a role in the decline of citizen political participation. Abolishing the Electoral College would reduce the purchase of influence. Once a state is known as a swing state then they can expect to have big money spent on its Electoral College votes attempting to exercise more influence than the other side on that state’s electorate. Simply put, lobbying and big spending to gain political influence has alienated the American citizen from getting involved in politics.

In the 2012 election, The Washington Post reported that in the top ten battleground states the Obama campaign spent $386 million and the Romney campaign spent $476 million; while the two spent a combined $34 million on the other forty states. The Electoral College has made the biggest election in our country an auction over a handful of states.

This brings up the point of campaign spending. The Electoral College was designed to emulate an election system in the model of the House of Representatives. The Electoral College will remain as much to the American people as the House does. So what does it take to become a member of the “people’s house?” In 2004 it took 1 million to win a congressional race.

It is against the values of equality to have to be rich to wield political influence and it shows how vast amounts of money are being spent on elections in some states, but not in others.

There has not been a presidential election since 1948, in which 65% of the eligible electorate comes out to vote. In four of the seven general elections between 1980 and 2008 there was a less than 55% voter turnout. Diamond goes on to note that compared to other democracies the United States voter turnout numbers are dismal at best. This is an intriguing fact when you consider that America is generally viewed as the world’s flagship democracy.

There is a clear and viable solution to our problems of political stagnation. “Simply making elections more competitive will increase voter turnout. In addition to equalizing the field in campaign finance, presidential elections could be made fairer and more interesting for more voters if states opted (as Maine and Nebraska already have) to give two of their electoral college votes to the presidential candidate who wins the state overall and then one vote to the winner of each congressional district.”

34 (Diamond 2008,345)
35 (The Washington Post 2012)
36 (Diamond 2008,355)
37 (George Mason University 2013)
38 (Diamond 2008,360)
Changes to the Electoral College system provide a clear path for strengthening our democracy. A move like the one mentioned above would not even require a constitutional amendment but would likely bring national campaigns to areas of our country and portions of our electorate that have been forgotten.\(^{39}\)

There is concrete evidence that suggests that American politics have become more polarized in the current day and age. The most stunning statistic to support the idea that politics have become more partisan in nature is this: in 1972 40% of congressional districts were considered competitive between the Democrat and Republican Party, but thirty-four years later in 2006 there were only 15% of districts that were still that way.\(^{40}\) This is a very similar ratio to competitive states in the last election.

Certainly it has been proven time and time again that polarized politics intrigue people less than competitive politics, thus an increasing trend of partisanship would absolutely hurt citizen participation in democracy.

**Part III: Theory, Hypotheses and Relationship of Variables**

“I am certainly not an advocate for frequent and untried changes in laws and constitutions. I think moderate imperfections had better be borne with; because, when once known, we accommodate ourselves to them, and find practical means of correcting their ill effects. But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy.”

- Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816\(^{41}\)

**Theory**

The Electoral College is also outdated because it never accounted for an influx of money in politics. The amount of money combined with the Electoral College system creates a small amount of highly competitive states while blatantly ignoring the vast majority of the electorate. It is not that the amount of money in national elections that is the problem, it is the uneven distribution on a small concentration of the electorate that creates discrepancies in political participation.

In recent times politics have become more polarized and this dwindling

\(^{39}\) (Macedo 2005,60)

\(^{40}\) (Brady and Nivola 2008,236)

\(^{41}\) (Monticello 2013)
of competition has allowed for mainstream political parties to focus our national attention on the issues that affect citizens in the small percentage of states that are “in play”. There are five categories in which a state can be placed:

**Strongly Democratic** - California, Connecticut, Delaware, D.C., Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington = 179 Electoral Votes

**Lean Democratic** - Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin = 68 Electoral Votes

**Tossup** - Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio and Virginia = 85 Electoral Votes

**Lean Republican** - Indiana, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, and Nebraska (Congressional District) = 40 Electoral Votes

**Strongly Republican** - Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming = 166 Electoral Votes

The outlook of the 2012 election showed that a very small amount of states would actually be in play; only seven according to esteemed Political Scientist Alan Abramowitz - who said that the race would come down to Colorado,

42 (Abramowitz 2012,134)
Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio and Virginia. ⁴³

These states had a total of 35,587,725 eligible voters ⁴⁴ and a grand total of $668,199,810 ⁴⁵ was spent by the two campaigns in these “tossup” states. That means that only 35,587,725 out of 219,296,589 eligible voters are actually “in play” - that is only 16% of the total electorate. On the other 84% of the electorate the campaigns spent $168,098,270.

