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A HOUSE DIVIDED: HOW TODAY’S MEDIA AND PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING BROKE AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts”-Daniel Patrick Moynihan

We frequently hear about how the political conversation is divided in American society, about how American society is broken, and yet who is there to blame? Between discourse amongst our neighbors, politicians, and media, we are surrounded by an influx of polarized viewpoints and a discouraging outlook on everything from our elections, to healthcare, our president… and the list goes on. However, I question whether if we were to sift through the clutter of information, and oft-published misinformation, to single out just a few, relevant problems, that we would see we have some readily available solutions. In this paper I seek to understand, firstly, where the problem may be coming from, and secondly, what are some manageable ways to help mitigate the effects. I suspect that “fake news,” or misinformation, in the fast-paced digital age and political gamesmanship via partisan gerrymandering are two key issues that could have considerable positive outcomes if acted upon. My work in this paper is theoretical and based in current events and research to support it, as well as some suggestions for future research if considerable weight is given to seeking out solutions. I find that while much of the research proves to be quite complex, yielding mixed results, some of the most effective ways we may see an increase in trust and less polarization is by continuing to allow the same freedoms of communication the United States has always enjoyed while taking personal responsibility on all fronts to stay ahead of fake news outbreaks and combat their emergence the right way, and to promote media literacy in the context of a new media framework; and fight partisan gerrymandering by striking it down in the courts and acting swiftly to institute independent
commissions to take on the role of drawing district boundaries. These measures show a considerable degree of support from scholars in the field and show quantifiable, positive results.

With these two goals in mind it is possible that we can make small, yet substantial changes and enjoy the vast support of the public. If we don’t, we will continue to see trust and satisfaction disintegrate more and more.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 1

The Two Vices: Media and Politics ....................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: The State of the Media: Bust Cycle ................................................................. 4

- How the Digital Age Resurrected Fake News ................................................................. 5
- Online News: Global Network or Pitfall? ................................................................. 9

Chapter 2: “Fake News” ........................................................................................................ 13

- Tête-À-Tête .................................................................................................................. 16
- Partisan Media: On A Tightrope .................................................................................. 22

Chapter 3: The New Watchdog: Social Media? .............................................................. 29

- A Global Epidemic ....................................................................................................... 38

Chapter 4: Political Chess…AKA Partisan Gerrymandering .............................................. 42

Chapter 5: A Case Study: *Gill v. Whitford* ................................................................. 54

- The Answer: Independent Redistricting Commissions .............................................. 66

Chapter 6: Redistricting Abroad ......................................................................................... 72

- Britain: Work in Progress ............................................................................................ 73
- Canada: A Better Way, Eh? ....................................................................................... 79

Chapter 7: Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 85

Appendix: Explainers ........................................................................................................ 87
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Introduction

The Two Vices: Media and Politics

Which do you trust less: government or the media? A question likely to be followed by a brief pause as one considers which he or she considers to be the lesser of the two evils. It is our modern day theoretical “rock and a hard place” question and it shows in public opinion. Gallup reported a record low of 30% of Americans believing in the “honesty” of our elections. Among the 34 OECD-member countries, only Mexico was ranked lower than the U.S. in election confidence. Among several surveys with Gallup and Pew, the media was met with the same criticism; only 18% trust news from national organizations, and online news organizations fared even worse, with only 7% trusting news they find online.¹ It is hard to rationalize in the home of democratic ideals that key pillars of our democracy, the press and our legislature, are failing the public so concretely. However, it is with minor changes in both that we may see the greatest shifts back towards a place of confidence in the institutions that are a part of our daily life. Americans cite several lingering problems that have created a gnawing skepticism in the effectiveness of both. In our elections, voters have much more sinister views on the practices related to elections versus the process of elections themselves. While public trust remains in regards to ballot counting and the fairness of election outcomes, other factors, such as money for campaigning, the electoral college, hidden party agendas, and redistricting are not just confusing to understand, but have corrupted the ideal of how government is supposed to run. In this paper, I

focus exclusively on the role of redistricting in damaging trust and the way in which we may change it, because there is a tangible solution that we have the opportunity to implement, and it is one feasible step towards better results rather than attempting to take down the goliath of campaign financing or the political machine that is our party system.

In addition, redistricting has an overlooked relationship to another pressing issue of our time, fake news. While the media has faced an onslaught of criticism for years about bias, dishonesty, and gaps in information, this is being amplified and confused with the prominence of fake news. Not only does fake news guise itself as legitimate to infect online users with fabricated realities, but it has taken on a new life in the age of social media where foreign actors infiltrate the web with mistruths that can hack our information, generate new suspicions and conspiracies, and in the scariest of cases, incite real violence on the basis of a complete lie. I focus on fake news because there are several subtopics that are critical to examine as we live in a world of constant social media engagement. How we differentiate fake news from partisan media, how we evaluate the impacts of fake news and how we can control its spread are all essential pieces to how we attempt to repair trust. And, measuring steps toward success in this area are observable and have already begun. Tracking Internet user trends and comparing our behavior over time is simple and can give us insight into how to contextualize the problem before us.

Both of these practices work in cohesion to target demographics of the population that they seek to manipulate for self-gain. They disregard our rights and protections as citizens and are creating a nation where consensus and understanding are becoming unfamiliar words. In research and literature we have tackled both of these topics individually, but to understand these
pieces together may create new understanding and solutions as we look at patterns in voting outcomes, polarization and public opinion.
Chapter 1: The State of the Media: Bust Cycle

“My heart and my best intentions still tell me that’s true, but the fact and evidence tell me it is not.”- Ronald Reagan

The concept of fake news is not new; mistruths have existed in a variety of forms for hundreds of years. Many point to some of the most famed conspiracy theories of all time to show instances of fake news, such as the skepticism around JFK’s assassination, the moon landing never actually happening, and on. Depending on one’s definition, a rumor may be an example of fake news. But, the phenomenon has been popularized and is now rampant in today’s context largely because of the time period in which it exists. Amidst the age of social media in which influencers play a key role, public opinion indicates high mistrust, and financially incentivized actors spread blatant falsities, fake news has taken on a life unlike what has been seen previously. It has been reported that the top fake news stories of the 2016 election got more engagement online than the top real hard news stories. And, 41% of visits to fake news stories come through social media shares, compared to only 10% of stories from traditional news sites.²

Fake news has always been used as a tool to target certain demographics of the population via a process of inducing a reaction in response to emotionally charged false statements. However, the rapid and elusive nature of social media allows extremist views to be injected into the public eye quickly and with a louder voice that could not be heard previously. Though the literature on just how much fake news may impact a viewer is conflicting, the existence of an effect of

misinformation is undisputed. In the discussion below I will not only examine fake news on its own, but also look broadly at various aspects of the current state of media, because the issue of fake news is not something that can be analyzed independently. As mentioned before, fake news has existed for thousands of years, so what has brought it bubbling to the surface with such velocity? It is the combination of other factors including online access, hyper partisan news, and natural human tendencies that have brought our current media to a place I will categorize as “the bust cycle.”

How the Digital Age Resurrected Fake News

With an extremely low cost of entry, the Internet has made itself an extremely accessible platform for users from all walks of life. As of Quarter 4 in 2017, Facebook had roughly 2.13 billion monthly active users (and 83 million fake profiles).³ It is quite literally available to audiences 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Social media platforms enable an individual with merely 40 Twitter followers to post a tweet about paid protestors following Trump’s election at 8 p.m. on November 9, and have it be shared 16,000 times on Twitter and more than 350,000 times on Facebook by around 10 a.m. the next morning. So quickly that President Trump responded to the alleged fake protests that evening via Twitter, also believing the paid protestors to be real.⁴ According to Pew Research, in 2017, two-thirds of U.S. adults got their news from social media.⁵ And, more than 70% of Americans use social media, as compared

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with just 5% in 2005. Media is more pervasive than ever before, in part because of accessibility and speed. Really anyone can get online, and can post any content at any time, which stands in stark contrast to the newspaper age, which generally required more money, higher education and influence to contribute. But, the attractive qualities of access and speed held by media like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and others prove to be a double-edged sword because these are also the factors that culprits of fake news abuse for their own purpose. Political scientists found that during the 2016 election, one in four Americans visited a fake news site, primarily via clickbait on Facebook. As a professor from the University of Michigan said, “People have a benevolent view of Facebook, for instance, as a curator, but in fact it does have a motive of its own…curating news and information that will keep you watching.” Keep in mind, 42% of marketers report that Facebook is “critical or important to their business.” Algorithms used by these platforms build profiles for individual users to gather similar content for one’s newsfeeds. This presents itself as a perfect opportunity for motivated actors to publish misinformation to a targeted audience that will be more likely to react to certain information and spread it. Aker et al. examine a sampling of 330 conversation threads out of 2,695 collected on Twitter that were associated with nine different major world events in 2015. The analysis categorized a total of 4,842 individual tweets. After extensive cataloguing of the tweets based on veracity, bias of the tweet, and whether pre or post-resolving tweets are also sent out; they found that the source of the original rumor is re-tweeted to a high degree in the first 20 minutes, but even after resolving

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9 See (3)
tweets are sent out, the original rumor is still spread in lesser degrees for some time.\textsuperscript{10} The most re-tweeted posts are those early tweets that support a rumor that is unverified, and this result remains consistent even with news organizations as the user. Interestingly, the least re-tweeted are those denying a rumor, regardless of whether or not the rumor is eventually proven to be true or false. It is almost as if consumers resist nonconformity; any content that stands against the majority is given significantly less attention. In fact, in their collection of three different rumors during the Boston Marathon bombing they found that the ratio between tweets supporting a false rumor and those debunking it was 44:1, 18:1 and 5:1 for “supporting a false rumor” tweets.\textsuperscript{11} Shockingly, the analysis found that an increase in online discussion took place after a true rumor was proven to be true, but it was characterized by a higher degree of denial. The authors attribute this behavior to be the consequence of lingering emotionally-incited skeptics who outweigh supporters who have seen their opinions verified. However, it may also just be human behavior in our interactions as a group online. Princeton social scientists conducted a study on the human approach to fact checking in group and individual settings. They found that even when participants were being paid for each statement they fact-checked, the overall response was that people flagged fewer stories in a group setting than when alone.\textsuperscript{12} These findings present a clear dilemma as we tackle the issue of fake news. If our inherent nature as human beings is to spread unverified information out of fear of standing apart, and on top of that, we don’t follow up to share the outcome, we become bystanders in an issue that we have the ability to stop. And, it doesn’t stop at online media. From news commentary shows on the most prominent cable


\textsuperscript{11} See Supra (10)

networks to at least 2,500 talk radio shows across the U.S., there is influence everywhere. We depend on other news sources to spread factual information, assuming (or hoping) that people will cross-check the stories they read, however some social scientists indicate this may be idealistic. Balmas argues fake news messages are derived from hard news, but a problem arises when users do not have a hard news source as a point of reference with which to assess a potential fake news story. Hard news may serve as a moderator in what is the “perceived realism” of fake news, but Balmas finds perceived realism really depends on how much hard news a viewer is consuming.\(^\text{13}\) This implies that a large part of combatting fake news lies in the hands of news sources who must take on the traditional role of gatekeeper, but even this is being threatened, as highly partisan news straddles the thin line that separates falsities from the truth. Zubiaga says, “In the absence of an authoritative statement corroborating or debunking an ongoing rumor…social media users will often share their own thoughts on its veracity via a process of collective, inter-subjective sense making.”\(^\text{14}\) This is a substantial factor in the world of online social media platforms, where every piece of material, true or false, is evaluated in a group setting. The fear of standing out may be substantial enough to sway many to not only not debunk a claim, but maybe even reinforce it. In addition, some findings indicate that fake news activates the prefrontal cortex, or rational part of the brain, second, and our primary response is emotional, evaluating a news piece’s social value to us.\(^\text{15}\) If true, this means that many would rather sacrifice the need for accuracy in order to satiate our desire to be socially relevant and engaged in a personally meaningful debate. Some may say this can be seen on a daily basis


already. As we move forward in the discussion of what fake news is, its effects, and other culprits, we must keep in the back of our minds how our own human behaviors impact our ability to stop it.

**Online News: Global Network or Pitfall?**

Probably one of the most telling realities of the current state of media is a story told by professor Markus Prior, who wrote an award-winning book about the modern relationship between media and public participation. To get an idea, he says that a problem with today’s media lies in the fact that most people prefer *Seinfeld* reruns to any news outlet. It seems strange to blame the issues associated with the media on *Seinfeld*, but his logic is simple. In the 1970s, media looked much different, with only three network channels of television, all broadcasting news at the same time of day. So even though political interest was probably relatively the same as it is now among Americans, the only entertainment available to them in those time slots was news, so people naturally picked up information, even if it was just background noise.

Nowadays, there are so many options people can easily avoid news, which many do. While Prior finds that the laundry list of options is also important in some respects, and about 20% of respondents indicate liking news programming over any other type of entertainment, there exists the other end of the spectrum, which is becoming less informed and less engaged since limited to no news content is being taken in.\(^\text{16}\) And, those becoming less engaged are finding media increasingly distasteful. According to Pew Research, twice as many social media users report feeling “worn out” by political content they see in their news feeds as compared to those who say

they enjoy the information. And it makes sense, Sobieraj and Berry also found in comparing newspaper columns from the 1950s and 1970s that the discourse was much more civil then than it is now.\textsuperscript{17} 59\% of people say that social media interactions with people of opposing political views are “stressful and frustrating.” And, the vast majority reports that when it comes to social media as a venue for political discussions, they find it less respectful, less civil, less focused on policy, and less likely to come to a resolution.\textsuperscript{18} Some will even avoid it all together to eliminate the chance of running into politics.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, 66\% of Americans believe the media does a “bad job of separating fact from opinion,” so there is very little to mitigate the already biased and coarse dialogue.\textsuperscript{20} With this knowledge it is easy to see why users would prefer light-hearted entertainment news and \textit{Seinfeld} reruns to hard news. And, its not just about seeking relief from the grim media, like Prior indicated, the wide-range of choices available to us allow us to prioritize our interests. Evidence suggests that political interest has become a much more important determinant of news consumption in the high-choice environment of the Internet than ever before.\textsuperscript{21} This may have larger consequences. A cross-national study of 34 countries and over 48,000 observations shows that reading a newspaper, listening to the radio, and using the Internet for political information all correlate negatively to satisfaction with democracy. The study shows that while there may be positive effect of media use on satisfaction with democracy, the mediating factor is political interest; otherwise the direct effects of media use on satisfaction


with democracy are negative.\textsuperscript{22} An interesting question is if those who are actively engaged in political topics on social media are insulated from negative effects as opposed to the average passive consumer who is not looking for particular content. College Media Review analyzed news consumption in university students finding that the behavior of most users is actually active consumption first through identifying trusted news sources, followed by passive consumption or even habit formation as users begin to consume news on social media as part of a daily activity.\textsuperscript{23} If satisfaction with democracy is dependent on political interest, this may mean that one of the keys for the largest generation of online news may be putting political reporting at the top of the priority list in improving its delivery. However, while new media has its faults, it may also solve some problems. There is some evidence to suggest that the interactivity on the Internet actually allows people to feel like they have an impact and influence policy.\textsuperscript{24} There is something to be said for the global network due to the Internet, and this doesn’t just apply to economics, but also to communication and collaboration among people. Social scientists have popularized the term “netizen” to describe any individual who can be either a “receiving node” or “originator” of content in cyberspace.\textsuperscript{25} This is unique compared to previous modes of communication such as the newspaper and television that largely came from central nodes of communication to be dispersed to whatever public was motivated enough to seek it out. However, the paradoxical reality of our current media is that it comes with an increased presence of information; the extreme, the neutral, the true, and the false. It is a package deal. While false stories used to have


\textsuperscript{24} See (21)

a much more limited following and could not typically make it into the mainstream, in this day and age, every piece of information has the potential to go viral. And sadly, fake news does more often than it should.
Chapter 2: “Fake News”

“Did Melania Trump hire an exorcist to cleanse the White House of Obama ‘demons’?"26

Formerly known as “yellow” journalism, produced by the likes of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, “fake news” has made its way once again to the forefront of the public tongue. For the purposes of this discussion, fake news is misinformation that is intentionally false with the express purpose to generate a reaction or outcome. But, in what ways does it appear in today’s media and in what ways does it harm people?

