



Epsilon Theory

The Projection Racket, Pt. 2

September 28, 2020

This is Part 2 of The Projection Racket, a series of notes detailing the civic arguments underlying a movement to both (1) make our lives less dependent on political, social and financial institutions with structurally broken features and (2) to protect the rights of our fellow-citizens to do the same by eliminating the source of those structural breaks so that these institutions can serve both the collective and individual good. It is an explanation of what we mean when we say to “Burn it the \$!# down.”*

You can read [Part 1](#) here.



Arthur (reverently): Camelot!
Galahad (reverently): Camelot!
Lancelot (reverently): Camelot!
Gawain (dismissively): It's only a model...
-- **Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)**

Our political machinery expends a great deal of energy to tell you that your vote **IS** your right to political expression. That your vote **IS** your right to political self-determination. That your vote **IS** your political will.

Sometimes they tell you in shades of Vote or Die, insufferable if sometimes well-meaning campaigns meant to impress on historically apathetic groups the existential importance of voting.

Sometimes they tell you through **Holy Theatre**, celebrating campaigns for long-withheld suffrage and criticisms of shameful voter suppression practices.

Mostly, however, they tell you through the machinery of the major political parties and media, which are in the convenient position of being able to say “voting is important!” out loud in ways that too obviously say “voting for this person/party is important.” As the now-politicized pulpits in most evangelical churches start delivering their “duty to vote” sermons, the words will say “vote”, but the context will scream “vote for Trump.” Captain America didn’t **drop trou on Instagram** for you to express your political will, y’all. When he says “vote,” what he means is, “vote for Biden.”

And there’s nothing at all wrong with Cap wanting you to vote for Biden, of course, any more than there is anything wrong with conservative Hollywood celebrities who want you to vote for Donald Trump. Both of them, in fact. So have at it, James Woods and Angelina Jolie’s dad.

More importantly, there *certainly* isn’t anything wrong with demanding our right to vote, celebrating when it is recognized and protesting loudly when it is denied or suppressed. Still, whether they are promoted by official party apparatchiks or their counterparts in business, media and entertainment, the mass of these exhortations inevitably fuel one of the oldest **Projection Rackets** in the game. In this racket, partisan campaigning in a turnout-driven election is clothed in the finery of high-minded belief in suffrage and self-expression.

Point out the political insufficiency of voting alone or the underlying intent of those who are really just using its memetic value to promote their preferred candidate or party, of course, and now *you* are the one who is questioning the sacredness of the vote.

Or, to put it in our parlance, “Yay, voting!”

Yet while we bathe in these memes, it is easy to lose sight of an important truth: **Your vote IS NOT your right to political expression. Your vote IS NOT your political will. Your vote IS NOT your right to political self-determination.**

Our right to political self-determination is nothing less than the inherent right to establish what authorities we will grant to those who would govern us, and what actions we will permit them to take in our name. It speaks to a scope of sovereignty that a periodic expression of our personal preferences in a representative democracy cannot *possibly* contain. But there is a lot of daylight between “my vote isn’t always a perfect expression of my political will” and “what’s the point in

voting when none of these people matches my views of the world, and even if they did, I don't trust one of them to actually do it, and even if they would, I live in a district that has voted for the other party in every election in my lifetime?"

That daylight is filled by a range of abstractions. In this context, that's a \$10 word for things which reduce the extent to which your vote has the ability to faithfully represent and advance your political will. For most of American history, those abstractions have been largely reasonable compromises. They were things for which you were offered some meaningful thing in return for a vote that offered influence that was slightly less transparent, slightly less direct and slightly less likely to achieve your desired ends.

Today, however, those abstractions have been transformed by a series of catalysts. Transformed into structural elements of our voting system that will persistently impair the capacity of American citizens' votes to act as an expression of our political will. In short, the arrival of these catalysts means those compromises are no longer reasonable.

The Projection Rackets will say that the solution to this, like everything else, is to *vote*. Express yourself! *Don't you believe in democracy?*

Here is what I say:

I say that we should first consider together the pre-existing, long-standing features of our electoral and political systems which create abstractions between your political will and your vote: the (1) two-party system made inevitable by our first-past-the-post ("FPTP") electoral system, and the (2) winner-take-all ("WTA") structure embedded in our existing social contract.

I say that we should then consider the emerging catalysts which are transforming those theoretically acceptable compromises into unavoidably oppressive systems which will persistently diminish your right to political self-determination: the (1) steadily increasing federalization of government policy, the (2) dilution of representation and (3) the Widening Gyre.

I say we that we should then burn them the \$#@! down. All of them. First-past-the-post elections. Winner-take-all elections. The Electoral College. The structural inevitability of two-party hegemony and the fuel for America's everything-polarization.

I say we do it not through destruction or dismantling of our most cherished and important institutions, but through the *reinvigoration* of our commitment to them. Not by diminishing the constitution, but by embracing its role as our protection against the encroachment of political actors and state power. Not by diminishing the several states, but by rediscovering how to wield their political power in defense of the rights of the people.

It's not THE Answer, but it is AN answer.

First, I'll suggest the WHY; then, I'll propose the HOW.

First Past the Post and The Two-Party System

Your vote has *never* been a pure or complete expression of your political will. And that's OK.

The most basic layer of abstraction between your political will and your vote is also the most obvious, namely, that our system of government is a representative democracy. In short, other than the occasional municipal bond issue and some state and local ordinances and referenda (more in some localities than others), in our system you don't get to vote *directly* on practically anything.

This is an abstraction because the politicians you vote for are both figurative and literal proxies for your political will. They replace your detailed, specific views about the powers you would grant to those who govern us and the actions you would permit them to take in your name with the political candidate who you deem most desirable. Usually, although not always, you might decide who is most desirable on your assessment of the similarity between "*what you think they would do*" and "*what you want to be done.*" In some cases, perhaps the replacement of "*what you want*" with "*who you think will do the closest to what you want*" is a good representation. In other cases, perhaps it isn't. In all cases, it is an imperfect representation acquired in exchange for a great deal of simplicity.

There are other reasons for the exchange as well. The reasons provided in defense of this system historically largely boil down to the same two, and they're both pretty good ones: *tyranny of the majority* and *unmanageable scale and scope*. Founders who disagreed on practically everything else were convinced of the dangers and impracticality of a fully democratic form of government. Hamilton, probably the most comfortable of the prominent founders with the oligarchic risks of a permanent political class, was the most strident.