When the level of ideological divide becomes so rampant and the amount of competition by state decreases so dramatically an environment is created in which money can tip the balance. Among those seven states that were in play in 2012, $18.78 was spent per eligible voter. In the other 43 states and the District of Columbia, which have a total of 183,708,864 eligible voters, that number is much lower; $0.92 was spent per eligible voter.

Without an Electoral College campaigns would actually be a nationwide experience and political participation would increase. The opportunity to become politically involved would be equal and every voice would count, not just those of a few.

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⁴³ Abramowitz 2013,135
⁴⁴ George Mason University 2013
⁴⁵ Levien 2013
Politics in America have become more “corporate.” Presidential Elections are costing more now than they ever have, but national elections are becoming less competitive.

I am not saying that more money in political campaigning is the problem, but it is hard to ignore the fact that we have not had a 65% turnout in a national election since 1948\(^48\). The graphs above shows that since 1956 there has not been a presidential election that has cost less than $200 million\(^49\), and since 1960 the number of states/electoral votes in play in national elections has decreased.

The Electoral College, coupled with a more divided political landscape, enables the purchase of political influence, unaccountable campaign activity, continued partisanship and declining political and civic participation.

\(^{46}\) (Gilson 2012)

\(^{47}\) (Abramowitz 2012, 85)

\(^{48}\) (Diamond 2008,355)

\(^{49}\) (Gilson 2012)
Electoral College America

Electoral Votes

Campaign Spending America

Hypothesis

The Electoral College is a hindrance to American Democracy because it has caused the emergence of “battleground” states, which when combined with rapidly increasing rates of campaign spending has created a gross imbalance in political equality and opportunity.

My research has shown that as more money gets pumped into a system in which the focus is on states that are in play, there will be a growing gap between competitive states and non-competitive states in how much national attention they get from the Democrat and the Republican Party. Over time the percentage of states that are competitive in national elections have decreased, setting the stage for an environment in which national campaigns can become even more concentrated on small portions of the electorate.

There are three variables in this equation; an antecedent variable, an independent variable, and a dependent variable.

The Antecedent Variable precedes the IV and the DV; in this case it is what it used to determine what will be a purple state compared to a blue state or a red state.

(Jones 2012)
state (before the election). To determine this I added Obama’s approval ratings per state and the District of Columbia, and got each individual state’s average on a 0-100 scale. I added that number with the percent that voted for Obama in 2008 and then divided the sum by two. In my data I ranked the states and DC 1-51; 1 being the “bluest” or most liberal and 51 being the “reddest” or most conservative. The purple battleground states occupy numbers 15-29 on this scale. There were three blue states in that block – Oregon, New Mexico and Maine, but they were all in isolated political locations and logic dictated they would go blue, which of course they did.

Looking at it through the “5 Categories” all of the states in the battleground block, 15-29, comprised the 2nd and 3rd category which was; “Leaning Democratic” and “Tossup”. North Carolina however, was the only battleground state that was “Leaning Republican” - it was also the only competitive state Romney would win.

The Independent Variable is campaign activity and how concentrated it is in purple states compared to red or blue states. There are three categories to this variable; Campaign Money Raised (CMR), Campaign Money Spent (CMS) and the Number of Campaign Events (CE) - all per each state and DC. All three activities are measured separately.

The Campaign Money Raised is pretty balanced with all states pitching in their fair share. The percentage of Electoral votes that battleground states have (29%) is fairly synonymous with the percentage of CMR per state (24.7%).

The Campaign Money Spent varies on a much grander scale. There were 16 states that received nothing from either campaign while the twelve battleground states received over 99% of the CMS.

The Number of Campaign Events is also marked by discrepancy, albeit in a different way than the CMS. Ranked 1-51, purple states comprise most of a solid 1-17 block, and received 254 out of 314 (81%) campaign visits. There were five states in that block that are members of the “Strongly Democratic” or “Strongly Republican” categories; New York - 35 CE, California - 31 CE, Texas - 14 CE, Illinois - 11 CE, and Massachusetts - 9 CE. Oddly enough these five states ranked 4th, 2nd, 5th, 1st, and 7th in CMR.

The Dependent Variable is each state’s political participation level; which is the percentage of the eligible voting population that voted.