While investigating how fake news spreads on its platform, in 2017, Facebook reported that ¼ of the ads that it sold to a Russian company were “geographically targeted,” although it does not disclose where specifically. And, the purpose of these fake accounts – 470 of which coming from Facebook alone? To publish ads meant to identify other Facebook users susceptible to reacting to the same type of information and using this data to target those groups in the dissemination of more fake news.27 In other words, probably the most relevant problem in the analysis of fake news is the manipulative process of bad actors using demographic information mined online to exacerbate deepening divisions in public discourse. We have become pawns in a scheme to produce content that pits one group against another. Take the example of the fake news creator Jestin Coler, tracked down by NPR in Berkeley, California. Coler, a Democrat, said he started writing false news stories to attract alt-right media users to then denounce them.

However, his curious hobby grew into a side job as he discovered he could make money from


advertising on his sites. And, while he said it is “not about the money,” he also agreed it is enough of an incentive to continue, despite the fact that it is morally objectionable. Coler’s story is meant to illustrate how fake news has exploded in the digital age and really, explain what fake news is through the lens of its impact. Years ago, Coler probably would have had no entrance onto a sizeable-enough news platform in which he could disseminate these mistruths. The Internet age gave him the power to access millions of people in mere seconds. Also, Coler tells the story of how fake news perpetrators act intentionally to create emotional distress in their target demographic group. As Coler says, “I do enjoy making a mess of the people that share the content…I still enjoy the game I guess.” The game being, how can I get the most page views right now. James Murphy of the New American sums up this strategy: “Most of the creators have no political axe to grind; they are simply searching for clicks, which lead to dollars.” This is extremely easy to do when the focus is aimed toward emotionally stimulating societal problems such as the recent gun debate following the Parkland school massacre. It was quickly followed by a flood of fake news reports that one student activist, David Hogg, was a paid actor, which was then perpetuated in the mainstream through YouTube and picked up by extremist sites like Infowars. Rather than being viewed as a survivor sharing his story, because Hogg was speaking out about the gun debate, he was targeted as both a hero from one side, and a demagogue from the opposing ideological side. There has been a plethora of research to suggest that there are really two means in which people share news on social media: those who are “opinion leaders” with many followers and a thorough interest in news, and those who have been provoked

29 Murphy, J. (2018). “Unworthy NEWS: Fake news, once dubbed "yellow journalism," is as old as news itself, but nowadays, with the slant given by major media to most reporting, major media have themselves to blame.” New American (08856540), 34(4), 21-23.
emotionally. It is exactly these kinds of people who are targeted, as researchers find that the key to spreading fake news content is feeding the information to an “initial cluster” of believers who will spread it like wildfire. And while some may dismiss fake news or think of it as political jabber with little influence, fake news reports can have lasting and dangerous effects. In the worst of cases, mistruths can motivate people to act out, like the horrific shooting at a pizza shop in D.C. spurred by fake news reports of an alleged sex trafficking ring being run from the shop by the Clintons, or death threats sent to the Syrian refugee community because of a false account of rape in Twin Falls, Idaho. Sadly, the “Pizzagate” shooter, Edgar Welch, and the Twin Falls community are not alone. It seems fantastical to believe that actions like this could be carried out because of posts with so little evidence or corroboration, but this is a reality, and it must be dealt with. These are the most extreme of cases, but they demonstrate to what extent fake news can have an impact on, not just ideology, but actions. To be clear, I am not suggesting in this discussion that fake news drew the 2016 election in one way or another. As professor Nyhan makes clear, the relative impact of fake news in persuading an individual with solidified opinions to vote one way or another is limited. I am looking beyond the election at how fake news endangers the American public by contributing to existing realities of cynicism, polarization and distortion of reality. The curated content that is fake news lends itself to heightening anxieties and negativity towards the media, making the public trust information less

32 See (5)
and less, and depend on human judgment and groupthink to evaluate truthfulness. And, it contributes to polarization among the public as the degrees of separation between ideological ends become greater and issues become wrapped up in morality and which side is better or worse. This also exaggerates existing methods to parse apart the population, a discussion I will get to later in this paper.

Tête-À-Tête

It is no secret that America is politically polarized. Pew research from 2014 indicated that consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions among the electorate have doubled over the past two decades. And, animosity towards opposition is growing, with 27% of Democrats viewing the Republican Party as a “threat to the nation’s well being,” and 36% vice versa.36 After revisiting similar questions in 2016, Pew found 93% of Republicans are more conservative than the median Democrat, and 94% of Democrats are more liberal than the median Republican. Compare this to 64% and 70% just two decades ago; in other words, partisans are running to the poles.37 And, fake news is only exacerbating the situation. Said best by Nayef Al-Rodhan in an editorial, “post-truth thrives in a very polarized environment, where the idea of truth is already split into notions of ‘my truth vs. your truth.’”38 This statement carries with it an implication that when fake news is broken down to an individual’s truths and morality, no one is safe, because issues are personalized. Research supports this, too, finding no evidence that those who are less

38 See (15)
knowledgeable about politics consume more fake news than those are more knowledgeable.\textsuperscript{39} In fact, some preliminary evidence suggests that education is linked to polarization as it provides political sophistication, resulting in stronger sorting.\textsuperscript{40} That is because fake news is curated to incite an emotional reaction, beyond what education and knowledge can control. When exposed to misinformation, it actually appears that much of the initial reaction is resorting to the comfort zone of one’s partisan framework. Indeed, research by Han and Federico say that “motivated reasoning,” or information to bolster one side of an argument, contributes greatly to the polarization in attitudes towards an existing topic. They observe reactions to partisan-framed versions of a story about a made-up new tax proposal, and find that self-identified partisans move more strongly to their respective poles upon reading the information.\textsuperscript{41} In the \textit{Journal of Communication}, researchers expand on this, finding one’s emotional state is directly related to their partisanship after reading misinformation. “When initially faced with inaccurate claims about politics,” angry people are more likely to respond in a partisan manner, reinforcing a partisan narrative. In contrast, anxiety seemed to reduce partisanship and the information in the message was accepted.\textsuperscript{42} Other studies back this finding by examining emotions imbued after reading \textit{New York Times} articles over a three-month period, finding that while positive content is more viral than negative content, negative arousal in the form of anger or anxiety is so substantial that it eliminates the difference in virality.\textsuperscript{43} This wealth of data indicates that battling fake news is far more complex than just identifying and disputing a false claim. It comes down to


what Liu et al. call ‘naïve realism’; “consumers tend to believe that their perceptions of reality are the only accurate views, while others who disagree are regarded as uninformed, irrational or biased.”44 These perceptions of reality are then reinforced by online networks of people that collectively judge what is truth and what isn’t. There is a deep interplay at work involving an individual’s emotions and subconscious beliefs that are being manipulated by misinformation. In times of partisan news media on top of fabricated news that relays partisan objectives, it is easy to see how people are pulled to the trenches of the political war zone and the divide amongst Americans is the starkest it has been. 

It is dangerous to live in a world where the only opinions we hear are our own. Samuel Woolley of University of Oxford describes part of the danger is that bots “manufacture consensus,” or curate popularity on social media by gathering data on the initial respondents and targeting those groups.45 This process facilitates the acceptance of fake news because of two factors: social credibility (believing a source to be credible because other people believe it to be credible), and frequency heuristic (growing belief in a source because it is frequently heard, regardless of its veracity).46 It contributes to the problem of Internet users creating niche networks of like-minded users to perpetrate information that fits with their ideological framework, better known as the echo chamber effect. It is why scientist Filippo Menczer warns, “don’t unfollow someone just because they post something you disagree with…unfollowing is one of the most efficient techniques to put yourself inside an echo chamber.”47 By eliminating other opinions, users effectively trap themselves in a Plato’s cave, unable to understand reality

45 See (5)
46 See (44)
because the only truth known is what is real from inside the perspective of the cave. However, some social scientists dispute the existence of echo chambers. Andrew Guess tracks media consumption using a software installation that tallied page hits on 1,392 individuals over three weeks, finding that the “average slant of Democrats’ and Republicans’ media consumption differs by less than 8% of the available ideological spectrum of online sources,” and that the only spike exists at the far reaches of the spectrum, so extreme partisans may be responsible for nearly all of the persistence of fake news.48 Further, he finds even at a time of what he terms “political shock,” such as the revelation of Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server, the media choices made by consumers were relatively balanced, except on March 4, when she made a press statement, which may indicate that only scandal drives people to their personal partisan narrative.49 The weaknesses of this study are that people may act differently knowing that their online activity is being tracked, and the scoring of ideological slants on media sources is rather subjective. Guess scores CNN as a ‘middle-of-the-road’ outlet when some users may consider this more to the left, which could impact consumption data. In addition, his results may actually prove a significant pattern, that people are driven to partisanship during a scandal; and if the vast majority of stories are scandalized by mainstream media and politicians looking to mobilize a base, would this not drive traffic to the ideological extremes? Andrew Guess contends that people are much more “omnivorous” in their reading of online material, balancing their consumption, and that “subtle individual biases” are key factors in a person’s individual choice to spread a fake news story. He argues that the decision to accept or deny a potentially fake story requires a person to battle with the existing subconscious feelings about a certain topic and either

49 See Supra (48)
accept or reject those feelings. However, some may say this is exactly why fake news is so hard to control, because it is emotionally tied. These analyses also fail to consider how fake news may have a considerably different impact on a reader than hard news, even if one’s hard news consumption outweighs their intake of fake news. And, in any case, it’s up for debate how “omnivorous” we really are; studies looking at the rate in which partisans choose a “dissonant” source for an article show that 144 of 326 Democrats chose at least one article from Fox and 74 of 147 Republicans chose at least one MSNBC story. Metzger et al. find that while participants in his study experience a cognitive dissonance towards news sources that challenge their world view as opposed to “attitude-consistent” sources, this cognitive dissonance had more to do with the lack of credibility a user ascribes to the opposing source than the disagreeable information alone. This suggests that while people in general prefer attitudes consistent with their own, they are able to take a stop back and accept another point of view. The real problem comes with the trusting the source, a major dysfunction I will explore later. Further research from Nyhan regarding online tracking data of over 2,000 Americans throughout the 2016 election show that indeed the echo chamber exists, but it is “narrow,” meaning that the high rate of consumption (33.16 articles from fake news websites during the study period) is limited to about 10% of the public. However, 27.4% of Americans over the age of 18 visited a pro-Trump or pro-Clinton news site during the final weeks of the 2016 election. That is over 65 million American citizens. Even if the vast majority of audiences are balanced in their media consumption, and can respect

50 See (48)
54 See (39)
an opposing opinion, this does not eliminate the effects of a selective bias in choosing news, or the innate emotional reaction that comes with seemingly accurate information that proves to be false, and it definitely does not eliminate the small percentage of extremely motivated consumers of fake news who are able to thrive in the social media environment. This view is echoed by researchers in the UK who reference the problem of algorithms that use browser cookies to track online activity and curate more content that reinforces one’s views. They point to two fundamental consequences of this “confirmation bias”: if one has a “latent” bias against a particular group, this can be honed in on and inflamed by repetitive, extreme, and emotional narratives that often exist on fake news sites and are shared by a group of peers with similar beliefs; and secondly, once this misinformation is in the online sphere, it will create a ripple of skepticism and doubt no matter who it reaches. Cognitive psychologists have identified over 175 cognitive biases, any of which at any given time may be stirred by the presence of an emotionally fueled news story.55 And, according to analyses of 126,000 tweets, MIT researchers found fake news tweets frequently used words that elicited “surprise” and “disgust,” and that this content spreads “further, faster, more deeply and more broadly” on social media.56 “Once in the public consciousness,” even if it is proven to be untrue, the seed of doubt will be sown in the minds of some people who will then take caution towards a topic because of the narrative.57 A recent example is the FBI’s statement regarding Agent Rogelio Martinez’s death, which received a flood of attention after Trump and right-wing outlets linked his death to immigrant violence.58

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While the FBI stated publicly that they found no evidence linking his death to an assault, instead attributing it to a likely fall or other accident, the presence of Trump’s version, especially when connected to a “need” for border security in policy talks, ignited fear and resentment in those with a subconscious bias in regards to these issues. To cite just one inflammatory comment from a Twitter user, “Americans love our Border Patrol Agents! They are the only thing standing between American and unlimited violence and mayhem.” Creating this type of world view, in which America exists within a bubble, and those outside of it are associated with “unlimited violence and mayhem,” is exactly the reason why conversation about political topics has evaporated, and all that is left is a moral stand-off. This tweet boiled down a conversation about border security to the fear of the outside world, and the dangers of anyone outside America’s borders. It doesn’t help that the “real” media have become completely entangled in the world of money and advertising, finding it more profitable to target a niche political audience than to put out balanced and fair content. Both fake news and highly partisan media of today are financially incentivized actors that blur the line between what is fact and what is pure, emotionally-charged fiction.