The ancient democracies, in which the people themselves deliberated, never possessed one feature of good government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity: When they assembled, the field of debate presented an ungovernable mob, not only incapable of deliberation, but prepared for every enormity. In these assemblies, the enemies of the people brought forward their plans of ambition systematically. They were opposed by their enemies of another party; and it became a matter of contingency, whether the people subjected themselves to be led blindly by one tyrant or by another.

Alexander Hamilton, in Remarks to the New York Ratifying Convention (June 21, 1788)

Madison, however, wasn't far behind him. His arguments, however, typically differed by casting the problems of a majority voting away the rights of the minority as one whose vector was nearly always factionalization. In short, Madison feared the effects of faction, and wrote in opposition to pure democracy principally on those grounds.

From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.

A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking.

Federalist #10, by James Madison (1787)

Even Jefferson, perhaps the most fundamentally democratic of the founders at heart, understood the intractable problems of scale and scope in a direct democracy. He favored what he considered the “2nd grade” of purity of government, and supported it with the “earnest wish...to see the republican element of popular controul pushed to the maximum of its practicable exercise”

[Classical Greece] had just ideas of the value of personal liberty; but none at all of the structure of government best calculated to preserve it. they knew no medium between a democracy (the only pure republic, but impracticable beyond the limits of a town) and an abandonment of themselves to an aristocracy, or a tyranny, independant of the people. it seems not to have occurred that where the citizens cannot meet to transact their business in person, they alone have the right to chuse the agents who shall transact it; and that, in this way, a republican, or popular government, of the 2^d grade of purity, may be exercised over any extent of country.

Thomas Jefferson in a private correspondence to Isaac H. Tiffany, 26 August 1816

Much of the electoral system through which this representative democracy takes shape is not the direct product of our constitution; instead, it is the product of laws passed by the US Congress.

In the current federal electoral framework, each of the 435 members of the House of Representatives is elected in a geographically defined district using a pluralistic first-past-the-post (“FPTP”) process. What that means is that each state designs districts that have (roughly) the same population, and whoever in that district receives the most votes in an election wins. The US Senate is the same, except that it is a statewide election rather than a district-based election, and each state has 2 members.

Beyond the natural abstraction native to a representative democracy, our first-past-the-post system introduces two additional abstractions. The first abstraction transforms the vote of a significant number of citizens from an expression of political will into an expression defined entirely by the features of the electoral system itself. In other words, you could tell me everything about yourself, your political will, engagement, political history, preferences and temperament. Yet the most important thing, the thing that would tell me most about how your vote would influence the powers granted to government and the actions permitted in your name?

Your zip code.

Here's what I mean.

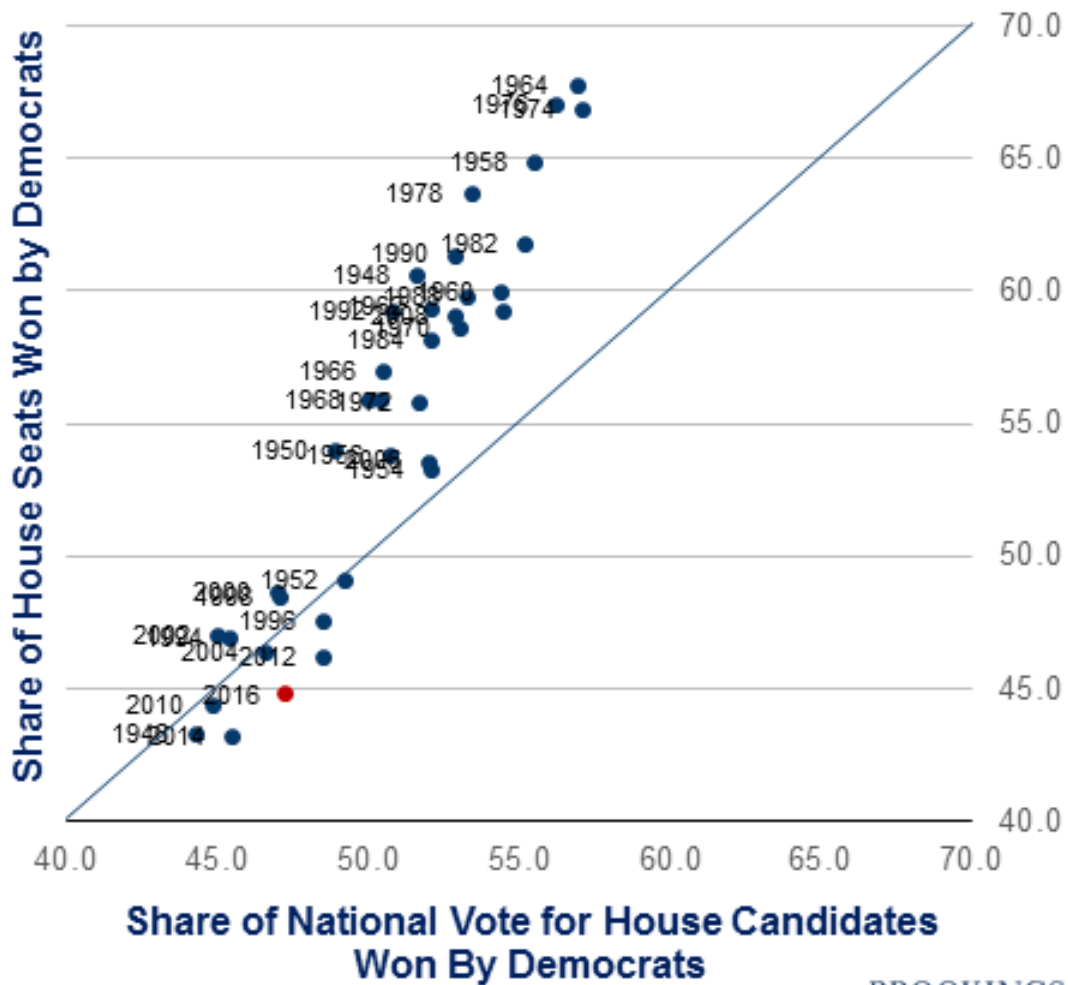
Abstraction of your vote into features of FPTP

Because congressional elections are allocated by district, in our system, if you vote for a candidate and your candidate loses, your vote expresses *nothing* in terms of the post-election reality. Because senatorial elections are conducted discretely by seat, the same is true of the US Senate. Because of FPTP, the votes of tens of millions of Americans will have the capacity to convey **zero** effective influence over House or Senatorial elections come November.