There were little over 219 million eligible voters from 50 states and DC

51 (Gallup 2013)
52 (George Mason University 2013)
53 (Abramowitz 2012,134)
54 (Levien 2013)
55 (Levien 2013)
56 (CNN Election Center 2012)
in 2012; only 68.6 million of them in the 12 battleground states, or 29% of the electorate.

Political Participation is measured by dividing the number of citizens that voted compared to citizens that were eligible to vote that did not. The twelve battleground states have a 65% level of Political Participation, while the other non-competitive states and DC have a 56% level of Political Participation.

The relationship of the variables is negative because as the amount of money and time spent in purple states (IV) increases; political participation on a national level (DV) decreases.

**Part IV: Research Design**

To test my hypothesis I grouped the fifty states and DC into two categories - battleground (purple) states and non-competitive (red/blue) states. I ran each state's numbers of CMR, CMS and CE and got the average for the two categories in each. My research aims to prove a correlation that a drop-off in political participation is explained by a discrepancy in the amount of CMR, CMS and CE.
As you can see battleground states comprise 29 percent of the total electorate but receive 99.8 percent of the money. What is especially appalling is the ratio of money raised. Non-competitive red and blue states raise 75.3 percent of the money and only get 0.02 percent of the total money spent. One would seem to think the visits show more equality, but as mentioned before, the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 7th ranked states in CMR received 100 of 157 Campaign Events in non-competitive states. Outside of the 12 battleground states and the 5 money raisers the other 33 states and DC only got 57 out of 314 visits.

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57  (Levien 2013)
58  (CNN Election Center 2012)
America’s Biggest Losers

Residents of California, Illinois, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, Washington, Georgia and Connecticut raised 57.2% of all donations (453 million dollars) for the Obama and Romney campaigns. For every $1,000 dollars raised in one of these states, they saw $1.70 of it back. The political participation in these 10 “net exporters” was 55%. How awesome would it be if my state (Georgia) had $22 million to put back in for our kids when it is time to make more cuts to education?

Part V: Results of Hypothesis Test

It is clear that the IV- Campaign Activity (CMR, CMS, and CE) has became extremely concentrated on a small portion of the national electorate, 29 percent to be exact. But what does that mean for my hypothesis test, which focuses on national levels of political participation?

This is how the states vote. Keep in mind that like anything in Political Science or Sociology nothing is ironclad and there will always be exceptions. Some purple states vote lower than some red or blue states. There could be a plethora of reasons for this such as voter suppression, other ballot measures, etc. The states are ranked by ideology; the District of Columbia will be first and Utah will be last.

Blue States
15 Total States and the District of Columbia; Political Participation = 57%

District of Columbia (62%), Hawaii (44%), Vermont (66%), Rhode Island (58%), Maryland (66%), Massachusetts (66%), New York (48%), Delaware (63%), Connecticut (Levien 2013)
cut (61%), Illinois (59%), California (53%), Washington (64%), New Jersey (60%),
Maine (68%), Oregon (63%), New Mexico (55%)

**Purple States**
12 Total States = 65%

Wisconsin (72%), Michigan (65%), Minnesota (76%), Pennsylvania (59%), Iowa
(69%), Virginia (66%), Nevada (57%), Colorado (70%), New Hampshire (70%),
Florida (64%), North Carolina (65%), Ohio (63%)

**Red States**
23 States = 55%

Georgia (58%), Missouri (63%), Mississippi (59%), Indiana (55%), South Carolina
(56%), Texas (50%), South Dakota (59%), Arkansas (51%), Montana (63%), North
Dakota (61%), Arizona (53%), Tennessee (52%), Louisiana (60%), Nebraska (60%),
Kansas (56%), Kentucky (55%), Alabama (58%), West Virginia (46%), Oklahoma
(49%), Idaho (60%), Alaska (59%), Wyoming (59%), Utah (55%)

Total Non-competitive State Political Participation = 56%

**Part VI: Analysis**

The obvious critique one could make of my hypothesis is that the battleground states
combined are only 9 points higher than red or blue states. But there are some key
observations to be made that really expose some of the major flaws of the Electoral
College.

The first is how we must analyze the discrepancy of political participation. Most of
the time if we see two or three different percentages and they are 65% and 56%, or
65%, 57% and 55%, a person would not be likely to jump to the conclusion that there is
a critical matter at hand. However, in this particular scenario nine percentage points
can be deceiving.