**Partisan Media: On A Tightrope**

As James Murphy says, “it’s in the minutiae of such stories, when reporting begins to focus on the whys and how of events, that the news giants show their true colors. That is where advocacy begins and impartiality ends.” In this discussion it is unfortunately easy, though not

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60 Murphy, J. (2018). *Unnoteworthy NEWS: Fake news, once dubbed “yellow journalism,” is as old as news itself, but nowadays, with the slant given by major media to most reporting, major media have themselves to blame. New American (08856540), 34(4), 21-23.*
accurate, to blend fake news with highly partisan news. In just one study of several hundred college-aged respondents, 71% did not consider television news objective.\textsuperscript{61} Studies of trends in media indicate that “outrage” statements, or those inciting a strong negative reaction are all too common with TV, radio and other traditional media; with mockery being the most present, followed by misrepresentative exaggeration.\textsuperscript{62} Evidence from the 2016 campaign found the most reported news stories (32%) visited were those of scandal; from Clinton’s email leaks to Trump’s \textit{Hollywood Access} tape; whereas hard news, like policy coverage accounted for 6%.\textsuperscript{63} While news bias itself is not a danger, it is the sensational way in which reporting is being done in recent times that creates a gray area for viewers, to a degree where fact becomes muddled. Recent examples can be taken from the Parkland high school shooting in which inaccurate reports surfaced that the shooting was the 17\textsuperscript{th} or 18\textsuperscript{th} school shooting of its kind since January 1\textsuperscript{st} and that the Florida Governor Rick Scott was too busy to meet with anti-gun advocates when they arrived at his office when in reality he was at a funeral and had already scheduled the meeting for later on.\textsuperscript{64} It is this kind of information we expect (or hope to expect) news outlets to get right, but depending on which source one chooses the “facts” of a news event can look remarkably different. It is important as readers trying to inform ourselves that bias does not equate to falsity, but it can come close, and highly partisan news serves as a major deterrent to combatting the pervasiveness of fake news, and it mirrors some of the same consequences. One similar effect is polarization, and we can see this easily, just by looking at headlines coming from

various news sources after an event. Following Charlottesville, *Politico* neatly organized some of the most controversial breaking news stories as they unfolded, and they tell quite a different story. To give a taste, some headlines from the “left” included, “Trump Gives White Supremacists an Unequivocal Boost” (nytimes.com), and “Trump again blames ‘both sides’ in Charlottesville, says some counter protestors were ‘very, very violent’” (washingtonpost.com); versus the “right,” “Donald Trump Blasts Reporters at Trump Tower for One-Sided Charlottesville Reporting” (breitbart.com), and “Left Blames Trump for Charlottesville. Here are 5 Murders the Press Didn’t Blame Obama For” (dailywire.com). Not only do these headlines depict starkly different views, but it can be characterized as examples of animosity and strong partisan affiliation with each news outlet, and this persists on a variety of media. A comprehensive study found significant results in the effect of a source label; Republicans preferring news reports attributed to *Fox News*, whereas Democrats preferred those attributed to *CNN* and *NPR*. This showed in 2016, with *Fox News*, *Drudge Report* and *Breitbart* accounting for 1/3 of all news visits by Republicans; and *Huffington Post*, *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* accounting for the same share of clicks for Democratic voters. Part of the polarization caused by media like those listed may have to do with the way the news is told. University of Minnesota researchers found a significant correlation between conflict-framed news and polarization as a response to such framing. In practice, this can be seen in the standard news outlet model, with one pundit in a public *tête-a-tête* with another from the opposing side with the hope being to ridicule the opposing side on a particular issue. This not only frames the

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67 See (63)
conversation as “us vs. them,” but by intentionally seeking to degrade the opposing side, it normalizes the behavior and reinforces the combative attitudes in conversations about politics. In circling back to arguments made about the general public’s “omnivorous” media diet, research found that while “like-minded” media may not impact a viewer’s factual knowledge about an issue, we all are supplied the same basic information, it significantly impacts one’s “belief model,” effectively altering one’s opinion on an issue, polarizing them on said topic, and then motivating one’s political participation toward the topic. This was demonstrated by looking at reactions on two topics; McCain’s age in relation to his fitness for office and America’s readiness for a black president. For both, the side of opposition showed statistically significant results in both attitudinal polarization and participation, while the support party was unaffected.68

One drawback of this study is that the relationship may be reversed, that more partisan viewers seek out more partisan media, regardless, this would just as significantly point to a correlation between media and opinion formation. One other relationship of interest is the one between the perceived credibility of a news source and polarization. Evidence suggests beliefs about source credibility may actually be a larger factor in partisan segregation than actual biased content.69

How someone determines the credibility of a source is dependent on their media consumption, and the options in today’s media environment have become nearly limitless. As I describe above, Prior argues in his book that the real issue lie in the opening up of media choices, which has led to “polarization without persuasion.” As “news junkies” are able to consume more political news they become more partisan while apolitical Americans exhibit a greater ability to avoid the news. It has created the effect of moderates dropping off in voter turnout, so even though it appears as


69 See (66)
if partisans are becoming more partisan, in reality they are just increasingly becoming the only ones turning up to vote.\textsuperscript{70} There is comprehensive support for this hypothesis, with studies indicating a significant relationship between media fragmentation, polarization and a sorting effect, but only consistently among those most interested in politics.\textsuperscript{71} Even if partisan media only works to make the existing extreme partisans more extreme, this is still problematic because not only does this pattern threaten the very existence of the moderate voter, changing the face of our political landscape, but this small group is able to circulate their extremist views more than ever before, threatening to incite others who normally wouldn’t see this content. One study to date finds that discussing a partisan program does indeed generate polarization as well.\textsuperscript{72} If anything, highly partisan news may be even worse than fake news; at least some fake news is blatantly fake. Partisan media outlets manipulate their viewers by using real information and twisting it to the point where it almost crosses the border outside of reality. And like Lilleker points out, “citizens will rely on their beliefs when they are unable to believe alternative accounts.” If news media cannot prove itself to be a reliable resource for fully truthful information, citizens will use their personal belief system, their own fact-checking, and cues from peers to form a judgment.\textsuperscript{73} Various studies indicate that the variety in news media allows users to be exposed to dissonant views from their own, to the extent that it may even transcend partisanship; however, this effect is weaker among strong partisans, who aim to create “homogenous interpersonal networks,” especially in an environment that seeks to conform to


\textsuperscript{73} See (57)
audiences’ ideological views. McLaughlin and Velez find support for the notion that when a partisan is surrounded by political messaging that is intended to be personally relevant, it results in a strong adherence to that issue and candidate and increases commitment to that candidate. And this relationship may work in reverse as well. Multiple studies suggest politicians have altered their voting pattern and alter messaging in line with partisan networks’ narratives to be able to spread their message and gain exposure to potential voters. As evidenced just as much in fake news, partisan media use emotional cognitive messaging to fuel stronger opinions and resentment towards the other ideological side. It is why so many people warn against speaking about politics at the dinner table, because issue topics become a piece of one’s cognitive identity. This pattern has created the lasting impact of a deepening cynicism that the public has with the media. Gallup research asked respondents how much confidence one personally felt towards a variety of institutions in the country, and in 2000, 23% said very little or none at all about television news. In 2017 that same question garnered 44% responding very little to none. This is a reaction to the fact that most consumers are no longer willing to hear the barrage of negative and highly skewed news anymore. Yet, it is becoming increasingly important for partisan news sources to consider their impact, as social media has changed the media landscape. Partisans now rely more than ever on social endorsements (likes and shares) as well as source cues. Evidence suggests that partisans on either side were more than twice as likely to choose an article from an opposing source if it had strong social endorsement and 76% higher chance if it came from a


76 See (72)

like-minded source.\textsuperscript{78} The media has an obligation to its original purpose to be a public service, and as such it must tread carefully not to fall in line with a partisan narrative, despite the financial incentive to do so. Media outlets must take an active part in reworking their structures to address issues of bias and borderline fabrication. As of right now there is little care and accountability to create positive outcomes in our public with the power of media. One consideration to further research would be to compare user knowledge of certain trending news topics after a control group consumes strictly nonpartisan news programming while the test group informs themselves using their news source of choice to ultimately evaluate whether nonpartisan news produces a better-informed public. While it is exceptionally unlikely that we will ever block a news outlet or create a barricade by which news outlets must pass, we must consider how we can and should respond to an institution that is lacking in its fundamental duty. Just as we would expect something to be done to law enforcement if we saw a correlation between a drop in drunk driving citations and an increase in drunk driving accidents, we should expect no less of our gatekeepers of credible information. As something to think about for our future after considering the dangers of our modern partisan media Mutz and Martin remark, “Mass media’s greatest potential lies in its impersonal exposure of audiences to cross-cutting views…in order to sustain this benefit, however, news media must be structured so as to limit the public’s capacity for selective exposure.”\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{78} See (52)
\textsuperscript{79} See (74)
Chapter 3: The New Watchdog: Social Media?

“We do not want to be arbiters of truth ourselves, but instead rely on our community and trusted third parties”-Mark Zuckerberg

There are really two major problems to address in combating fake news: detection, or the being proactive to stop the spread; and minimizing the effects, or reacting to exposure. A huge factor in detection, however, is trying to stay ahead of breaking fake news. This is a significant dilemma, many in the news industry say, because it is common that by the time fact checkers see a fake news story, it is has already been shared on social media hundreds, if not thousands, of times. A very recent study out of MIT found that a false news story reached people, on average, six times faster than a true story and fake news was 70 percent more likely to get retweeted than a true story. The spread is almost instantaneous. In addition, even when a fact check is put out to dispute the falsity, this does not necessarily have the effect of dismantling the untruth; in fact, some studies suggest that people perceive the correction as a ‘stamping down of the truth’ by a bureaucratic force. The key then becomes finding a way to track patterns of social media to be able to stop fake news before it even emerges. This is especially true as alternate research by Nyhan finds that in follow up analysis of respondents who read fake news articles that were known and identified to contain a claim rated false by fact-checkers, none of the respondents found that the fact-check sufficiently debunked the claim. Other social scientists conclude that debunking misinformation relies on an individual’s mental framework as it relates to the fake

80 See (56)
81 See (44)
news in question. They found that debunking was less effective when a person was initially more receptive to a piece of misinformation than when they were more skeptical. But, some factors that helped were a more detailed debunking than merely labeling fake news as “fake.”³³ The key, they point out, is in “prior exposure,” which has been found to increase believability even after a single exposure. Flagging the story as “false” on social media platforms has done very little to reduce believability.³⁴ Additional work by Nyhan and Reifler specifically in regards to correcting misinformation finds that a mere denial of a mistruth did not effectively undo the damaged perception created by a fake news story; however, when an alternate explanation was provided for the event described in the fake news story, this type of correction was able to reverse the damage caused by the misinformation.³⁵ Another positive note, the presence of a social endorsement (i.e. like or share), actually nullified some of effects of source bias associated, and endorsements proved to be a much stronger predictor of online behavior than source cues.³⁶

Some takeaways from this: the first being that if we can’t get ahead of fake news before it surfaces in the mainstream, then a full picture is absolutely necessary for users. Media outlets and social media must make the effort to give a complete explanation when it comes to debunking a claim, otherwise the effort will be futile. Also, there is incentive to get the debunking out into the mainstream quickly, and media outlets to support one another with spreading a debunked claim. By the time fake news is read, the damage may already be done, solidifying a falsehood in one’s beliefs. In a world where curated content is the norm, we must work together to endorse the fact check rather than remain complacent to a spreading rumor.

³⁵ See (82)
And, in general, evidence suggests users tend to support a rumor before it is known to be true or false, and while true rumors are resolved on social media within 5 hours of being posted, the average false rumor takes around 15 to 20 hours to be resolved after its original posting.\(^\text{87}\) However, there remains some pushback to the idea that social media is all to blame. Recent research found that while only 14% of American adults reported that social media was their primary source of news during the 2016 election, 57% said that TV, whether cable, network, or local, was theirs.\(^\text{88}\) Not to mention, polarization has been growing fastest amongst elderly Americans who are also the least likely to use social media.\(^\text{89}\) Social media giants have been hesitant to fully engage in discussions about possible links between their platforms and users’ behaviors involving fake news, but the missing research in this area could show the depth of the significant impact social media has on its users. Especially keeping in mind that the majority of its followers are the Millennial generation, and the online community is only growing, so these effects may be lasting. Studies out of NYU suggest that, in general, discussions on Twitter occur between groups with the same ideology; topics of the 2012 election, the 2013 government shutdown, and the 2014 State of the Union all produced echo chamber-like behavior.\(^\text{90}\) Even scientists in the medical field have conducted experiments on social networks as they relate to human behavior and resoundingly support the notions of clustering, contending that social proximity is stronger than physical proximity in determining behavior, and they even found evidence of a third-degree influencing factor, such as endorsements.\(^\text{91}\) Not to mention a study of

\(^{87}\) See (10)


61 million users on Facebook indicated that during the 2010 congressional election, the creation of a virtual “I Voted” badge played a role in the turnout of an addition 340,000 people to vote. Those who received the social message, which displayed photos of other “friends” who clicked the badge and gave polling location information were .39% more likely to vote than those with no message at all. While this, of course, is a small effect, it is significant in pointing out social media’s influence on human behavior. It is why there have been such feverous calls to social media outlets to act on this issue, and sites like Facebook have announced plans like the “election integrity initiative” to start combating it. For example, at the 2019 Canadian federal election, there are plans to roll out a digital literacy campaign, training for politicians on how to communicate digitally and avoid cyber threats, and a hotline to not only stop bots from reaching out, but also be there for support for those who have identified a bot or think their account has been hacked.

Some researchers point out the flaw in relying on technology to maintain the standards of objectivity required of reporting; technology is vulnerable to manipulation and this can result in “omission and falsification,” which we previously scrutinized newspaper reporters for. Many scholars in the topic point out that there is some beauty to human reporting, because there are ethical standards a human moral code understands that algorithms cannot. Others point out that there are certain human nuances that fact-checks may not be able to assess and there are concerns about how these algorithms really parse out what is truth and what isn’t. But, to some extent it is pointless to harp on the previous standards of newspaper reporters, because one must

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95 See (5)
acknowledge that times have changed and news consumption has changed with it. We must start somewhere when it comes to putting measures in place to wean down on the exposure to fake news, and coming from a fact checker himself; the algorithms are fast.\textsuperscript{96} They, at the very least, take some burden off of humans involved in this line of work as we continue to specify our expectations when it comes to modern day media. Krishna Bharat, the founder of Google News, argues that maybe it is not every false story that needs to be flagged, but only those that reach a certain threshold of shares, which could then trigger a “pause” mechanism for the information in question to be evaluated.\textsuperscript{97} This is a definitely workable solution, and it would take some burden off of fact checkers who are overwhelmed by the infinite supply of stories online, which could spread within seconds. There have been several other suggestions put forth for social media sites like Facebook to adopt something like an optional filter to block out unverified accounts from one’s newsfeed. However, part of acting on solutions requires that social media sites acknowledge their role in the problem. Facebook and others have denied being labeled a news media platform, with Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook’s COO saying because Facebook doesn’t produce content, it is a neutral networking company.\textsuperscript{98} However, this laissez-faire approach opens the door for bad actors to take control. It’s hard to say to what extent social media should draw the line, however, I think an open-door policy of communication between security officials and social media giants would certainly help to come up with solutions. In addition, Facebook must be more willing to allow researchers to work with data to investigate if a causal link does exist between its users and fake news. This is the only way we may be able to start seeing

patterns in behavior that will allow policy makers to draw conclusions about what will effectively stunt the proliferation of fake news. There is particularly a concern with sites like social media, which profit from their algorithms that purposefully create like minded communities between users. Facebook’s 3rd quarter revenue in 2017 was $10.3 billion dollars, 98% of which came from advertising. It is reasonable to think that some of the solution may come from handing over the baton of oversight to a third party regulator who can be objective to this clear conflict of interest. Of course, there is a thin line between oversight and censorship, but the indisputable link between social media platforms, fake news, and a threat to the public should cause concern and action. Some users may contend that fact checkers online are just one other spin on a story, rather than a correction. This is being exacerbated by the increasing willingness of people to discredit legitimate news sources as “fake news,” following Trump’s lead. One interesting idea to think about was pointed out by a Columbia Law professor, Tim Wu, “the use of speech as a tool to suppress speech is, by its nature, something very challenging for the First Amendment.” He says this to point out the interesting crossroads we have reached due to social media. Because it is accessible to virtually everyone, now every person has a voice in the discussion. When the First Amendment was created, it was intended to protect those with conflicting views from being punished by the state. However, there is no shortage of those with a platform and a megaphone to share their views, and combined with polarization, this often means opposing groups use their freedom of speech to wield attacks, insults, and even threats to the other side. Wu’s comment subtly leaves open the question if stricter regulations may be the only way to mitigate some of the harsh communication that is out there.