This is a familiar arrangement to us, and so there is a powerful Projection Racket that treats concern about the abstraction – no, the *elimination* – of individual political self-determination in winner-take-all districts as opposition to democratic principles, opposition to competitive markets or a desire for coercive state influence. **Our narratives and language cause us to frame elections discretely as something to be unequivocally 'won' or 'lost' by a single candidate, not because that is an inherent feature of democratic elections, but because it is an inherent feature of our electoral system.** The district as the “unit” of an election to be won by a single candidate on a discrete basis is a construction, in no way a necessary condition of democracy. Still, in the United States, that racket has been successful enough that *everybody knows everybody knows* that this is “just how elections work.”

When viewed in the aggregate, the effect of this racket is bad enough. The (terribly labeled) chart below comes from the Brookings Institute. It shows the difference between the share of seats in the House of Representatives won by Democratic candidates and the proportion of votes that were cast for such candidates. If you drew a ruler between each dot and the solid line, you'd know, by percentage, how much greater the share of seats was than the share of votes. Dots above the line favor the DNC. Dots below favor the GOP.

Figure 1



BROOKINGS

Source: Brookings Institute, **Republicans in Congress got a “seats bonus” this election (again)** (2016)

Remember that this is an aggregate. Underneath the hood are states and jurisdictions which vary wildly in both directions. Indeed, the underlying feature driving this in the aggregate is that even in jurisdictions which tend to be dominated by a particular party, there are *still* a lot of people who dissent from the majority. Nearly 41% of people in deep blue Connecticut still voted for Donald Trump. In crimson Alabama, some 34% still voted for Hillary. As a rule, in a small or medium-sized deep blue state, unless there’s a military base, anything less than 40% for the minority party is going to mean a clean sweep, or damn near. In a small or medium-sized deep red state, unless there’s a city with a quarter of a million people or so that hasn’t been gerrymandered into five different districts, anything less than 40% for the minority party is going to mean a clean sweep, or damn near.

The scientific term for FPTP's model of self-determination offered through the vote to these people is "pissing into the wind." But, I mean, you never know until you vote, right? *Don't you believe in democracy?*

Except even *that* isn't an option in many cases. You see, so powerful is FPTP in the stable political tendencies of these districts that the opposing party often doesn't even bother to run a candidate *at all*. For example, in the 2014 elections, there were 72 different congressional districts in which one of our two dominant parties decided not to field a candidate. More than 16% of the seats, accounting for some 55 million American citizens, didn't even bother with supporting the *narrative* that the citizens there have a right to effective self-determination.

This is the heart of what we mean by an abstraction – that for most Americans, whether your vote is an expression of your political will has more to do with the parameters of our electoral system and the zip code you were able to find a job and house than anything else.

But geographical features of FPTP are not the only abstraction of our vote we must contend with.

Abstraction of your vote into less representative candidates

The second abstraction is the result of FPTP's tendency to produce two-party outcomes. These two-party systems, by extension, tend to produce outcomes in which policies of the *closest candidate with a possibility of winning* are inherently more distant from the preferred policies of each voting citizen. In other words, under representative democracy, your vote will *always* be for an individual that doesn't perfectly represent your political will. Under FPTP, that imperfection is magnified by the limited number of viable candidates.

The cause of pressure in the direction of fewer parties under the influence of FPTP is no secret. French political scientist, sociologist and Nikita Khrushchev superfan Maurice Duverger wrote about it enough in the 1950s and 1960s to get his name attached to it. To wit, Duverger's Law posits that the equilibrial outcome for any pluralistic voting system like FPTP will be the concentration of party power, most often into a two-party system. In other words, if states determine who they send to Congress (or say, who they direct electoral college electors to select) based on who got the plurality of votes in a bunch of different political subdivisions, over time you are going to end up with two dominant parties.

You don't have to be a political scientist to puzzle this one out. If you've heard – or God forbid, uttered – the words "wasted vote", then you understand the cause and effect of Duverger's Law. It is the practical, game theoretic outcome of political parties encouraging voters not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Yes, you may *prefer* that libertarian candidate, and you may *prefer* to give the libertarian party a leg up to begin building a third-party crusade, but are you *really* willing to let the DNC send another rep to expand the size of the federal government? Or if that isn't your cup of tea, while I'm *sure* you would prefer a more progressive candidate, are you really going to let Donald Trump have another term?

If you *are* a political scientist, on the other hand, you probably have some technical rebuttals against Duverger's. Save them. Yes, there are other pluralistic jurisdictions (e.g. India) with robust multi-party constructs. Yes, something something Canada. Yes, I am sure that by using a rational choice proximity model you can show that citizens who know they're in a dominated district are happier to split their votes to support the emergence of third parties than Duverger allows for. But while the question of whether another path for American politics which permitted regular party formation and emergence was theoretically possible at some point sounds like a great journal submission, we have 100+ years of consistent data and an increasingly bimodal electorate, so forgive us if we'd rather not engage in hypotheticals.

The more important question, however, is this: how does a two-party system under FPTP structurally erode the self-determination and self-expression of the individual? How does it produce outcomes, as I alluded to above, *in which policies of the closest candidate with a possibility of winning are inherently more distant from the preferred policies of each voting citizen?*

The two-party system under FPTP creates artificial constraints on what would otherwise be a relatively free market for political ideas. Historically it does so by making it not only optimal but often *necessary* for candidates to adopt modal (i.e. the most common) same-party platforms in primaries, and modal (i.e. the most common) all-party platforms in elections. But while the central tendency of the electorate in any district may be something we can calculate to achieve election, it does not reflect reality. A Republican is not any more the 'average' of a Nozickian minarchist and a Jerry Falwell, Jr. poolside theocrat than a salad is the 'average' of a tomato and a ribeye. A Democrat is not any more the 'average' of a minister at an African Methodist Episcopal church in Louisville and a professional protester and Socialist Workers Party volunteer from Portland than Nebraska is the 'average' of Kentucky and Oregon.

Said another way: if you have ten viable candidates for office who each reflect some mixture of positions or a coherent political philosophy, the odds that *your* political will may be expressed in something approaching its true form is possible even in a representative democracy. If off-modal preferences are stamped out or become persistently sub-optimal, the odds that *your* political will may be expressed in anything approaching its true form are far less likely.

Still, the existence of a two-party system does not presuppose that off-modal preferences will *always* be stamped out. The two-party system under FPTP doesn't require that, either, although it makes it much more likely. Indeed, for *most* periods in American history, FPTP and the existence of a two-party system have **not** been untenable constraints on effective individual political self-determination. The reason: There have always been factions within parties. These factions could grow or decline in their influence on the party as a whole. Parties *could be* big tents, even if there is pressure on certain issues to present a united front (which can be true in multi-party coalitions, too), and while still often monolithic in terms of specific districts, it was possible for individual districts to reflect an off-modal character.