Thirty-nine states are not voting at the level that the “chosen few” are. Among
the thirty-nine forgotten states of the union are the three most populated: California,
New York and Texas. These three have an average 50% political participation rate.

There should be no doubt as to whether there is a gross discrepancy in the
amount of campaign activity that occurs in battleground states compared to
non-competitive ones. To test whether there were significant differences between
my variables I conducted a “Difference of Means Test”\(^\text{60}\) between the twelve battleground states and the thirty-nine non-competitive states to see whether there my

\(^{60}\) Answers Research. “Difference of Means Calculator”
hypothesis was correct.

The population mean of battleground states is 0.6633; the sample size is 12; and the standard deviation is 0.05. The population mean for non-competitive states is 0.5777; the sample size is 39; and the standard deviation is 0.03. Conducting the test with a 80%, 90%, 95%, and 99% confidence interval the results concluded every single time that the test was significant as the mean of the battleground states did not equal the mean of non-competitive states, showing an obvious discrepancy in the level of political participation in the twelve battleground states compared to the 38 non-competitive states and the District of Columbia.

When I lived in Washington D.C. this past fall, I asked as many people as I could from around the country what they think of national elections. This led me to realize that most people from non-competitive states will follow up with “it’s not like my vote matters anyway” after they told me whether they voted or not. I say it is unfortunate because it is absolutely true.

The reason political participation has been dropping is because political campaigns are becoming more corporate and less citizen action oriented and the time and money spent is concentrated on such a small percentage of the electorate that it is damaging the heart, soul, spirit and body of democracy - the people. Abolishing the Electoral College would force national campaigns to become nationwide. This would also reduce the purchase of influence that plagues our system and is a key factor in the slackening participation rates.

If campaigns were actually nationwide and not so concentrated on such a small portion of states, we would see much higher and more widespread voter turnout. In my opinion voter turnout is the safety net of the people in a democracy. It is what keeps our leaders accountable.

But when campaigns become unaccountable and they can spend $791.12 million on negative TV ads. Yes, that is $791.12 million spent on negative TV ads in only 12 states! What else could we do with $791.12 million? I believe that we could fix a lot of other problems with that money. Imagine how many more people in battleground states would get more involved if they weren’t being barraged with negativity all day. I wonder if people living in rural and urban poverty would take a more active role in their governance if they actually got to hear from candidates that acted like they cared about them. Even if we were not giving that money to our impoverished citizens, at the very least we could be spending it in efforts to mobilize voters and enhance our levels of political participation.

It is clear that the things that cause American citizens to become less politically involved are problems that would begin to lose traction in an environment in which the President is elected by the voice of the people, not a system that screens out 71 percent of the population and costs billions of dollars to win.

61 (The Washington Post 2012)
Part VII: Conclusion

In 2012, out of 219,296,589 voters only 65,727,664 voted for Barack Obama. In the United States of America only 30% of eligible citizens chose their President. Is this what democracy is supposed to be? I think we deserve better. (This isn’t a critique on Obama - I was an outspoken Obama supporter) The Electoral College does not get out the votes; it squeezes out just enough votes in a handful of states.

Ridding ourselves of the Electoral College would accomplish the following things:

1.) Reduce the purchase of influence that has become a part of our politics.
2.) Hold campaign activity accountable.
3.) Heal partisan wounds that plague our system.
4.) Enhance political participation.
5.) STRENGTHEN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

But what can we do about it? Some would contend that perhaps we should move to votes by congressional districts. But that would not solve any of the problems that have arisen in an Electoral system. Not to mention the amount of gerrymandering that occurs. Trends have shown the number of competitive congressional districts in the United States has dropped from close to 25% in the 1920’s to 10% or less in recent elections. Which also coincides with less voter turnout. More recently, from 1980-2010 the number of “safe” - solidly blue or red - Congressional districts increased from 133 to 213 while the number of competitive ones dropped from 170 to 112 in the same time span.

If Presidential elections were held by congressional districts there would be even less turnout. In my opinion a switch to a direct national election is badly needed. A move away from the Electoral College and to a popular vote would be the greatest step we could take in the direction of fulfilling one of our most often recited slogans of democracy; to be a nation and a government that is for the people and by the people. It is the only way that Americans will truly feel that their voice matters.

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62 (Putnam 2000,38)
63 (Abramowitz 2012,97)
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