100 See (96)
Other problems to consider in future analyses are the rising role of citizen journalism and relying on user-generated content to fill journalistic roles. While these are, for the most part, valiant efforts, they are closely tied to the problem of fake news since they draw away from those in the profession who are chained to ethical and factual standards that others are not. When anyone can put out content it is hard for journalists to stay on top of the onslaught of contesting information coming in, and even harder for the public to tell what is real and what is fake. Some experts in the field recommend promoting media literacy and adapting to the age in which we live to teach consumers how to navigate the world of online content.101 As Matthew Johnson, the director of education for MediaSmarts said, “We really, in many ways, can’t rely on other people to act as gatekeepers anymore…we today are responsible for filtering our own information.”102 If we are to accept citizens to the role of contributors to the public well of information, part of the transition has to be educating ourselves on how to use this medium. While to some this may seem extreme, it would not be the first time citizens have had to evolve with new innovation. Transitioning from newspaper, to radio, to television media was not, theoretically, any different, the biggest distinction is that those media all limited themselves to certain, in some ways, more privileged segments of the population. In a recent essay scholars said, “We must redesign our information ecosystem in the 21st century.”103 While we must seek to preserve the beauty of the Internet’s inclusivity, we must teach ourselves how to grapple with some of its obstacles. Some suggestions in terms of education include “debiasing,” reinforcing behaviors to make “controlled thinking override automatic thinking.” This is a strategy that librarians have spoken of to teach students how to avoid misleading content.104 However, this type of approach requires officials to

101 See (57)
102 See (94)
103 See (56)
104 See (55)
consider just how much of a priority combating fake news is. In terms of what we may be able to regulate, one idea is creating stricter controls for what is labeled as a news outlet on social media. If we create certain standards by which we expect journalists to comply, those that do not follow those standards may be considered as “political,” not “news” online. One foreseeable problem is who determines what is considered a reliable news outlet and what isn’t, and, will sidelining some sources over others actually increase their attractiveness as “anti-establishment informers.” This battle also requires greater efforts from researchers in the topic to evolve with the public, and find modern ways to connect with the public to present information, Boden says. It is not enough to publish a 90-page scholarly article, such as this one, and hope for people to read it, they won’t. Of the 1.5 million peer-reviewed articles published annually, 82% in the humanities are never even cited once. Those who wish to take part in fixing the problem must find ways to communicate with an audience that increasingly wants their information succinctly, quickly, and interesting enough to keep them looking at their phone. This is a new age that requires adaptation for survival, as more and more people are gaining access to the Internet, through efforts to improve infrastructure and increase Internet service providers. Less and less information is being limited to those who are literate, or those who can afford to access it. So it is part of academics’ jobs to make fact readily available. Remember, comprehensive counter-fact was one of the only successful means in which to debase misinformation and fend off effects of fake news.

105 See (57)
The age of the traditional newspaper is behind us, and it is time that we grapple with the issues we face with our new media. Data indicates that sites like Facebook are a growing source of referrals to major news websites, and an even greater source of news aggregators.\(^{108}\) Although the medium has changed, and the rules of engagement have changed, the goals must remain the same. When the process works correctly, there is beauty in the way that news on social media operates; namely because it gives audiences choice. Rather than selecting within one particular outlet, or choosing a source, users select a story. The power to browse any and all sources to inform oneself is an unbelievable gift, but it also comes with a certain responsibility. Many factors go into evaluating the credibility of a news source, and online media is evaluated different than television media, where the emphasis is placed on the medium’s credibility, things like the speed with which reporting is done and the comprehensiveness of the coverage. Whereas online media is evaluated more on the quality of the news itself and the reporter’s credibility.\(^{109}\) Within the shifting environment of the Internet, it seems that by placing transparency and well-rounded information at the top of the list, they should steer outcomes in online content in the right direction. I believe, first, we must stress education and comprehensive coverage versus filtering or blocking of any kind of media. Without a doubt the Internet generation relishes in their ability to browse and control, and taking this away is not the answer. As we look to take on this issue globally, we should consider the structure of our media as well as digital literacy campaigns.

\(^{108}\) Amann, A. (2017, Apr. 7). Social media is driving traffic to news websites – and one source dwarfs all others. Medium. Retrieved from https://medium.com/echobox/saturday-is-facebook-day-498e4809e6ea
\(^{109}\) See (61)
A Global Epidemic

As much attention as the 2016 presidential election received for its problems with fake news, this problem is not limited to the United States. Every country is experiencing problems with how to spot, combat and take down fake news. Researchers in Canada found that social media is becoming increasingly important as a source of news for Canadians, and with it, bad actors circulating fake news. Studies highlight examples of the wave of fake news in Britain that has been closely following the “Brexit” decision and violence towards migrant groups in Germany after inaccurate reports of refugee crimes leading up to its election. The French Election Social Media Landscape released a report voicing similar concerns to the U.S., namely an outsized nationalist voice and Russian interference in the social media landscape. A separate report found in the 2016 French election 21.3% of political news circulating on Twitter came from “junk news” sites such as propaganda or hyper-partisan media. The authors recommended that media in France “re-orient” itself, as more people are disengaging with traditional media, and place more emphasis on addressing timely topics on social media. They also recommended continuing to try to end the segregation of content leading to echo chambers and making the online experience more transparent. Overall, the findings show that both French and German social media users viewed and shared more professional news content as opposed to Americans. This could be due, in part, to differences between French and

112 See Supra (111)
114 See (111)
American public, or it may have to do with the structure of U.S. national media. The American model of media stands in contrast to most other European countries, which run under a more regulated public service mission model. But, there is plenty to suggest these aren’t perfect models either. While the U.S. is described as “profit-oriented commercialism,” the U.K. has also displayed strong media party parallelism and several Central European countries like Poland still have media heavily controlled or operated by the government. In addition, many Europeans take issue with the fact that they must pay a tax to fund the operation of their media that they cannot control, don’t enjoy, and don’t know how their money is used. This plays into larger concerns that governments must be careful not to overstep the line of authority in regulating communication, for fear of censorship and autocratic-type control. This was made clear in a Joint Declaration made by the UN in March 2017, warning against the impact of fake news and propaganda. For our sake, I would argue that it is more of a gray area to recalibrate our model of media for fear that it would come dangerously close to infringing on the sanctity of our right to free speech and freedom of the press. It is far more approachable to address the actors related to the issue, primarily looking at our social media, news media, individual citizens, and cyber security; though I am not informed enough to engage in discussion regarding our national security efforts to combat foreign threats online.

Social media efforts have been relatively consistent globally. In the U.K., thousands of fake Facebook accounts have been deleted, an ad campaign was run during the election showing how to spot fake news, and efforts were made to bring a research group specifically in the

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117 See (15)
category of fake news into the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology.\textsuperscript{118} Much of this response, as well as in other countries, came after the 2016 U.S. election, allowing other countries an advantage in how to prevent the infiltration and react when it occurred. Europe does also have stricter controls when it comes to online communication, filtering social media more stringently than the U.S. for what it considers hate speech, most of which is protected in the U.S.\textsuperscript{119} Some features of the European system could work effectively in the U.S.. For example, Britain, Spain and Germany all have standards to be followed under the supervision of an independent committee that ensures that public service media are providing its intended service to its citizens. A possible place for this to emerge could be a committee within the FCC that hones in on media and creates its own service to put out nonpartisan content. The BBC has already begun to think in this context, gathering as much data as possible on social media consumers to define the relationship the public has with online information.\textsuperscript{120} For this to be scaled, worldwide, it will be important to gather more substantial research to look for correlations between online content and human behavior. As of now, the most solid findings have been linking sensationalized content with an emotional reaction. For example, media organizations must do more than seek eyeballs by writing a catchy headline; the French Election report found over 64\% of the conversations analyzed on social media were solely based on the article title and URL, and it is common for people to share content based on headline alone.\textsuperscript{121} Around the globe we have an incentive to act on this issue because the payoff could be enormous. A cross national study found that there is a “virtuous circle” that exists when news

\textsuperscript{118} See (15)
\textsuperscript{119} See (5)
\textsuperscript{121} See Supra (120)
media is used by youth voters, leading to more political engagement.\textsuperscript{122} However, this study did not look at how the interplay of satire, infotainment or fake news impacts the normally positive association between news media and youth turnout. My hypothesis is the relationship would likely be negative. But, these are the types of relationships we need to scrutinize to make concrete policy decisions. Beyond this, the most we can do is continue to add to the growing list of active detectors, debunkers, and enforcers that are working to take down fake news actors. “Faktisk” in Norway, “WikiTribune” available globally, and “Stop Fake” in Ukraine, are among the organizations attempting to fight misinformation.\textsuperscript{123} As news consumers ourselves, we need to educate ourselves on good media consumption behavior online and take personal responsibility by consciously thinking about the information we share. Unless we would rather opt for a world in which information is censored, this is our best solution to maintaining truthfulness online.


Chapter 4: Political Chess…AKA Partisan Gerrymandering

“Redistricting reform is no panacea, but it is a start”-Thomas Mann

A topic that has recently hit the spotlight, yet has been a long-time issue in our electoral processes is partisan gerrymandering. Gerrymandering can come in a variety of forms, each variation targeting a particular segment of the population by a party to effectively manipulate their respective vote strength and eventual electoral outcome. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be focusing on partisan gerrymandering, which I define as the act of politicians using demographic information and mapping technology to form congressional district lines with the express intent to create an outcome favorable to that party’s objectives. Partisan gerrymandering has the effect of physically separating the population in defined districts by party affiliation engendering a situation where the voting population’s power of choice is weakened by the party using these tactics. It is threatening our expectations in a democracy, in which we expect to be able to choose who may represent us, and the issue must be addressed to mitigate some of the cynicism we experience in politics.

The somewhat elusive term “gerrymandering” is one that dates back to 1812, although the practice precedes its name, some historians finding trails of its existence in the U.S. all the way back to 1705 in Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{124} The Democratic Republicans were the party in the majority at the time and Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, with his party’s approval, took to the task of redrawing district lines. One of the districts, Essex County, was redrawn in such a perverse way that political cartoonist, Elkanah Tisdale, sketched it for publication in the Boston Centinel to resemble a salamander mocking its absurd shape. Combining the senator’s name with the cartoon led to the name “gerrymander” and referred to “the cheat, which had been imposed upon the people by the senatorial districting.” The cartoon said - rather accurately - about the infamous practice, “when a man has been swindled out of his

rights by a villain, he says he has been gerrymandered.” This description rings true today as we look at some of the maps generated by parties tasked with redistricting. Gerrymandering is traditionally done in two ways: termed “cracking” and “packing.” “Packing” is a process in which legislators encapsulate a large amount of their opposition’s voter base into one district, such as a large urban area, serving as a strategic concession to one’s opponent because of the high imbalance of the opposition’s supporters versus their own. The other scenario is “cracking,” where the party’s supporters are parsed out among several districts, mostly suburban areas, that are drawn in order to construct small majorities in every one, so while the overall victory may appear to be a small and competitive margin, it is “safe” in that each local victory is planned to be secured by computational precision.

In order to understand gerrymandering, one must understand how it even has the potential to occur. This involves a brief discussion of our nation’s election law and how the process of redistricting happens in the United States. Our Congress is made up of two bodies, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House is made up of 435 members, meaning the entire country must be divided into 435 congressional districts in order to achieve the 435 members. However, each state’s contribution to those 435 members is different, and it has the potential to change. It fluctuates in accordance with U.S. population changes, some states growing after ten years and some waning. For example, following the 2010 Census, ten states lost congressional seats, primarily in the Northeast and the Midwest, and seats were gained in the Southwest and South. Texas alone gained four seats, reflecting a 20% increase in population since the 2000 census. After the Census indicates how many of the 435 seats will be allotted to each state, those states then must redraw their congressional district lines to form each of their districts with a roughly equal amount of people in each one. However, Article 1, Section 4 of the Constitution hands the power of regulating federal elections, including redistricting, to the states. The Supreme Court has upheld this and given the state’s quite a bit of flexibility throughout the years to determine what

125 See Supra (124)
exactly “representative equality” means when it comes to redistricting. Not every Justice has agreed with this freedom, however. In his biography it cites that Earl Warren wrote, “judicial deference to legislators in reapportionment matters was a sham because those possessing disproportionate power in a legislature had no incentives to surrender it. And his calculation is correct; even though congressional maps must be approved by a state’s respective House and Senate and approved by the governor, if one party is in the majority, and controls the process at every checkpoint, there is very little to control what those district lines may look like. It is the freedom that politicians in a position of authority have that leads to the practice of gerrymandering and yields results that are fundamentally unfair when it comes to representing their constituents. A caveat to this discussion is that gerrymandering only impacts the House of Representatives, and not the Senate. The reason why is because the Senate, consisting of 100 members, gives each of the 50 states exactly two senate seats. This number does not waver with changes in state populations. If it did change in accordance with population shifts, state borders would need to be redrawn. The last time there were any significant shifts in state border lines was around 1900. So, while it is theoretically possible, the likelihood of such an occurrence is nearly zero.

With this understanding of what partisan gerrymandering is and why it exists, I would like to discuss several effects it has on the electoral process and politics in America. By distorting the sanctity of the right to vote in theory and in practice, and adding to partisanship in both politicians and our electorate, the practice scrappes away at what we believe to be standards of our democracy.

Beyond any quantifiable effects that may be seen in skewed election results and ridiculous looking district shapes, gerrymandering mocks the concept of fair representation that is sworn to citizens of America. The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution secures every citizen, above the age of 18, the right to vote. As Diggs asserts, “political gerrymandering distorts the market in which voters exercise the

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right to choose their representatives,” this being a “democratic good in itself.”

In the very documents that detail the framework with which this country was built on, Hamilton asserts in the Federalist Papers that our “confidence in and obedience to” our government will be “proportioned to the goodness or badness of its administration,” the only exceptions to this coming from accidental causes. However, planned manipulation of electoral results by political parties is not accidental nor well-intentioned, except to achieve its own end. Especially when legislators use programs such as Maptitude that stores census, economic, and voting histories of every district dating back years to predict as precisely as possible how a district will shake out come election time. In Federalist 52 Madison wrote, “As it is essential to liberty that the government in general should have a common interest with the people, so it is particularly essential that the branch of it under consideration should have an immediate dependence on, and an intimate sympathy with, the people.”

Following the explicit expectation of the shapers of this country to have legislators be dependent and sympathetic to their constituents, the practice of gerrymandering plainly diverts from this by warping electoral outcomes to adhere to party objectives.

The effects of computer-driven partisan gerrymandering are obvious in election outcomes. On a case-by-case basis there are examples of disproportionate vote counts and seat allotments, as seen in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. There are also nationwide trends to be accounted for, such as a decrease in competition and entrenching the party that is in control of drawing these lines. Over the last number of years there has been a significant decrease in swing districts, with only about 30 House races being settled within ten percentage points in 2016. Trend lines indicate that victories in both the House and Senate won by five percent or less are the lowest they have been in the last 40 years. In Michigan alone only 21 of their total 148 legislative seats have been competitive since 2012, the first year in which


the districts drawn based on the 2010 census applied.135 But, some scholars dispute the extent to which gerrymandering may be at fault for the shrinking list of competitive districts. One study points more to increased polarization and an inherent incumbent advantage to explain the lack of competitiveness.136 Comprehensive data comparing competitiveness between rounds of redistricting actually found that rates of competitiveness are highly variable, increasing some years and decreasing others, and declines did not always directly follow a year of redistricting. This indicates that any decrease in competition would have resulted from changes in the electorate; voter mobility based on partisan preferences and an increase in partisanship among the general population.137 However, there must be something said for the ability to draw district lines that secure 13 of 18 legislative seats in a state where Democratic voters outnumber Republican voters five to four.138 This example is summed up as entrenchment; having definitive control over election outcomes “such that a subsequent majority of voters who would prefer to replace the incumbents will be thwarted.”139 It is evidenced by the oft-cited work of Nicholas Stephanopoulos finding that parties with this power have enacted maps that give them six percent more seats on average than a plan that would have been created if the other party were in control.140 Jacobson affirms this trend, “Of the twenty-five districts Republicans won in 2000 with less than 55 percent of the vote, nineteen were strengthened by increasing the proportion of Bush voters…” and likewise some Democratic districts increased their levels of safety as well.141 So, while redistricting may not significantly impact levels of competition, with other natural factors taking precedence, to deny a gerrymander’s ability to amplify this effect would be a mistake. But, the degree to which election reform may matter is still disputed in other

ways. Senior Fellow Elaine Kamarck at The Brookings Institute noted that Americans have fallen into a pattern in which they have naturally sorted themselves into like-minded communities on their own, and this is backed up by his findings.\textsuperscript{142} Some of the most notable data by Eubank looks at the “efficiency” of the way voters live. He finds that Republicans are more likely to live in neighborhoods with a smaller number of “co-partisans” versus Democrats who cluster in larger cities.\textsuperscript{143} The concern is that even with gerrymandering gone, the result may not be more competitive districts, if it is just the way that voters are choosing to live. Despite this, the reality of entrenched political parties does exist, and in particular, one area of interest is to what extent gerrymandering has silenced the moderate voter, who is subject to whichever of the two major parties is in control at any given time and may be disaffected because of this.