What's more, FPTP *does* obviate some features of alternative systems that are not always desirable. The hostage-taking, power-brokering potential offered to small minorities in proportional representation systems *can* be debilitating. The continuity offered by two-party government *can* have efficiency and execution advantages in implementing government policy. Um, theoretically. You may believe or disbelieve any of those arguments as you wish.

Because in the end, I am not saying you would have been wrong if you wanted to end FPTP before today. It is not a point worth arguing. But for those who did NOT think it rose to the level of institutional reform, I think it is important to establish that I agreed with you.

Until now.

But hold that thought until we explore the catalysts that we believe have changed the game.

Winner-Take-All Systems

In the same way that a system of representative democracy inherently creates distance between what you can vote for and your political will, there is a distance created by features of our social contract. To make everyone unhappy, I'll use the term in *both* the sense of Locke and Rousseau.

The John Locke part of our social contract is the part we wrote down. Our constitution. The Rousseau part exists in the implicit vesting of authorities and duties in the state by long-term legislative mandates that cannot be (or at the least, perhaps ought not to be) unwound by a short-term change in aggregate political preferences.

In other words, there are things which citizens of our country decided – sometimes before you could express your political will – for which your vote provides practically *no* feasible avenue for expression. They reduce the extent to which your vote represents an expression of your political will.

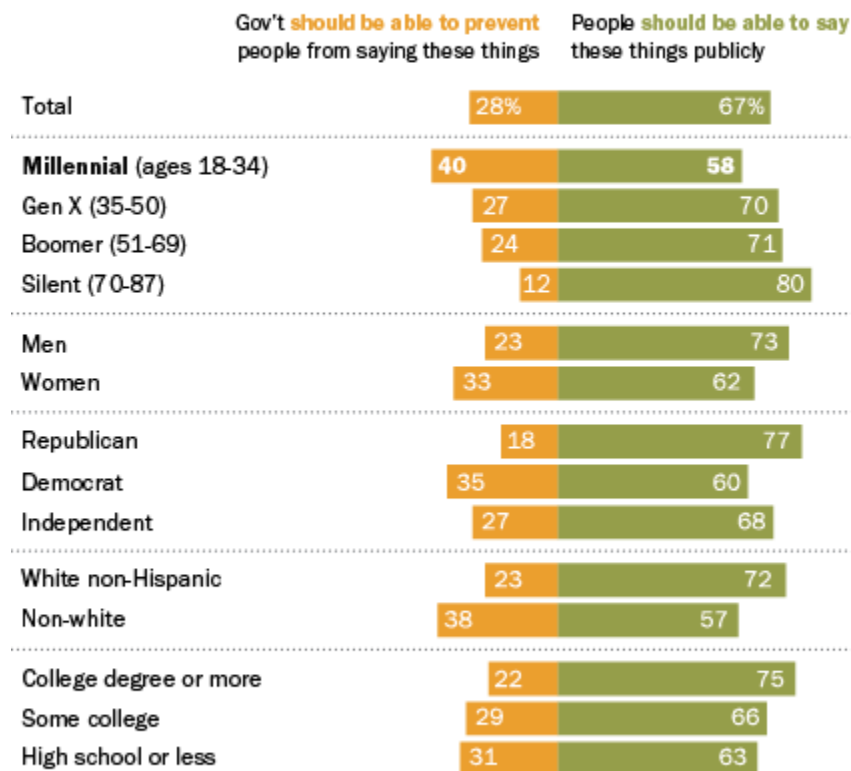
It is, perhaps, an unusual framing to think of our constitution as constraining your expression of political will, it being a document that is designed to strictly define the scope of the government's valid activities. But that is precisely the point. The Bill of Rights constrains the capacity of your vote to effectively convey a preference for curtailing speech, or for permitting police departments to adopt policies which would violate the 4th Amendment (hah!), or for desiring the abolition of private ownership of firearms. **To constrain state encroachment on your individual liberties, an effective constitution must necessarily establish boundaries to the power of imagination vested in your political self-determination.**

To be fair, not every American agrees on the desirability of what we have or haven't defined as rights. Roughly **one in four** Americans *explicitly* wants the repeal of the 2nd Amendment. **One in five** would like to reinstitute the 18th Amendment and keep you from day-drinking to-go frozen

margaritas during quarantines. Nearly **three in ten** disagree with the plain language of the 1st Amendment.

U.S. Millennials More Likely to Support Censoring Offensive Statements About Minorities

Statements that are offensive to minority groups



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research

Center

For my own mental health, I am not even going to search for any polls on the 13th Amendment.

Anyway, let's say that for whatever reason, the rights *you* would grant to those who govern you included the right for police to rummage through your house because they felt like it, to fine you for saying naughty words or to charge you a \$5 billion fee to get regulatory approval for your M&A transaction (**oh wait**). Your vote as a mechanism for expressing your particular brand of crazy is abstracted by one layer because you first have to find a candidate who shares something like that brand. It is abstracted – or rather, diluted – further by the fact that doing those particular things would require that insane congressperson to find enough like-minded sociopaths to initiate the constitutional amendment process. Just the small matter of securing 2/3 of both the senate and the house, followed by the ratification by at least 38 states.

This is unequivocally an additional encumbrance on the power of your vote and its link to your political will. And while we *will* differ on our judgments of the rightness of, well, rights, I don't think it's too controversial to judge this system as a good thing. The process for all of us deciding whether we should allow citizens to vote for permitting the chattel enslavement of other citizens should *probably* be a somewhat higher bar than deciding what the speed limit or budget for resurfacing interstate highways in a given year ought to be.

The other kind of social contract – in the more typical Rousseauesque meaning – is less formal than the recognition of rights in a constitution, but still effectively constrains how much of your political will your vote can make manifest. You may not agree that Social Security is an untouchable policy – I certainly don't – but common knowledge has long been that it is a long-term commitment of the state that politicians only meddle with at their own peril. Remember the *third rail*? Remember the *lockbox*? Remember the mythology of the non-existent but still somehow inviolable *social security trust fund*? Everybody knows that everybody knows you can't change social security.

There are other such policies which reflect long-term commitments of the United States both internally and externally, and for which that strong form of common knowledge increases reluctance by politicians to change course. Many fall into the category of what we call *entitlements*. Here, I think, it is probable that you and I disagree on particulars of the policies. For example, I think it is untenable *not* to make meaningful adjustments to social security, including increasing the eligibility age to reflect changes in life expectancy. I also think that the effective impediment to my power to effect that change through my vote is an acceptable price to pay for the flexibility and feasibility of our system to support long-term policy commitments. In other words, while we may reasonably believe that the individual *policies* are broken and in need of amendment, the *system* through which we express that preference is not broken, at least not as a result of this abstraction.

There is another system, another part of our social contract, however, which is instituted by the *system* of constitutional process. And we've got to talk about it.

Abstraction of your political will into the will of your state

Article I, Section 2 of our constitution sets out the parameters of what we call the Electoral College.

Whatever your opinion on the Electoral College – and I am certain you have one – there is zero question that it blunts the capacity of the vote to act as an expression of political will for tens of millions of Americans. It does so in two ways, one big and one small. The small way, which is the only way *required* by the constitution, effectively dilutes the influence of a vote from a state with a large population. The number of electors in each state is based on the sum of senators and representatives, so smaller than average states get the usual senatorial boost.

The big way that the Electoral College blunts the capacity of the vote to act as an expression of political will isn't required by the constitution at all. The language permits the states to determine their own mechanism for directing the electors. All but two of them have chosen – in a game theoretic competition game that converged on its present strong equilibrium long ago – to implement a winner-take-all system. The candidate who achieves a plurality in every state but Maine and Nebraska takes *all* of its electors. For the same reason as FPTP, WTA is inherently disenfranchising in a very real way. Tens of millions of Americans will live their whole lives voting for president without a *single* shred of practical influence on the outcome of a *single* election.

That this creates an abstraction-into-system in the same way as FPTP is not in question.

What also isn't in question is the fact that our constitution was *clearly* written to ensure that the vote for president still recognized the sovereignty of the states. It could have specified a clear process for selecting electors. It didn't. It could have apportioned electors based on the House. It didn't. It could have made the tie-breaking vote in the House in the case of plurality-without-majority a population-based affair. It didn't. It gave each state's delegation to the House a single vote. There is a movement to pretend all these things away that is transparently motivated by a desire to see the practical outcome of the removal of the Electoral College – a clear advantage granted to the DNC.

Feeling indignant, liberals? **Have a snickers.**

What also isn't in question is that the same people who wrote in those protections for state sovereignty also wrote language which would have diluted the disproportionate tilt of the senate on electors into oblivion. All those founders who we're so convinced would be rolling over in their graves if they heard us talking about giving away Wyoming's sweet electoral advantage? You mean the guys who wrote and passed the Congressional Apportionment Amendment, which would have had the effect of reducing the 'senatorial' contribution to the Electoral College from 27% in 1789 to 1.5% in 2020, but for the intransigence of the Connecticut legislature in ratifying it? You mean *those* founders? I don't know, but it seems kind of daft to imply that they couldn't calculate growth rates over time considering that you couldn't get Ben Franklin to *shut up* about compound interest. There is a disingenuous "but the founders" narrative that is used *very* selectively as part of a transparent desire to maintain the status quo of the Electoral College because it presently grants an advantage to the GOP.

Feeling indignant, conservatives? **Have a snickers.**

But we are not rhinoceroses. We can hold multiple ideas in our head at once. We can believe that state sovereignty and expression matters. AND we can believe that it was the founders' intent to retain that and appropriate to be cautious about wantonly discarding it. AND we can believe that the constitutional amendment system isn't broken. AND we can believe that it matters – a lot – for the people to have votes that matter.

From those ideas, we must determine together (1) whether we think that what we gain by exchanging some measure of the capacity for political expression through the vote is worth it and (2) whether the process of modifying the system which creates this structure is worth the high bar presented by the constitutional amendment process.

I have an opinion on both. I bet you do, too.

I don't want to convince you that you *were* right or wrong. I do want to convince you that our catalysts have made both of our points of view moot.

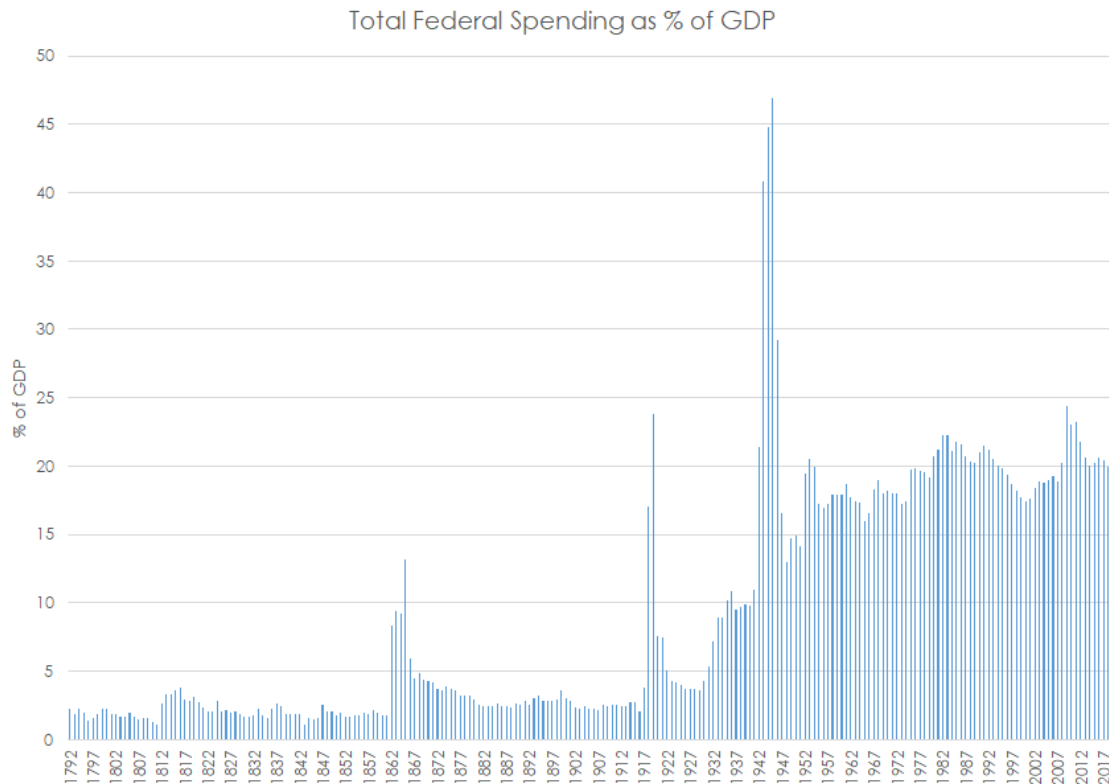
It's time to end winner-take-all. That includes the Electoral College.

Catalyst #1: The Encroaching Federalization of Government

Since some of you are probably still mad about all the Electoral College heresy, let's bring your simmering anger to a rolling boil by starting with the most complicated of the three catalysts: the encroaching scope and scale of the federal government and the imperialization of the presidency.