While there is an indisputable increase in polarization persistent in the American public and our legislature,\textsuperscript{144} this may be a question of the chicken or the egg. Did the electorate become polarized first, forcing parties and politicians to respond to these demands, or did the electorate shift as they followed their party alliances, drifting farther apart? Smidt said that there has been a decline in the “floating voter,” often viewed as the flexible voter because they are “indifferent, unaware, or conflicted.”\textsuperscript{145} The narrative is that voters shift with their party, and the decrease in the moderate voter, or the undecided vote, is because of a trend in the “floating voter mentality,” because parties have become more clearly separated, these voters can more readily identify issue differences between them allowing a voter to strongly align or defect based on a core belief or issue. She finds that the rate of awareness between issue differences has risen from 31.4\% in 1956 to 76.5\% in 2012, accounting for education. Also, the rate of vote switching from one party to another in the last four election cycles is half (6.2\%) of what it was compared to 1952-1980 (12.0\%).\textsuperscript{146} Shor presents similar results, evidenced by a strong correlation between presidential


\textsuperscript{146} See Supra (145)
voting behavior and legislator ideology in situations where there is increased polarization. This would suggest that political parties have consciously shifted to the extremes to distinguish themselves more clearly to the electorate and give them a clear difference when deciding whom to vote for. However, research by Lindgren tests hypotheses against the voting record of legislators between 2002-2010 House elections, finding that a legislator’s voting record is affected by the partisanship of the district and the margin of victory in the previous election. This would suggest that legislators shift ideologically in response to the climate of their constituents. There is supporting evidence for this, with data indicating that in the 109th Congress, almost every Senator was more extreme than the median voter of his/her state, and, as early as 1960, delegates to party conventions taking more extreme positions than the respective party’s voters. However, tracking of roll-call voting recorded by Samuel P. Huntington as far back as 1950 indicates that members from safe seats are often less partisan than their more marginal colleagues, which would mean competition is not necessarily connected to polarization, though they are often causally related in the literature about gerrymandering. Beyond the debate of which arose first, the discussion of whether gerrymandering plays a significant role in polarization at all, in the electorate or legislators, is an even more muddled argument. The most effusive proponents against the practice of gerrymandering propose it’s impact is twofold; that redistricting helps create safe seats in which they may pursue extremist agendas that are attractive solely to their primary voters who will turn out to vote, and these lines are drawn in such a way as to embellish the incumbency advantage, resulting in more homogeneity in the voting populous over time and entrenching a party within a district that has been computer-generated to fulfill boundary requirements and appear “normal.” The need to be more moderate

and compromise across the aisle is then diminished. There has been evidence to support this notion; researchers Brady, Han, and Pope found Democratic incumbents who lost in the primary were more conservative than the winning candidate and, likewise, Republicans who lost were more liberal than those who won.\footnote{Brady, D., Han, H., & Pope, J. (2007). Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate? \textit{Legislative Studies Quarterly,} 32(1), 79-105. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40263411} However, Thomas Mann\footnote{See (150)} refutes this charge somewhat, saying the incidence of this scenario, incumbents running against each other, is so low that the causal relationship may not be that strong. Or, this may be more evidence to suggest that politicians react to constituent behavior and polarize more to party values to prevent a sure loss. But, Nathan Cohn argues there is a bit more strategy involved and that while gerrymandering does make districts safe, it does not result in making “red districts more red,” instead it attempts to make “purple districts redder.” This correlates with his finding that 17 of the last 30 most moderate Republicans based on voting pattern came from more gerrymandered states.\footnote{Cohn, N. (2013, Oct. 14). Gerrymandering Still Isn’t to Blame for the Shutdown. \textit{The New Republic}. Retrieved from https://newrepublic.com/article/115182/shutdown-2013-gerrymandering-still-isnt-blame} However, to say this practice leads to moderation is far from the truth, if we consider that without certain lines drawn to include partisan supporters, some districts might actually become competitive or flip the other way. So politicians must strike the perfect balance to secure their win. Cohn’s argument is then best summarized as elections being a game of numbers followed by going through the motions until the polls close. Mann follows suit in his dissent about polarization, recounting that the first emergence of strong polarization between the parties really emerged after 1994, when the parties took to new strategies to build political powerhouses within their respective parties.\footnote{See (150)} He breaks down the causal link between gerrymandering and polarization in a few ways, pointing to the well-documented trend in polarization in both Senate elections\footnote{See (150)} as well as other statewide elections, such as county elections\footnote{Cook Partisan Voter Index for the 115th Congress. \textit{The Cook Political Report}. Retrieved from https://adobeindd.com/view/publications/76a932db-5c64-472a-b201-6534a25af6d3/1/publication-web-resources/pdf/PVI_Doc.pdf; Campante, F., & Hojman, D. (2013). Media and Polarization: Evidence from the Introduction of Broadcast TV in the United States. \textit{Harvard University}. Retrieved from https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/wcfia/files/rcampante_media_polarization.pdf} over the last 40 years. But, as was made clear, redistricting is not a factor to be accounted for in either of those races.
McCarty attributes most polarization to a few other factors; a differentiation in practice of how Democrats and Republicans legislate the same district (Republicans tend to be more conservative than Democrats are liberal), that there is congruence between the demographic makeup of a district and its representative, and that the sorting effect of the voting population occurred before the trend of politician partisanship.157 Maybe, in some ways, the best way to think about polarization in political parties is to consider Brady and Han’s consideration of the definition of a political party in general. He says they are meant to “to organize differences between factions in the political system,” in other words, to some extent they may exist to be polarized.158 However, analysis of the American National Election Studies surveys indicates a clear link between party ideology on social welfare issues and opinions in the electorate on the issue. Beyond that they see a strong correlation to the party ideology and feelings about the opposing party and its leaders.159 So, regardless of the impact to legislator and party polarization, it does not mean gerrymandering does not exacerbate a natural problem, that it does not lead to further mistrust in politics, and that it does not affect the more important group involved, voters.

Indeed one of the fears of gerrymandering is that it intentionally excludes some voters over others, contributing to ideological sorting. Abrams and Fiorina hone in on the sorting effect, pointing to evidence that neighborhoods are becoming more segregated and ideological inbreeding is becoming more apparent, but that it is not due to political sorting, instead it may be influenced by something else.160 Caughey et al. argue that it does, swinging elections farther away from the median voters’ preferences since gerrymandering has the ability to match a legislator with a particular ideological base. They explain that if the “median voter is slightly liberal but the median district is slightly conservative, the median legislator is likely to be a Republican,” in addition, they will likely be more conservative than their

district to appeal to the district’s majority ideological base.\textsuperscript{161} This is supported by similar analysis that examines a variation of the “pack and crack strategy,” termed “matching-slices.”\textsuperscript{162} Here the strategy is to match opposite ends of the political spectrum with each other and focus on which type of voters a party would like to maximize. This considers looking more statewide, rather than at individual districts, and considering that if there is a cluster of strong partisans in one area, attempting to match those up with the strongest partisans on the other end to eliminate the hardest competition in the state as a whole. It also allows for legislators to create safe zones, in which they can redefine the most partisan supporters as the “median voter,” framing the perception of the ideological norm for other voters. This model does take on an idealistic view of geography, that legislators can easily encapsulate both ends of the spectrum in spite of clear geographic and demographic obstacles; but despite this drawback it points out the theoretical concerns of how politicians split voters and draw a deeper divide between ideologies.\textsuperscript{163} There is some degree of disagreement about how much partisan sorting takes place, with Abrams and Fiorina believing that while neighborhoods are becoming more segregated, the assumption that it is for political reasons rests on the presumption that politics is a central tenet of American life, which it is not.\textsuperscript{164} Stanford political scientists agree that most Americans prioritize other personal factors to decide their place of living over what their partisanship is.\textsuperscript{165} But, Brennan Center analysis indicates while clustering may not explain partisan bias, it could signal foul play. In the seven worst gerrymandered states there is actually not much natural clustering to be account for, so to use it as an explanation for partisan bias would be misleading, instead it is indicative of being a result of third party manipulation.\textsuperscript{166} Whether by human habit or foul play, clustering exists in some form. The problem may be in how to realistically overcome

\textsuperscript{163} See Supra (162)
\textsuperscript{164} See (160)
this, as we naturally want to live where like minded people live. Levendusky explains in his book, the “partisan sort” exists in how we tie ourselves as voters to our political parties. While it may not make the vast majority more partisan or extreme, “liberals today overwhelmingly identify with Democrats” and vice versa, which has the effect of categorizing voters into distinct, and easily targeted groups.167 This manifests itself in how we think about issues, how we vote, and, at times, where we live. Gerrymandering is one factor putting force behind this targeting, creating outcomes like polarization.

As Levendusky alludes to by pointing out the strong identity of our modern day parties, politics has become a fierce fight over strong moral values that bring out the most extreme opinions because political parties have separated to brand themselves to particular constituents.168 Gerrymandering becomes part of this equation when politicians, as laid out in the Republican REDMAP strategy, “[formulate] a strategy to keep or win Republican control of state legislatures with the largest impact on congressional redistricting as a result of reapportionment.”169 This roadmap is what politicians spend millions on developing170 to then decide which house races to flood with campaign messaging and win toss-ups around the country. Without the promise of some of the expected results from gerrymandering, why would parties continue to pump this much money into developing these maps following the Census? As scientists from The Brennan Center contend, “we find little evidence supporting the notion that the most commonly discussed neutral factors…are driving the extreme partisan bias in this decade’s seven worst states.”171 In other words, to rely on neutral factors such as clustering to explain the partisan bias in redistricting plans would be, not only naïve, but damaging to efforts to fix a problem. It is not far-fetched to reason that congressional races that appear to have a predetermined outcome to potential voters would serve as a disincentive to take part, especially when one knows one’s vote will not have any meaningful

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170 See Supra (169)
171 See (166)
impact.\textsuperscript{172} This greatly impacts voter turnout, suppressing the opposition while encouraging primary voters who tend to be more educated on their party’s issues and the more extreme supporters. For those who may argue one’s vote doesn’t matter, I question why we would ever remain complacent to an issue we can change. Even if one singular vote does not change the outcome of an election, I argue that that singular vote that carries the weight of a citizen’s voice is more important than what any election outcome may be. Because as soon as a vote matters, the ability to choose, change, and take part exists. I believe that partisan gerrymandering is best summarized by Senior Fellow Thomas Mann at Brookings, “Partisan gerrymandering is not the major source of our dysfunctional politics, but it surely reinforces and exacerbates the tribal wars between the parties,”\textsuperscript{173} and these tribal wars are becoming the fundamental building block of our dysfunctional politics.


\textsuperscript{173} See (142)
Chapter 5: A Case Study: Gill v. Whitford

“[This case] would end the convenient excuse that lawmakers have right now of, “We were just trying to do this on the basis of politics””-Michael Li

Because gerrymandering is a long-standing problem in the history of U.S. congressional elections, there have been several cases that have made it to the Supreme Court. However, no case has ever been able to puncture the armor of politicians’ gamesmanship because the justices of the Supreme Court have been unable to agree on a standard with which to measure gerrymandering. While the former cases prove to be very important in the current discussion, I will specifically examine the most recent, Gill v. Whitford, to evaluate previous shortcomings. The focus of this case is for the justices to definitively strike down on partisan gerrymandering and approve the use of the many neutral statistical tests to pass down to the lower courts so that they may easily and effectively tell when a gerrymander is present, especially in the age of sophisticated computer-generated district lines. The goal is to follow the nationwide standards for creating districts, while maintaining the inviolability of voter rights. If the justices agree on a manner in which to shed light on perpetrators of gerrymandering, it may be the opportunity for remediation in our electoral processes.

On October 3, 2017 the Supreme Court heard the most convincing case in the gerrymander’s history; Gill v. Whitford. It was brought forth for judicial review in July 2015 by a group of 12 voters from 11 of Wisconsin’s 99 districts who filed a case against the 2010 electoral redistricting that took place after Republicans regained control of the House. The voters argued that the 2011 map violated their First and Fourteenth amendments. These two amendments address the Equal Protection Clause and the freedom of association maintained under the First Amendment. The election in question is from 2012,

after Republicans took control of the House and enacted Act 43, similar to their nationwide REDMAP scheme. To provide context, the results of Republican outcomes in the state’s elections over the last few years are as follows: In 2006, Republicans won 52 seats with 45.25% of the vote; 2008, 46 seats with 46% of the vote; 2010, 60 seats with 53.5%; 2012, 60 seats with 48.5%; 2014, 63 seats with 52%. This particular election gave Democrats 39 seats with 51.4% of the statewide vote. A 52% share for Republicans in 2014 resulted in 63 seats versus Democrats’ 29 seats, this is a 24-seat disparity from what the same percentage of votes yielded six years earlier. A suit was filed with the Campaign Legal Center (CLC) and a three-judge panel decided on November 21, 2016 that the map was unconstitutional. The lower court struck down the map by using a three-part test; measuring its success in implementing a strategy to assert partisan advantage (intent) and attempt to entrench that outcome (effect), which reduced Wisconsin voters’ ability to “translate their votes into seats.” However, the panel denied the plaintiff’s request, at the time of the original trial, to adopt the three-part test as a framework for a new way to redistrict. Instead, they appealed to the Supreme Court, asking them to review their decision. The state pressed the Court to fulfill the panel’s demand for a new plan. The case was volleyed to the Supreme Court, which could potentially establish a new precedent when it comes to redistricting. The history of the partisan gerrymander in the Supreme Court is quite important to understand the current set of obstacles in Gill v. Whitford, and tells the story of what solutions are readily available to implement should the Court decide to, at last, “slay” the gerrymander. This one case has snowballed into a larger conversation about gerrymandering as more states come forward with maps in question and lower courts are demanding swift action from state legislators.