I say it is complicated mostly because it is *very* difficult to disentangle the *structural* implications from the *policy* implications. And since **BITFD** is rarely, if ever, the right answer for policy differences, I mostly want to talk about why I think this has catalyzed the brokenness of other systems rather than why I think reducing the scope of the federal government would increase liberties of many varieties, *including* our right to self-determination.

First, that America has a larger federal government with a more expansive mandate than we enjoyed for most of our history is not very much in debate. Define the statement on any dimension you want, and it remains very obviously true. Define it by scale, say, by spending as a share of GDP, and we will probably look back on 2020 as the highest level since we were paying Ford to churn out a B-24 every hour out at Willow Run. Ignore the kink from our COVID recession, and you're still looking at one of the highest marks we've seen, despite 2019 coming at the height of a broad expansionary phase.



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Census Bureau, measuringworth.com, governmentspending.com.

Note: Pre-1929 GDP figures are somewhat less reliable than post-1929 figures, so take these with an additional grain of salt. 2020 represents an estimate and will likely deviate materially when realized.

Measure it by the scope of things the federal government is in the business of doing, and you'll find the same thing. It has been transformed from an agency overseeing foreign relations, defense, and laws resolving disputes between individuals and disputes between states into one which regulates, funds and in some cases outright controls housing, energy, telecommunications policy, environmental policy, transportation, transportation security, health care and countless other features of everyday life.

For the most part, this is the result of the expressed preferences of the American people. You may think, as I do, that those preferences are often very short-sighted and lend to very special kind of permanence that only exists for government programs. You may think, as I do, that they typically represent an almost comical and flamboyantly dishonest reading of the Commerce Clause of the constitution. You may think, as I do, that they very often represent a *bad model* of technocratic government (*yay, efficiency!*) and the central planning impulse, in which decisions are made too far above the nexus at which they are more *effectively* made.

And yet, somehow, not everyone agrees with me. Imagine that! I'd sure like to change that and tell all of you how very wrong you are, but BITFD is not about addressing idiosyncratic policy gripes. Even mine. And while I have a *lot* of these gripes with the centralization and federalization

of our country, a sack of idiosyncratic policy gripes does not magically become a systemic gripe just because it would be convenient for me to call it that.

To a lesser extent, all this applies for the expansion of the power of the presidency as well. We and our representatives in congress have tacitly and explicitly permitted it. Usually we cheer. When Obama had a “pen and a phone”, it was done to cheers from the blue bleachers. When Trump undertook a series of executive orders to “drain the swamp,” it was done to cheers from the red bleachers. Every president in most of our lifetimes has commanded the almost daily firing of weapons without a declaration of war, increasingly without even so much as an obligatory gesture in the direction of the War Powers Act. Conflicted investigations interfered in. Hyperaggressive interpretations of law in the case of DACA and ACA’s mandate. Complete indifference to law in the case of border wall construction, COVID relief and the approval of commercial M&A transactions.

I think you can probably tell where I come out on these issues, and if you were to say that the expansion of presidential power is of a slightly different kind than the encroachment of legislative and regulatory power, I would probably agree with you. But in the end, I am not trying to convince you that the expansion of the scope of the federal government or the imperial power of the presidency is good or bad, a righteous reflection of the will of the people or not. At least I’m not trying to convince you of that *right now*.

All I want to do is establish the shared foundation that, except for the Civil War and World War II, neither the federal government nor the presidency has ever exercised so much authority and power as they do today.

That fact isn’t just a policy question. It influences your right to self-determination under our electoral system. It does so in three ways:

#1 Stronger, Deeper Two-Party System Equilibrium

By increasing the stakes of federal politics, we have created the conditions to deepen the equilibrium of the two-party system. The mechanic here ought to be intuitive in both real-world and narrative-world, especially for anyone who has ever heard – or God forbid, uttered – “the most important election of our lifetimes.” When the stakes are higher, when our beloved policies are “under attack”, the willingness of parties, candidates and, in turn, the electorate to take risks is necessarily reduced.

What do we mean by *risks* in this context?

We mean out-group political risk-taking. Encroaching federalization makes it more difficult to justify funding, launching and running new parties and candidates to provide a more nuanced platform that better reflects the preferences of an underrepresented subset of the population.

Because this quickly becomes common knowledge, the individual voter is *even more* constrained to limit their support of new party emergence, too.

We also mean in-group political risk-taking. The increased scale of federal policy also makes it more difficult for parties to tolerate off-modal policies, views and candidates. As scale grows, so too does the impetus toward party unity, the impetus to ensure that every ounce of influence is devoted toward protecting the “most important legislation/budget/policy/supreme court nomination of our lifetimes.” When one party moves to the small tent model, they will have a brief advantage before the other adopts the same. It is a **defection in a Prisoner’s Dilemma game**, and it is a strong equilibrium.

#2 Increased Share of Political Power Executed at a Deeper Layer of Abstraction from Your Vote

The steady redefinition of the relative scope of personal, local, state and federal government, even when implemented with the good-faith intention of pursuing superior policy to provide for the common welfare, also has the effect of moving more issues of political import to electoral arenas at which the individual’s vote is more heavily abstracted.

Your vote’s ability to express a transparent, less abstracted form of your political will is *generally* going to follow this order:

Family > School District > Municipality > County > State > House > Senate > President

In short, the effect of moving an increasing share of our collective political sphere from the left side of the chart to the right is to decrease the aggregate power of your vote to determine how you will be governed. You may think that’s good *policy*. That’s super. It also catalyzes the degradation of the real-world ability of a citizen’s vote to express their political will in a FPTP, WTA electoral system dominated by two parties.

Yes, there are exceptions. Yes, I’m sure [your local official] has been in office a long time and his continued reelection is totally suspicious and bogus. Please Google the word “generally” if you’re still struggling with this.

Let’s say, for example, that you simultaneously held education policy views that (1) standardized testing-based school funding is mostly stupid, counterproductive and punishes schools in poor areas that need the most help, (2) the 1619 Project is wrongheaded and counterproductively revisionist, and (3) common core seems weird but has parts that are largely OK (all views which, if you held them, I would personally find very agreeable). None of these policy opinions concern *rights* that ought to constrain other people from exercising their right to self-determination to disagree with you. If this remains wholly in the scope of local and state governments, if more citizens in your district or state disagree with you than agree, your political will has not been abstracted away, or at least *not very much*. It has been *defeated*. C’est la vie.

When those issues are raised to the scope of the federal level – as they have through the tenuous auspices of federal pursestrings under *both* Republic and Democratic congresses and presidents over the last 25 years – your political will HAS been abstracted away. That is to say, the centralization of policy doesn't just affect that policy. It affects our self-determination, by which I mean that it vastly dilutes the degree to which our vote has the capacity to determine the way in which our lives are governed. The more that school policy sits with a school board or the state, the more direct the influence of your vote on how you are to be governed. The more that it sits in (or is influenced by the budget of) an agency empowered by federal legislation under the direction of a presidential appointee, the less direct the influence of your vote.

This is not complicated.

#3 Increased Political Scope Obviated by Winner-Take-All

This one is.

There is no clear answer for “how much self-determination given up structurally by permitting states to adopt winner-take-all systems is acceptable for whatever is gained in exchange.” There's *certainly* no objective answer. Maybe you think the answer is zero, and I wouldn't blame you for it, even though I disagree.

What we can answer objectively, however, is whether the effect of winner-take-all is *worse* when more of our political sphere has been moved to the federal side of the scale, especially when more of it has been moved to the imperialized presidency that is most sensitive to winner-take-all structures. That answer is yes. *Unequivocally, meaningfully* yes. It is worse.

We have empowered the presidency with the ability to wage war in our name on shallow pretenses and weak footing in both constitution and statute. We have empowered the presidency to suspend habeas corpus on multiple occasions with little to no timely consideration by congress, much less the courts, of whether that suspension was lawful. We have empowered the presidency to conduct warrantless surveillance on American citizens. If we preferred a presidency not so empowered, we have no candidate or party to express that preference and have not for many years. Both parties have routinely vested and protected an expanding presidency.

This is the presidency we allowed to exist.

So I get the arguments about retaining the sovereignty and coherent political identity of the states. I *make* those arguments. But if we are not willing to protect the sovereignty of the smallest minority, to permit each citizen to ALWAYS express their proportional opinion about who may wield the power to summarily kill, imprison or surveil in our name with limited or no oversight – and make no mistake, that's exactly what we have decided the President of the United States gets to do – I'm not sure what notion of the rights reserved for the several states and the people we think the Electoral College still protects.

Our Projection Rackets will tell us we must think about the Electoral College in a binary way – that it is either sacrosanct and inviolable (“*Don’t you respect the founders / constitution / states?*”) or that it was always wrong-headed and has not been vindicated (“*Don’t you believe in democracy?*”). I am asking you to consider instead a mosaic of catalysts. If the encroaching power of the federal government and presidency was not enough to convince you that asking citizens to have a mute voice in favor of the protection of a symbolic gesture of state sovereignty is no longer the reasonable exchange it may once have been, I’ll give it one more try.

But for now, let’s head back to Capitol Hill.

Catalyst #2: The Steady Dilution of Representation

In 1788, when the U.S. constitution was ratified, the population of the United States was probably a bit more than 4 million. The 1790 Census put it at 3,929,214, with the widespread assumption among government officials that this was meaningfully undercounted. Parts of the country at the time were, shall we say, a bit rustic. The constitution granted the authority to determine voting eligibility to the states; most tended to restrict it to property-owning, tax-paying adult white males. New Jersey allowed women to vote for a little while. A few states allowed free black men to vote. In all, probably somewhere between 200,000 and 500,000 Americans were truly eligible to vote.

Not to bring up a sore subject, but this is, as it happens, probably the single biggest reason for the Electoral College. To permit states the freedom and sovereignty to adopt their own voting requirements obliged the union to normalize the basis of each state’s contribution to the aggregate vote on some basis *other* than the number of eligible voters. Otherwise they would all have been incentivized by obvious competitive pressures to simply permit as many adult citizens as possible to be electors. And what a disaster that would have been!

At any rate, even in the very early days of the union, the nature and scale of representation for voting and non-voting citizens alike were among the most focused topics of discussion. The original text of Article One, Section Two of the constitution provides for a congress in which each representative accounted for no more than 30,000 citizens, although the calculation was based on the familiar and horrific calculation of enslaved black Americans as three fifths of a person. Still, even that total was a point of significant contention, having been reduced from the initial draft of 40,000 at no less than the urging of George Washington himself. The import is that for each representative in the post-census 3rd United States Congress in 1793, there were around 37,000 living Americans, free and enslaved, and probably between 2,000-5,000 eligible voters for each representative. In 2020, each congressperson represents, on average, some 760,000 citizens and about 570,000 eligible voters.

For those following along, in 2020 there are roughly 100x as many eligible voters per representative and 20x as many citizens as there were in 1793.

What does that mean?

It means a lot of things.

First, the change from 30,000 to 760,000 in a geographically districted system is not a change in magnitude. It is a change in kind. It is a change from a feasibly engaged citizen-to-legislator relationship in which personal interactions have *probably happened frequently* to one in which they *almost certainly* have not. It is a change from a system in which appointments and emails and phone calls from highly engaged constituents would be entirely feasible mechanisms for supplementing the political will expressed by a vote to a system in which the communication is almost entirely *one way* in nature. Unless you count formal auto-response letters with a signature stamp written by interns.

Second, it means that the financial means necessary to run for election are vastly higher and typically dependent on (1) pre-existing wealth or (2) party support. The average campaign to win a seat in the House of Representatives spends approximately \$1.5 million – that’s every *two* years, mind you. It’s nowhere near the stratosphere of a seat in the senate or the presidency, but even at that level it has the effect of creating dependence on the existing party infrastructure and deepening its entrenchment. It also has the effect of biasing the pool of likely candidates and stifling the entrance of new candidates and the formation of new parties.

Third, when the number of representatives grew along with the population, it had the ability to serve as an offset to the other features of our electoral system which supported the entrenchment of two-parties. It made the thresholds of first-past-the-post slightly less relevant because it *increased* the odds that a district would be capable of supporting a candidate that existed outside political norms within a party, or outside a party altogether. The fixed nature of our congressional vote since 1911 has stifled this impulse.

Each of these effects interacts with our electoral system as a catalyst that steadily erodes our right to self-determination as the population grows, not through the linear proportionate reduction we should expect by being slightly less of the electorate, but through the non-linear effects which compound that desirable dilution. They have limited the non-voting recourse available to citizens to actively influence their representative and they have reduced the pool and diversity of prospective candidates for office, further entrenching the dominance of the existing two-party structure and reducing the odds that a viable candidate will be a close match to the political will of a large number of voters.

This is the kind of steady, difficult-to-detect usurpation of the promise of the American republic so indicative of those defended by Projection Rackets. It is, without response from us, an inexorable and corrosive process which will continue to impair our expressions of political will.