Of primary concern in the evaluation of a partisan gerrymander is how the courts may tell when one is actually present. As described by Charles Stewart III of MIT in an interview, the old standard of

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evaluation of whether or not a district is “ugly,” is no longer a viable or legitimate means of measurement because of the massive sophistication of computer technologies that draw the lines. The obstacle has been providing a framework that may be easily used by lower courts and whoever is tasked with redistricting in the future, so that redistricting can be a language everyone can speak. This is the only way to ensure proper checks on those in control. Grofman and King use the analogy of boxing to explain, saying that audiences and commentators often distinguish between a true knockout and one as a result of a “low blow;” similarly, in redistricting there needs to be standard criteria in which we can tell the difference between “normal” redistricting, which may still be partisan even though it is fairly drawn, and a “low blow” where “partisans engage in deliberately inappropriate and egregious manipulation.”179 However, such standards have been met with hesitation. Even from its earliest days of adjudication in 1946, Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote, “Courts ought not to enter this political thicket,” which pretty well summarizes the sentiment for decades following.180 The tide began to turn somewhat with Baker v. Carr (1962), which took up issue with the fact that Tennessee legislators failed to reapportion despite huge population changes, and though the lower courts dismissed the case, the Supreme Court held that it could be disciplined.181 The Court ruled that Tennessee had failed to reapportion since 1901 and referenced the Equal Protection Clause as proper grounds to contest the map in federal court.182 Cases following began to examine variation in population discrepancies, throwing out maps in Missouri and New Jersey for their inability to keep in line with “one-person, one-vote,” a phrase the court has historically used to describe the principle that all votes for seats must carry the same weight. Davis v. Bandemer (1986) was the next big stepping stone where the Court maintained that partisan gerrymandering was, in fact, justiciable, meaning it could be evaluated and acted upon by the judicial system. This did very little in the fight against the practice, however, as there were many conflicting opinions about the outcome, and no

179 See (127)
182 See (180)
consensus on a sound measure for evaluating a potential gerrymander, so it was sent back to the lower courts and no concrete judgment was provided on the question of legislature-controlled redistricting. Following that was an equally burdensome case, Vieth v. Jubelirer, in 2004. Here, four justices favored the reversal of the Bandemer decision, seeking to deny hearing any future case on gerrymanders on the grounds that the courts should not be involved in the work of legislators. Four others disagreed, believing the Court’s intervention was possible, but each had a different theory on the best test to use. Finally, Justice Kennedy, separate from them all, wrote that the truly best measure had not yet been created, but he left the path clear for a case to come forth in the future that would bring with it an effective measurement standard. Additionally, there was a partial victory in 2006 with LULAC v. Perry, in which a single Texas district was ruled to have violated neutral redistricting principles, but there wasn’t enough convincing evidence for the rest of the state. At this time, assessing a gerrymander involved recognition of a district’s asymmetry, in other words, if the parties were to switch places in terms of outcome of the popular vote, the returns in seat counts would be unequal between the two parties. Since then, social scientists have been at work to come up with measures legitimate enough to pass the standards of the Supreme Court.

One such measure focuses on a district’s compactness, measuring the degree to which a district is morphed or misshapen, as often is the case with a gerrymander. It calculates the district’s area in proportion to its perimeter to identify how “efficiently” the area is placed inside the district. This ratio is compared with a circle, 1 indicating a “perfect circle,” or the most efficient compactness, and as the numbers gets smaller the more likely the district has been skewed. However, this has been met with substantial criticism, since it relies on the assumption that a gerrymander will always be ridiculously shaped, or that a district may not naturally have an odd shape due to natural boundaries. For that reason, it

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185 See (183)
has been largely pushed out. Of great interest are the efficiency gap, the mean-median difference, seats-to-votes curve and partisan symmetry.

The efficiency gap, as described by its creators, Nicholas Stephanopolous and Eric McGhee, rests on the supposition that a partisan gerrymander seeks “to end up with fewer wasted votes than the opposition by winning its seats by smaller margins on average,” maximizing overall profit.\(^{187}\) Assuming that any vote cast for the losing candidate and any vote for the winning candidate over the threshold needed for victory is a “wasted” vote.\(^ {188}\) It then compares the difference between the parties’ wasted votes, looking for a large difference that would indicate gerrymandering. The party in power would presumably try to maximize wasted votes for the other party and minimize its own, so in a perfect world with no gerrymandering, both parties would have equivalent wasted votes.\(^ {189}\) Under this measure, researchers found consistent inequities in Michigan, North Carolina and Pennsylvania since 2012.\(^ {190}\) And while these results are convincing, the problems with the efficiency gap measure are that it accounts for geography and other factors when calculating bias, meaning it may give too much weight to any bias in an election. Any natural clustering of segments of the population or changes in voter behavior may create changes in efficiency gap outcomes, without being related to how a district is drawn. This measure assumes that blocs of voters can be expected to vote the same way in every election, which may be true in lots of cases where voting along party lines is a real phenomenon, but that cannot be relied upon solely to evaluate state legislatures on redistricting practices.

The mean-median difference takes a different approach, with the attempt of a party being to make the median vote share higher than its mean. It relies on the fact that no matter what gerrymander may be present, the mean vote in a given state cannot change, so it is a constant. But, if districts were redrawn to be highly skewed, the median vote share would be thrown off by the packing of opposition in some areas.


\(^{188}\) See (166)

\(^{189}\) See (181)

\(^{190}\) See (187)
It is calculated by subtracting the average vote share of each party across all districts from the median share of the same party across all districts. If negative, there is an advantage for that party, and positive indicates the party is disadvantaged. Again, analysis from the Brennan Center finds statistically significant differences in six states; Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The problem with this measure is that it depends too heavily on what it defines as the “zone of chance”, or the percent threshold in which any mean-median difference may be reasonably considered to be naturally caused. How this number is determined, whether or not it need be changed, and its reliability in general is all up for debate.

The seats-to-votes curve compares the actual seats won by a party to the expected seat count based on the party’s statewide vote share. This method plots the average share a party receives of the statewide vote and its seat share. By taking a snapshot of one district and checking to see if it mirrors the expected outcome given the state’s demographic makeup, social scientists can plot hypothetical election outcomes to see if the district in question responds in a way that would be reasonable swings. Once again, Michigan, North Carolina and Pennsylvania all showed a persistent skew of at least two seats across three elections. Once mapped out, the curves tend to create an S-curve, which is, in theory, supposed to indicate that it follows the law of cubic proportions, and therefore it is compact and efficient. However, here lies the ultimate problem with this analysis. The slope is not a true representation of every race because data collection on every election is not gathered. Not only does the curve get significantly impacted by things like uncontested elections, which naturally distort a party’s overall vote count by contributing data points like 100%-0%, but also it makes a generalization about how partisan votes will swing in *every* district, even if that pattern can only be seen in one.

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191 See (187)
193 See Supra (192)
195 See (166)
Finally, the measure of growing popularity is partisan symmetry. It is contingent on the ideal concept that if a result can be achieved by one party, it ought to be possible for the other party to achieve the same result. So, as an example in the case of Wisconsin, because Republicans received 60 seats with around 48% of the vote, Democrats should, in theory, be able to achieve 60 seats with around 48% of the vote given the same map. As one can see, it follows the very simple and intuitive concept that a majority of votes should equal a majority of seats.\textsuperscript{196} The data collects thousands of scores based on potential seat/vote shares in districts across the states and compares the results by party. A score of 0 means symmetry, that both parties received the same number of seats for the same number of votes in the majority of hypothetical vote outcomes. As an example, scores for Massachusetts indicate a 40-60% responsiveness rate in favor of the Democrats, allowing them to win all 10 seats. However, it is not biased, because when the results are reversed and Republicans were tested with 65-70% of the vote, they also won the 10 districts.\textsuperscript{197} Appellants in the case of \textit{Gill v. Whitford} argue that this measure relies on a hypothetical turnout in an election, and therefore, is subject to scrutiny. They also question whether partisan symmetry is really another way of saying proportional representation, a party receiving the exact vote seat based on its vote share, which is clearly not in the tradition of the U.S.’s democracy.\textsuperscript{198} However, several scholars indicate that it does not “depend on the principle that equally sized groups are entitled to equal representation…Rather it is based on the requirement that individual voters receive equal protection in determining the overall result of the election.”\textsuperscript{199}

It is clear that there is a vast array of materials available to the courts to be able to measure a gerrymander, and though some are preferred to others, in comparing results in some of the worst states, there is consistency in the evaluation for states like Pennsylvania, which fail all commonly used


\textsuperscript{197} See Supra (196)


measures. In addition, as the appellees argue, there need not be one golden measure for assessing a gerrymander, instead each of the measures above should be thought of as another tool in the kit available to the courts to effectively weed out unfair maps. But, the unrest involved in creating a reliable measure is only one piece to the puzzle in the Gill v. Whitford case; outlined below are some of the more significant claims set forth by both sides in the case.

The appellants make an argument against gerrymandering claims in general, such as the question of if these complaints are merely a veil under which opponents can undertake a witch-hunt of the Republican Party, because all analyses indicate Republicans bias in the last few election cycles. However, appellees cite that this is far from exclusively a Republican problem. Republicans took on control of the House beginning in 2000, so many of the lawsuits we have seen, especially in the limelight of the media, are largely a product of the last nearly 20 years of malpractice, but there has been plenty of mischief from Democrats. In fact, more than half of all redistricting plans reaching the ten percent threshold of wasted votes based on the efficiency gap measure were pro-Democratic. Republicans are not the sole perpetrator, but in this case that could be the leading domino to the knocking down of gerrymandering, they are the party in question. They argue that because it is “only possible to suffer concrete harm” from gerrymandering in one’s own district, the claim is dismissible because it was brought forth on behalf of the entire state. This is contested by the fact that every major gerrymandering case brought forward in history has been statewide in nature. Just reminding ourselves of the weakness of LULAC v. Perry because impacts were only significant in a single district can serve as a counter to this argument. In addition, the plaintiff argues this may be an attempt to institute proportional representation, by creating a system in which the number of legislators elected in office is proportional or “mirrors” the proportion of the vote. This is challenged by the appellees arguing that fundamentally, even a state with

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203 See Supra (202)
proportional results may produce poor outcomes in measures of gerrymandering, which several measures would readily show.

From the other side, the appellee brief documented a trail of shady practices by Wisconsin Republicans, citing specifically the “Tale of the Tape” document that tested various Republican and Democratic seats in hypothetical districts until the final “Team Map” came about. Republicans took over redistricting following the 2010 census and enacted Act 43 in 2011, the piece of legislation explicitly giving them power to draw new lines for Wisconsin. In total, they spent $431,000 toward the technology to develop the map, ending up with a Wisconsin where the number of swing seats dropped from 19 to 10 and 58 of the state’s 72 counties were cut up. As with all gerrymandering cases, competition was thwarted. For Wisconsin, 59 seats became safe to Republicans and five Democratic incumbents were placed to face off against Republican incumbents in safely Republican areas.204 To put this in perspective, even if Democrats had received 56% of the vote, well over half of the population’s support, Republicans would have still beat Democrats by double digits in number of seats won.

With the court’s decision due some time before June 2018, key 2018 midterm races, and a new Census in 2020, this is the most opportune time that has come about to make serious reforms when it comes to America’s redistricting procedures. It is safe to say that the Supreme Court is weighing this impact heavily, having just added another partisan gerrymandering case to its docket in December, against a district in Maryland. The Maryland case would set several new precedents following Gill v. Whitford; it was brought forth by Republicans, points only to First Amendment principles without the inclusion of the equal protection clause in its argument, and the case focuses only on a single district versus an entire state’s map.205 The decision to hear an additional case indicates that this issue has gained momentum enough to rouse the Supreme Court to possibly lay down a definitive answer when it comes to redistricting. And, as pressure rises it seems the public has decided it is time as well. Courts all over the

204 See (201)
nation are beginning to hear the cries of dissent on the practice of gerrymandering. In January, a three-judge panel in North Carolina threw out the state’s map, ordering them to create a new one by January 29th. This federal court found the map violated the First Amendment, the equal protection clause, and Article 1 of the election clause by exceeding the scope to set the time, place and manner of elections.206 Most recently, Pennsylvania’s highest court struck down it’s congressional map, and in a dramatic fashion Republicans rose up in response requesting to halt the implementation of the new map put forth by the Democratic-majority court, after Governor Tom Wolf could not decide on one amongst his party’s legislators.207 The new map comes with the potential for Democrats to pick up six House seats, and they need to take back 24 to win back the House.208 The change-up is not only sowing frustration, but also confusion, as several candidates have to reconsider or pivot in their bids for House races in the final weeks leading up to key elections. This chaos and uncertainty was certainly the case in the March 13 special election for Pennsylvania’s 18th congressional election, as Conor Lamb and Rick Saccone faced off in a key race despite the reality that under the new state Supreme Court map both candidates are set to serve entirely new districts for the November midterms since the 18th district was largely split between the 14th and 17th districts.209 This put considerable heat on Pennsylvania’s legislature and judiciary to consider holding off on the changes until a decision can be heard from the Supreme Court. In fact, Republicans in the state filed an emergency stay request with the Supreme Court, to put a halt to the changes that could impact their election outcomes, which the Court also docketed.210 It is these scenarios that ultimately may damage some elections by altering the political landscape and displacing legislators. In addition, the recent storm of court cases has fueled awareness, with public opinion indicating that 71% of likely 2018

general election voters, of any party, favored the Supreme Court “setting new, clear rules for determining when partisan gerrymandering violates the Constitution.”

Even when asked to choose between having congressional districts with partisan bias or without partisan bias, knowing that a map without partisan bias may mean a voter’s preferred party might obtain less seats, 73% reported they would prefer congressional maps with no partisan bias. As the 2018 midterm elections draw nearer, voters are preparing for action, especially Democratic voters, 69% of which report they are looking forward to the congressional elections compared with Republican voters. This makes sense, too, after a few energizing wins in November 2017 for the Democratic Party including governor’s races in Virginia and New Jersey and a mayoral race in North Carolina, just to name a few. These races prove to be consequential, as they hold implications for when the new Census is held in 2020 and the cycle of redistricting begins anew. If no action is taken by the Supreme Court and Republicans win in races all over, maintaining their control in the House, they may embed their partisan advantage for several more years in districts all over the country. However, as mentioned, Democrats only need 24 seats to flip the House back and take the majority, which would open the door to a plethora of different policy implications from preventing some Republican-prompted legislation, to proposing entirely new legislation, etc. Most notably, this court case has invigorated a sense of action in political groups, politicians and voters everywhere. The drama in Pennsylvania comes at a time when multiple pieces of legislation have been introduced in the state to form an independent redistricting commission. In Ohio, grassroots organizations teamed up with groups like Brookings to use publicly available mapping technology to crowd source different district maps. They created a report of 21 sample districts, comparing plans made by either the legislature or the

213 See Supra (212)
public, finding, not surprisingly, different biases in the plans.\textsuperscript{216} What it allowed researchers to see are the various criteria that legislatures chose to miss out on when redistricting, and how easily a plan that met requirements of fairness \textit{could} have been adopted by the legislature, since it was so readily mapped out by regular citizens.\textsuperscript{217} This transparency opens up a window into the decisions made by our politicians, and contributes to the understanding that those in power will often opt to stay in power, in spite of what is fair or just. It’s critical to understand as eyes turn to the Supreme Court for a decision. As Judge Paul Neimeyer, a judge who sits on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit said, “Indeed, both Democrats and Republicans have decried it when wielded by their opponents but nonetheless continue to gerrymander in their own self-interest when given the opportunity. The problem is cancerous…”\textsuperscript{218} And it is because of this, that the best strategy, agreed upon by scholars across the board, is independent redistricting commissions. There have even been legislators emerging as soldiers in this fight, with new legislation being brought to the House floor in the 115\textsuperscript{th} Congress with 55 cosponsors (as opposed to 21 in the 112\textsuperscript{th} Congress) to enforce that remaining states form a commission.\textsuperscript{219} Unfortunately, these pieces of legislation have stalled after introduction and though the number of cosponsors is growing, it is not enough to turn the tide, at least not without some added fuel from elsewhere; which is where a decision from the judiciary could become an asset. However, the fight doesn’t end there. Even if the court adopts a national standard with which to adjudicate partisan gerrymandering cases, how this translates within states may vary. Implementation is an entirely new battle that changes by state and does not necessarily look the same in every state legislature.

\textsuperscript{217} See Supra (216)
\textsuperscript{218} See (205)
\textsuperscript{219} H.R. 1102-115\textsuperscript{th} Congress. (2017-2018). Redistricting Reform Act of 2017. Retrieved from https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1102?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22hr+1102%22%5D%7D&r=1
The Answer: Independent Redistricting Commissions

One complication to add to the matter is that enactment of independent redistricting commissions looks very different from state to state. Of the six states that currently do have a commission with sole responsibility for drawing a congressional district plan, all have different requirements when it comes to number of members, criteria for members, procedural rules, etc.\textsuperscript{220} For example, Montana’s commission consists of five members in which majority and minority leaders of both houses elect one member each, then those four selected decide on a fifth. During their time on the commission, members cannot be public officials, nor can they run for public office for two years after redistricting. Compare this to California, which has 14 members on its independent commission. Any registered voter may sign up to serve on California’s commission and government auditors select 60 out of the applicant pool to be evaluated by legislators, who must then pick eight by a lottery system. Those eight decide on the remaining six. The commission must consist of five democrats, five republicans, and four members from neither.\textsuperscript{221} And, these are just two examples of states where the primary responsibility for redistricting falls to a commission, other states simply have an advisory commission or a backup commission as a fail safe in case legislators are stuck in gridlock. While the different implementations of commissions may not be the primary concern, some form of standardization of a commission may, in fact, be necessary. Since parties in power aren’t likely to opt to loosen their grip on redistricting authority, states must vote in the adoption of redistricting commissions by a ballot initiative, but, here’s the big roadblock; only 26 states allow these ballot initiatives.\textsuperscript{222} Even in states that allow the initiatives, in most there is no way to put it forth on the ballot without approval from the legislature first. In other words, asking the King to \textit{willingly} remove his crown. For example, this is the reality for Pennslyvania, so even though there was an apparent victory with the state’s Supreme Court decision mentioned above, the ability for remediation may be eliminated.

\textsuperscript{220} See (181)
\textsuperscript{222} See (184)
because of legislative roadblocks. Here it is appropriate to consider the importance of *Gill v. Whitford* in potentially opening the pathway for states like this to address gerrymandering. While there have been other attempts at reforming the manner of redistricting such as requiring a supermajority in the legislature, this hardly solves the root of the problem. One of the fundamental problems associated with gerrymandering is the entrenching of a political party in a position of power. By maintaining such a high threshold for the legislature to alter district lines, this actually encourages parties to try to hold on to their majority, and it makes it incredibly difficult for the opposition to be able to overturn a redistricting plan. Supplemental commissions are a bit more popular, by providing support in an advisory capacity they may also have the effect of pressuring politicians to make more responsible decisions if they know they are being monitored. Especially because these commissions are made up of non-political and, in theory, objective members. They may also step in and draw the lines in cases where the legislature fails to do so. These solve some of the problems of the legislature being in control, at the very least they can help to prevent a situation of gridlock because politicians would want to maintain control and not delay to the point of having redistricting fall into the hands of the commission. However, their scope of power is limited, and the primary control still lies with legislators who are married to their political objectives. Any recommendations made could just as easily be ignored, politicians have little pressure to act in ways that won’t exclusively benefit themselves or their party. Independent commissions are really the only viable option to steer elections towards more fair outcomes. Evaluation of these commissions shows without a doubt that they have had a substantial effect on the partisanship of state representatives, and create more competitive elections. Other evidence may even suggest that some of these redistricting reforms may lower the number of uncontested elections. And by looking at these solutions, we circle back to some

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of the central arguments about partisan gerrymandering as a whole. If partisan gerrymandering didn’t, at the very least, play *some* role in reducing competition and heightening polarization, then why would taking the redistricting power away from politicians correct some of the problems? As Sam Wang, a notable social scientist notes, “partisan gerrymandering is unusually powerful because it leverages state-level victories into national structural legislative advantage.” Dismantling this power will require substantial reform, in which decision-making is withheld from the legislator. As a case study to prove the effectiveness of independent redistricting commissions, I will explore the results of Arizona’s adoption of one.

In 2000, *Proposition 106* was placed on the Arizona state ballot as an initiative to create an independent redistricting commission. After it was approved by the popular vote, the commission was implemented; five members in total, four of which are appointed by the majority and minority leaders in the state house and senate from a pool of 25 citizens selected by Arizona’s Commission on Appellate Court Appointments. Of the pool of 25 nominees, ten must be from each of the two major parties and five from neither. The fifth seat is chosen by the first four appointed members of the commission after a meeting and vote. The fifth member is not a member of either party and this person is elected as chair. If the four gridlock, the Commission on Appellate Court Appointments is in charge of appointing the chair instead. The commission has received some push back, such as in 2011, the Republican-controlled Arizona state legislature challenged the independent commission, saying that it violated the elections clause that, they argued, gave the power of redistricting expressly to the legislature. However, a three-judge panel ruled in favor of the commission, asserting that the term “legislature” included those ballot initiatives passed by voters to transfer redistricting authority from the state to the commission. The Supreme Court upheld this decision. The initiative simply “[facilitated] the voters’ choice of their

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227 See (184)  
228 See (121)  
representatives” rather than the other way around, wrote Justice Ginsburg.\textsuperscript{230} Arizona’s commission protects the integrity of the election process, being subject by law to maintain “traditional redistricting principles” such as contiguity and compactness, while at the same time only using party registration and voting history data to test a completed map for compliance.\textsuperscript{231} They eliminate the root of the problem, the conflict of interest inherent in allowing legislators to draw the very lines in which they will compete. As Madison outlined in the \textit{Federalist Papers}, “his interest would certainly bias his judgment” if able to “judge in his own cause.”\textsuperscript{232} By allowing legislators to “judge in [their] own cause,” we are taking away the power of the governed to consent to their representatives. This contradicts our fundamental concept of democracy set forth by the founding fathers.

In addition, early assessments of both the AIRC and California’s independent commission prove to be optimistic when it comes to better outcomes. Harvard social scientists indicate that the districts drawn tend to be more compact and are drawn and reviewed in a timely fashion with limited legal backlash.\textsuperscript{233} However, this commission, as well as independent commission in general, is not without its own faults, and must be considered as well. There are, of course, still some biases to be accounted for, as members are appointed by majority and minority leaders from both parties, this leaves the door open for party leaders to cherry pick those who will best represent their interests on the commission. We must not jump to conclusions about bias, though; Arizona’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} district, post-2000 Census, was drawn to meander throughout the state of Arizona, but ended up including the Hopi reservation, while placing the rival neighboring Navajo nation in a separate district, creating an oddly designed district. This was not done in an act of political scheming, rather it was crafted by the independent commission to accurately reflect community boundaries.\textsuperscript{234} We must be careful when we assess district lines not to attribute every crazy shape to gerrymandering, which again, is why having an independent commission in a position of

\textsuperscript{230} See (130)
\textsuperscript{232} See (130)
\textsuperscript{233} See (231)
\textsuperscript{234} See (180)
oversight that can make informed decisions about these historical and cultural boundaries, and have a fail
safe way to evaluate a map, would significantly help in addressing gerrymandering claims. One of the
main critiques is that the commission itself is tasked with reviewing and eliminating the plans that
normally a democratically elected legislature would be in charge of creating, but, the commission is not
itself democratically elected. However, as other scholars note, there is little to no reason to believe at this
point that a state’s legislature would prove to be more representative or accountable than a commission,
and the creation of an independent commission is an exercise in democracy itself.\textsuperscript{235} In addition,
researchers at Harvard Law point out, “By pairing a political diversity requirement in commission
membership with a supermajority requirement for any commission action, an independent commission
prevents unilateral partisan control.” This combined with the added benefit that the Governor and state
senate may remove any member of the commission means it is accountable and subject to the public’s
keen eye. In California, it is even more transparent, voters can implement a referendum on any plan set
forth by the commission.\textsuperscript{236} Of course, there are many factors to consider when seriously weighing the
decision to implement independent commissions, such its structure, if across all states they should be
uniform, the degree of independence, the method of selecting commission members, number of members,
and requirements of those members.\textsuperscript{237} There is also the cost of building an independent commission,
which by some estimates could cost state taxpayers a few million dollars if approved via ballot initiative.
However, the real cost burden comes from litigation fees to overturn distorted maps,\textsuperscript{238} and a good
amount of the legal fees come from political parties attempting to defend their partisan districts.\textsuperscript{239} All of
these factors together must be critically looked at to assess the best approach going forward; especially
with news emerging rapidly of individual state action in the matter and Gill v. Whitford looming

\textsuperscript{235} See (231)
\textsuperscript{236} See (231)
\textsuperscript{237} See (224)
The Arizona model proves itself to be a worthwhile model to look at, and there is security in knowing that there is a precedent for the court to evaluate the legitimacy and feasibility of such a commission.

One idealistic model proposed by some social scientists is a five-member commission involving all branches of government; with a panel of randomly assigned state judges finding candidates, recommending four to ten individuals by a supermajority vote to the Governor and then selecting two from the majority party and two from the minority to then be approved by their respective parties. The final member could then be an independent or non-political candidate, subject to the same vetting process. This multi-branch approach would require cooperation and surveillance from all branches on each other. It would, in the most effective way, ensure qualified and representative commission members, with the prerequisite of support from every political facet within the state. As political scientist Andrew Klassen pointed out through cross-national public opinion research from 158 countries and 7.5 million respondents, the most effective model in respects to public trust and feelings of accountability seem to be entirely financially and politically independent commissions that attempt to replicate the “one person, one vote” model as much as possible. An implication of his research is also the acknowledgement that the United States might not necessarily have the best system of governance. There are several other models that exist throughout the world that have fundamental differences such as variations in election systems like run off voting, or different legislative set ups such as proportional representation. Some of these reforms are much more realistic for the U.S. to adopt, and it is worth looking at those to see how we may be able to firstly, find comfort in a shared struggle, and more importantly, learn something.

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241 See (224)
Chapter 6: Redistricting Abroad

“…how lines get drawn fundamentally affects the nature of political representation-and thus who gets what, when.” 243

While it is easy to look at current issues within the scope of our domestic bubble, it is hardly advantageous to limit ourselves to this outlook. Tangentially related, one problem with mainstream media is coverage of foreign affairs. While the decision of the degree of coverage involves a complex interplay between viewer preferences and resources available to newsrooms to set up effective reporting correspondents abroad, the point is that quite often solutions to some of our own problems are overlooked or unseen by not even recognizing that other countries have already grappled with the same. Or, the public assumes that another method is better, simply because the grass always appears greener on the other side, though most of the public is not fully informed on all sides of an issue. This concept applies to gerrymandering as well. It is my belief that by examining other countries’ tales of redistricting I will get a more accurate idea of whether something can be done here at home, and, if so, what. I will look at both Britain and Canada to evaluate their own histories related to redistricting. I choose these countries for a few reasons. Firstly, they both represent countries we are akin to, constantly communicate with, and frequently align our values with, even sometimes seeking to adopt their models in some sectors, whether in health care reform, welfare, etc. In addition, these countries have relatively similar electoral models. It is quite unrealistic to compare apples to oranges when exploring solutions, so referencing systems that are not likely for the U.S. to adopt are not as helpful as proposing

specific solutions that have worked in systems that are already similar to how the United States functions. The best way to expect change is to examine options that would be relatively simple to adopt and met with minimal resistance. What I discover is that Britain actually still struggles with problems related to redistricting, however they have some structural elements that could be transferable to the U.S.. While Canada has flourished under the changes it has made to its redistricting process, the one roadblock being how we can easily transfer pieces of their model to our own. However, to drive the point home once more, both countries really achieved their success in improving redistricting by adopting independent redistricting commissions, proving their potential even on a national scale.

**Britain: Work in Progress**

A critical argument in the debate we have in the United States about our electoral system is that some bias may be more of a byproduct of our electoral system in general, and this can be shown with the case of Britain. The basics of Britain’s legislative and electoral system are that members of Parliament (our equivalent to the House of Representatives) are elected by *first-past-the-post* system, meaning that at a general election voters cross off their preferred candidate for their “constituency.” Whoever has received the most votes is elected to represent that constituency; sound familiar?  

244 The U.K. is divided into 650 constituencies with roughly the same amount of population in each one. Redistricting was secured by *The Parliamentary Constituencies Act of 1986*, giving the power of determining boundary lines to a commission

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under the Boundary Commission for England that operates under nonpartisan rules.²⁴⁵

Commissioners come from apolitical backgrounds in different private and public sectors and they are supported by a chairman who is consulted by a number of other professional staff. The chairman is the Speaker of the House of Commons, though he/she does not participate in the review process, so the Deputy Chair leads the process. The current Deputy is Mr. Justice Andrew Nicol.²⁴⁶ There are four different independent boundary commissions, one for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland each with four members appointed by their secretaries of state and monitored by assessors who give recommendations to the commission. Each of these nations is subject to the same requirements, though they may each decide to work under different timing for consultation stages. Under said rules, the boundary commission establishes a quota, or an average number of registered electors divided by the number of constituencies.²⁴⁷ The commission must respect the boundaries of local government and take into consideration historical ties when creating districts, while keeping within 5% of the current electoral quota of 74,769.²⁴⁸ Using the quota number, there is a formula used to first establish how many constituencies each of the four regions of the UK will have, and then how many districts each constituency within those four regions will have. There are four stages the Commission goes through in the development of boundary lines, and at each stage there is room for feedback and revision, with priority given to those opinions supported by empirical evidence.²⁴⁹ The Commission reported that over the three consultation stages, they received 35,000 public

responses to their proposals. After several stages of modifications the Final Recommendations are sent to the Electoral Commission for adoption. Although this system seems fair and transparent, it is not without its faults. Firstly, although the authority of redistricting is handed to a nonpartisan commission, the recommendations made by the Commission are based on the submissions by political parties and other partisan authorities. This is what leads to what Johnston describes as “Gerrymandering UK-Style; by consultation” because several parties have been able to manipulate election outcomes by means of presenting biased data to the commission to sway a map in their favor. For years, the Labour party has been the primary beneficiary of district maps, also being bolstered by vote abstentions and electorate sizes. While at the same time, Liberal Democrats have suffered the most and Conservatives having inconsistent outcomes. Researchers found political parties and other partisan groups follow the process closely while most of the public doesn’t engage, however, most of the time parties do not actually seek changes in district boundaries. Instead, they seek to maintain them to keep in contact with the same constituency they’re familiar with, were elected by, and have a connection with. This correlates with finding that the electoral review process as a whole has a positive impact on electoral equality, because interested parties are able to keep track of where “their groups” are being moved to. It appears one of the most important factors for an independent commission to succeed, and one that Britain has struggled with, is being able to balance “mathematical exactitude in electoral equality” and “local representations from councils” to respect local community boundaries. Throughout the years the UK has dealt with frustrating election results because of population clusters that ultimately benefited the Labour Party.

250 See (248)  
251 See (249)  
252 See (245)  
253 See (249)
Because of guarantees to some areas such as Wales and Northern Ireland for a minimum number of seats, it has created a situation where these smaller areas are disproportionately over-represented. This same kind of result happens in the U.S. because states only have to equalize population within a state and not between, meaning rural areas are over-represented in comparison to crowded urban areas. Even when comparing results pre and post the electoral review process, there appears to be a substantial bias toward the Labour Party, to cite one example, a disparity between votes and a surplus of seats of 21.8% in 2001, while the Liberal Democrats were underrepresented by 10.4% that same year. There has been a more recent push to promote fairness in vote equality for the next general election in 2022. The call for change came in 2011 with the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, at which time Parliament approved some features of the Act. This attempted to dismantle some of the bias in election results and became a large focus for the 2016 review to enforce changes to the constituencies and reform the electoral process. The Commission published its initial recommendations in September 2016, with several stages of review before Parliament votes on whether to implement the boundary changes for the election. The biggest change that will reflect heavily in the redrawn boundaries is the downsizing of the number of constituencies in the UK from 650 to 600. For England, this means a reduction of 32 constituencies to 501 total. Of course this proposition is controversial, with changes most likely to hurt Labour Party the most, and the proposal has already faced significant public scrutiny, largely because the initial recommendations were based on data from December 2015, pre the referendum popularly known as “Brexit.” That vote alone accounted for

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an upsurge in eligible voters by 2.5 million which ought to be accounted for.\textsuperscript{257} The last boundary review from 2013 was opposed by some parties, including Prime Minister Theresa May’s party and the Democratic Unionist Party because of concerns about how this will impact election results. However, Parliament is moving forward slowly to gain traction on some specific aims, such as goal that no constituency will have less than 71,031 eligible electors or more than 78,507. Voters should prepare to see significant changes in the electoral map and the number of MPs.\textsuperscript{258} Expectation for action is mounting especially because the maps that were used in the most recent elections, in 2017 and 2015, were based on 2010 boundaries.\textsuperscript{259} The Commission has until September 2018 to make recommendations regarding a final map.

It is interesting to see that Britain, with what is generally viewed as a “better” system, has faced its own set of setbacks and transformations with time. As early as 1885, scholars note that the U.K. turned from a two-member district format to single-member with the rise of political parties and bloc voting. Some researchers contend that the plurality system as a whole is really the key factor, which tends to “produce a single absolute winner supported by only a minority of votes.”\textsuperscript{260} The question becomes then, will independent commissions do anything to help? Or, is there a better way? As is mentioned by Colomer et al. there is, of course, the system of proportional representation, which would draw away from the problems seen with misrepresentation in plurality systems, however, it tends to draw up images of “multi-party legislatures in a permanent state of gridlock” in countries driven by different system like the U.S.\textsuperscript{261} In my view, as said before, the adoption of proportional representation is unrealistic for

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{257} See (255)
\item \textsuperscript{258} See (255)
\item \textsuperscript{261} See Supra (260)
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\end{footnotesize}
America, and there is no reason to snub the first-past-the-post way of electing legislators. There are drawbacks, but they are not insurmountable. The *Literary Review of Canada* explored the views on plurality systems, and found the vast majority consider the FPTP system valuable and is actually a point of cohesion for many voters, as mutual members of a political party. There is no evidence to suggest voters are more happy with their representation in PR systems, and they are, in general, relatively unstable, as turnover of small parties and dissatisfied groups make and break coalitions frequently.\(^{262}\) Some studies even suggest highly polarized systems with few parties spur more individuals to vote, which should mean America’s turnout should be far greater.\(^{263}\) From the U.K., the ultimate takeaway is that “partisan balance within a given area is not part of the formal remit of the Commission,” even though there are submissions made by political parties and those submissions are biased and driven by an objective, the fact remains that the Commission is independent, and that there is no room for one particular political party to control the process.\(^{264}\) Parties may move to block certain proposals or bring forward others that explicitly benefit them, but as Johnston notes, “it is very unlikely…that the Commissions…would be totally swayed by one party’s alternatives and entirely reject the others’.” In addition, in 1944 the U.K. Parliament changed some rules for redistricting, including creating constituencies based on the number of registered electorate versus population. This is one characteristic, in addition to the independent commission framework as a whole that could be readily adopted and would produce greater representation among the voting population here in the U.S., by focusing on the group that actually decides the outcome. The U.K.’s redistricting


process is substantially more transparent than the United States’, which may help, at the very least, improve trust and voter efficacy. Turnout was reported by the Electoral Commission to be “low,” around 69%, but this is stunningly higher than the average U.S. turnout, which lingers around 35-40%. And, that is for the presidential election; turnout for House of Representatives elections is much lower.\footnote{265} Tied to this is the feeling that one’s vote really doesn’t make an impact; comparative analysis of public opinion indicates most voters who didn’t turn out for the U.K. General Election were for reasons of being busy or being away, as compared to 15% of U.S. voters who felt their vote would not make a difference.\footnote{266} The Electoral Commission serves an advisory role and keeps politicians, for the most part, in line when it comes to electoral standards. There is strong evidence to suggest that reform by way of adopting just a few of the U.K.’s standards would take away authority from American legislators and provide a necessary check in our political system that prides itself on its need for balance.

**Canada: A Better Way, Eh?**

Another example is just north, with geography just being one way we may look up to our Canadian neighbors. Canada also uses a single-member plurality system, so in every electoral district, the candidate with the highest number of votes earns a seat in the House of Commons, representing their district as an MP (Member of Parliament). The House of Commons currently has 338 seats. The maximum amount of time allotted in between general elections is set at five years, but one may be called earlier by a joint decision between the Prime Minister and Governor

\footnote{266}{See (263)}
General. The Prime Minister is the leader of the party that obtained the largest number of elected representatives in the House of Commons. John Courtney, a scholar at Brookings and professor at University of Saskatchewan, tells the story of Canada’s history with gerrymandering. For about a century, starting from Confederation with the Constitution Act (1867), federal and provincial redistricting in Canada fell to the government. This resulted in many areas where seats were malapportioned, particularly Quebec, when analysis indicates that in the 1960s, just 26% of Quebec’s population could, in a hypothetical scenario, elect a majority for that province’s legislature. The country’s first attempt at reform was 1903, with the Representation Act that allocated the duty of boundary redistricting to a bipartisan committee in the House of Commons (somewhat like the hypothetical of creating a bipartisan committee of Democrats and Republicans within the House of Representatives). This brought on another 60 years of gamesmanship that switched back and forth depending on whichever party was seated in power – a tale we know too well. In 1964, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act created an independent process for drawing boundaries, bringing the restructuring to a national level. And, Manitoba was Canada’s first province to pass legislation enforcing an independent commission to redistrict in 1955. In fact, the national law in 1964 was based on the Manitoba model. This province’s motivation was fueled by the 1949 election producing 17 members from Manitoba’s urban voters (228,280 total) versus the 40 members that came from the province’s rural voter base (224,083 total). The Act has remained mostly untouched over the years, with a few adjustments to simplify and perfect election code, such as The Elections Act of 2000 and the Referendum Act of 1992, which consolidated each provinces’ efforts to create Elections Canada.

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the electoral body for the entire nation, while maintaining each provincial structure. Every ten years, just like the U.S., Canada requires the number of seats in their House of Commons be recalculated and boundaries to be reshaped following population changes. After the last Census, the number of House of Commons seats increased by 30, from 308 to 338.269 The fundamentals of Canada’s redistricting commission for each province involve a panel of three members with one judge that is appointed by the chief justice of the province and two others appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons within just 60 days after the release of the latest Census data. The chair of the commission is tasked with calculating the seat allocation based on a specific formula plainly provided on the Elections Canada website; however, the chair does not distribute the seats, that is the job of the commission. The redistricting process is guided by requirements such as no variance in population size between districts by more than 25% above or below the electoral quota, that it must respect existing geographic and other boundaries, that the process must be open for review by the public, and that it must also be evaluated by members of parliament to be able to voice suggestions or concerns and that those are considered in the commission’s final decisions.270 One case study looked specifically at the independent commission of New Brunswick, as it was the last province to form an independent commission, to observe how commissions had evolved in the country and what impact they had. Alarm bells went off for New Brunswick after the 1987 election in which Liberals won 100% of the seats with 60% of the vote.271 The deviations in representation were so stark that in 1991, 32 out of the 58 constituencies in New Brunswick would have exceeded the 25% range allotted by the federal

270 See (267)
regulations regarding redistricting. Once established in law, the commission formed used its new electoral map for the 1995 general election. That electoral map only had three constituencies outside of the 25% range. New Brunswick’s provincial commission is based on all of the premises of the federal commission, although it looks slightly different. Theirs is co-chaired by two judges of the Court of the Queen’s Bench (the superior trial court), with five others with former partisan-affiliated careers. This is pertinent to note because efforts are taken to be transparent about each of the commissioner’s backgrounds at length at every committee hearing. The New Brunswick commission stresses the importance of balance, even ensuring to have representative genders and linguistic abilities (English and French) to serve the needs of all constituents. Of course, this example details a provincial commission, not a national one; however, this type of independent commission has features that could be very adaptable to a state’s or even national commission. It represents yet another scenario in which the US would not have to sacrifice everything to obtain dramatically better results, in fact; as New Brunswick shows, as long as the structure is balanced, it doesn’t need to be totally stripped away from the entanglements of partisanship. Canada has faced it’s own quarrels when it comes to attempting to answer the question of fair representation, how best to redistrict to incorporate all of its citizens. But, what Canada has resolved in court is to advocate not for the “one person, one vote” model, but rather what is called “effective representation,” meaning that the court recognizes that absolute equality of a voter’s voting power is not necessarily possible because of natural biases that occur when voters move or populations change, however, what is important is that there is relative equality in voting power to create the most effective representation. Canada enjoys a

272 See Supra (271)
273 See (267)
high degree of political responsiveness, with a 77% turnout for the 2015 general federal election. Elections Canada administered a post-election survey with a 96.7% response rate, indicating that the percent of those nonvoters who believed that their vote would not make a difference was a mere 1.4%, and this confidence may be due, in part, to the work done by Elections Canada and the redistricting process. Follow-up surveys on the Commission showed that 34% of respondents named Elections Canada as a “top-of-the-mind organization for voting-process information” without being prompted by the survey first, this increased to 49% postelection. It was associated with high levels of trust and satisfaction. So what’s the catch?

There remain a few caveats to the Canadian system that would make its exact replication in the United States difficult, if not impossible. However, if America is capable of adopting and adapting statutes from a government it relieved itself from to craft its own Constitution, there are definitively some structural aspects of Canada’s independent commissions that can be readily used. One issue that is very relevant at this moment in time is that because of the U.S.’s system of governance, the only way independent commissions may form is by each state passing its own ballot measure to create a commission because the federal government gave the authority of elections to the state, and the federal government cannot enforce commissions to be formed for every state. This is a pertinent issue because as many states attempt to overturn maps and form these commissions, there have been significant roadblocks to the passage of these bills in state legislatures.\textsuperscript{274} Also, most judges in the U.S. are elected, which carries with it the skepticism of partisanship unlike in Canada; however, as we saw with New Brunswick, if it is balanced and transparent, this may not be an issue. There are also concerns about the use of party registration

information in America, which is not used in Canada; but again, if the Court lays down a
definitive strike on gerrymandering, an independent commission that is mandated to only use
population census data and not party registration could readily eliminate this problem. Elections
Canada proves to be a key example of what a wave of reform could look like in the American
redistricting procedure. It’s key elements of transparency, fairness, effective representation and
balance create feelings of trust in the Canadian public. Not to mention that the structure is quite
feasible besides minor adjustments to fit our framework. That is not to say Canada does not have
its own defects, and again, by no means is solving gerrymandering the silver bullet to end
government corruption and cynicism, but as Canada shows, it’s one simple thing that can go a
long way.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

“Congressional representation should not be a political blood sport that protects incumbents, disenfranchises legitimate interests, and allows people to achieve with surgical reappointment what they couldn’t do honestly at the ballot box.”-Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)

In order to fight polarization, we must first understand the root of the problem, which in itself is quite a burden to unravel. What has become starkly clear in this research is that some of our pessimism and divide is both historical and human, and there will be very little we can do to ward off these tendencies. At the same time, there are a few very manageable problems that we can do much more than just put a Band-Aid on, and at this time, two of the most impactful areas we may strike are fake news and partisan gerrymandering. The toxic combination of echo chambers online and partisan gerrymandering has amplified polarization and extremism, fracturing America. If we open up lines of communication between so-called social media “platforms” and researchers we can better understand how fake news travels and how best to prevent it’s surfacing and explore concrete ways we can make truth go viral. In addition, if the Supreme Court steps off the sidelines in Gill v. Whitford and makes a statement about partisan gerrymandering, it will go a long way for states to take hold of independent commissions and implement them to uncrack and unpack mischievous maps. It may, at the very least, create a wave for judicial review following the 2018 midterms, which could result in reform for the 2020 Census and demand greater centrism from our politicians. As this topic continues to make headlines and is analyzed in research it is important to keep in mind that in both sectors, the need for reform is evident.

for greater transparency and trust is high, and the level of sacrifice to make meaningful changes is relatively low. Personal interest must be set aside for what is just.
Appendix

Explainers

I intentionally use the phrase, “I define,” to underscore the fact that the definition is not extracted from another source, it was decided upon by me, informed by the extensive research and interviews I conducted with experts on the topic of partisan gerrymandering. Other definitions may exist and remain accurate.

It is also important to note that my analysis of Britain’s electoral process is entirely for the purposes of analyzing their most current electoral procedure, and for that reason, I will not address any potential changes due to the British referendum, otherwise known as Brexit, for fear of complicating a topic that is outside my realm of focus.
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Education

Major(s) and Minor(s): Broadcast Journalism & Political Science, Global International Studies
Honors: Journalism

Thesis Title: A House Divided: How Fake News and Partisan Gerrymandering Break America
Thesis Supervisor: Curt Chandler

Communications/Research Experience

-Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College-State College, PA

Supervisor: Curt Chandler

Researcher/Communication Strategist Spring 2017-Spring 2018
Develop and research the topic of partisan gerrymandering and fake news and their impact on electoral outcomes.
Interview a variety of scholars and experts and develop a portfolio of interviews to create a campaign.
Work with a team of distinguished faculty serving as guidance and contributing editors.

-Centre County Report-State College, PA

Supervisor: Steve Kracyik

Reporter/Anchor/Producer Spring 2018
Transfer between roles of production, reporting and anchoring with a small team in real small-town news environment.
Report on deadline using a variety of broadcasting tools to tell local, national and international stories.
Begin presence online as news reporter using a variety of social media tools.

-C-SPAN Washington, DC

Supervisor: Jonelle Henry

International Programming Department Intern Fall 2016
Research content and assist in live production of programming events including social media and equipment operation on international news events.
Coordinate contacts and interviews for programming events.
Assistant producer for 2016 Vice Presidential debate, the final
Obama State Dinner; producer of UK Youth Parliament Debate 2016

-WCVB-TV Channel 5 ABC-Boston Needham, MA

Supervisor: Chris Roach

Nightly News Intern Summer 2016

- Assisted news team with package scripts as well as on-air voice-overs, video and sound bites during nightly news segments
- Conducted in-field interviews and produced package stories
- Assistant producer of live Town Hall on Race Relations in the city of Boston

-Pennsylvania State University, African Studies Department-State College, PA

Supervisor: Elizabeth Carlson

Undergraduate Research Assistant Fall 2015-Spring 2017

- Investigate and critically analyze the underpinnings of contemporary African society
- Meet research deadlines and coordinate findings and problems in study

-Penn State News Network-State College, PA

Anchor/Production/Reporter Fall 2014-Fall 2016

- Research relevant and interesting stories for print with The Daily Collegian as well as on-air broadcasts with PSNTV
- Operate broadcasting equipment for live-air as well as in field such as cameras, audio, teleprompter and graphics
- Co-produced and hosted the live webcast of the 46-hour no-sit no-sleep dance marathon (THON) for childhood cancer
- Build and engage with social media to connect with viewers, respond to feedback and build profile online
- Op-ed political writer for The Tab, an online news service for college campuses across the United States

Grants Received: Enrichment Fund Grant from the College of Liberal Arts in the amount of $2,500

Awards: President Freshman Award, President Sparks Award, Evan S. Pugh Junior and Senior Award, Jack and Betty Brosious Undergraduate Journalism Award, Jeanne Chapkovich Award in Communication, Burns Family Internship Award, Washington Media Scholars Foundation scholarship, Richard A. Hayes Program Support scholarship, John H. Ferguson Award, Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications Overall Student Marshal
Professional Memberships: Behavioral International Economic Development Society-Junior Research Fellow, Douglas A. Anderson Chapter of KTA


Presentations: Grand Rounds for UMass Memorial Hospital

Community Service Involvement: Food service in Barcelona, Spain with community church (Spring 2016), Mission trips to Honduras with Rescue Project (Summer 2017, Summer 2018), Mission Trip to Haiti with Friends of Good Samaritan (2014)

International Education: Barcelona, Spain (Spring 2016)

Language Proficiency: Native English, Basic French