Catalyst #3: The Widening Gyre

All of the structures and catalysts to this point have been long-standing or gradual developments. What we call the Widening Gyre, however, is **not**. To the contrary, it is a still-emerging feature of American politics which serves to amplify the most liberty-reducing flaws of both the FPTP and WTA components of our electoral system.

So what is a Widening Gyre?

In literature, it is a reference to the poetry of W.B. Yeats, in which he famously coined the expression that the “center cannot hold.”

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming” (1919)

In our parlance, a Widening Gyre is a highly stable process of progressive political polarization.

[The Widening Gyre] is the breaking of mediative and cooperation-possible political institutions and practices, and their replacement by non-mediative and cooperation-impossible political institutions and practices. This is what it looks like, in a modern Western context, when things fall apart.

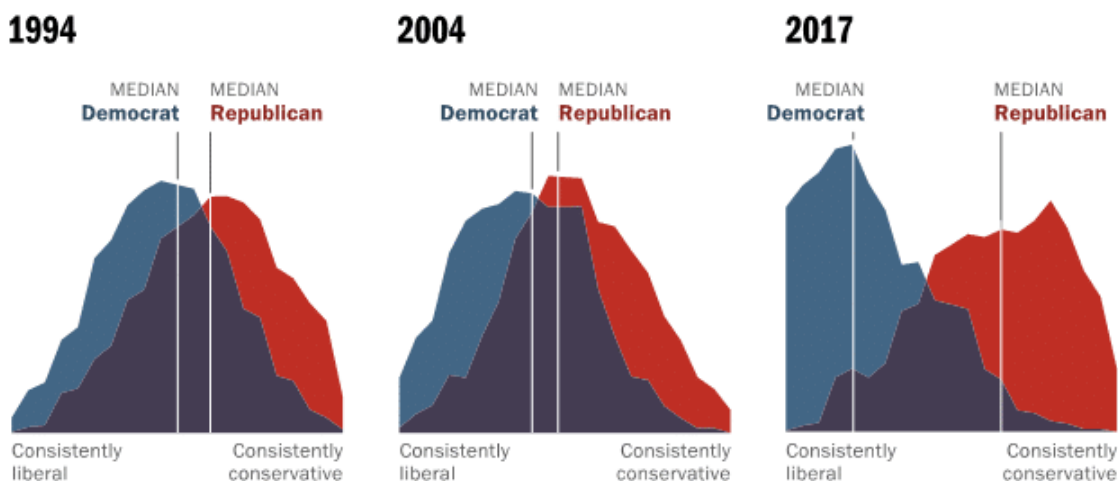
Things Fall Apart (Part 1) – Epsilon Theory

In game theoretic terms, a Widening Gyre is the specific outcome of a process in which the major political parties in a two-party system have actively dismantled systems and norms which protect cooperative game play, then engage in defecting strategies in the resulting competition game. Those strategies all but guarantee the persistent, long-term pursuit of that strategy by *both* parties. In other words, the self-defeating competition game becomes the new equilibrium. It is what happens, for example, when the sitting president declares the news media the “enemy of the people” and the media, in turn, uniformly and transparently sets itself against his reelection. It is what causes a viral pandemic to be perceived distinctly on almost explicitly political grounds.

In a picture, a Widening Gyre is this:

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

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A Widening Gyre *isn't* just a polarized environment. Those happen. It is an environment in which both parties in a two-party system have committed to policy-adoption, governing and electoral strategies which do not seek to appeal to the political center, to undecided voters, or to voters whose views do not map neatly to the “party” dimension who might otherwise find parts of the party’s platform attractive. Instead, they seek to win by creating more energy, internal consistency, antagonism of the political out-group and voter turnout among the in-group.

When one party in a two-party system commits to this strategy, it obliges the other to do so or be at a persistent marked disadvantage. When both parties commit to the strategy, it produces several results all at once. These are now features of American politics, so get to know them.

Emergence of Party as the Dominant Dimension of Identity and Group Polarization

While its political effects are diffuse, it is still worth pointing out what may be the most devastating influence of the Widening Gyre: it infects everything. Our culture. Music. Films. News. Conversations. How we see the same video. How we understand the same events. Whether we wear masks in a store or restaurant. Who we will be friends with.

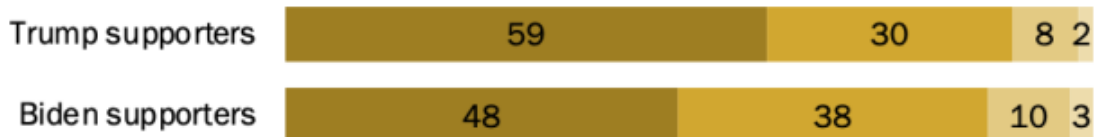
This has very little to do with my BITFD argument. It just makes me sad.

Majorities of Trump, Biden voters say they have ‘just a few’ or no friends who support the other candidate

% of registered voters who say ___ of their close friends support the ...

■ A lot ■ Some ■ Just a few ■ None

Same candidate they do for president



Other major party's candidate for president



Note: Based on registered voters.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.

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The Progressive Divergence of Out-groups on the Party Dimension

The progressive divergence of out-groups on the party dimension is the continued and dynamic election by the parties to embrace more extreme – which is to say, more distinct from those of the other party – positions on indicative policies for that party. That doesn't necessarily mean policies on the conservative-liberal dimension, however. It can often be as simple as the parties beginning to effectively choose contrary positions on as many issues and policies as possible.

The Progressive Consolidation of In-groups on the Party Dimension

I could describe what I mean by the consolidation of ingroups on the party dimension, but what Ben wrote in his note from 2018 does so better than I would.

If you're an incumbent centrist politician, somewhere to the left of your median voter if you're a Republican and somewhere to the right of your median voter if you're a Democrat, you have exactly two choices.

You remain silent and just go with the party flow, clinging on for dear life against primary challengers, holding your nose at the party excesses, apologizing to your donors and your spouse in private, and hoping that one day the party comes back

to you. You tell yourself “apres moi, le deluge.” Or in English, “sweet Jesus, have you seen the racist moron / lunatic communist who would take my place if I quit?”, and you’ve got a big enough ego to believe that sort of excuse as you slowly sell your soul.

You quit.

That’s it. Those are your options. I guess there are variations on #2, where you can either rage-quit (Jeff Flake) if your constituency is an eternal Trumpland desert or slink-quit (Paul Ryan) if your moderate constituency at least gives you a chance for a political comeback one day. But those are your only options.

Things Fall Apart (Part 1) – Epsilon Theory, August 8, 2018

In the familiar terms of the Pew Research chart, this is the “high-peaked” part of the “high-peaked bi-modal distribution.” It is the compression of allowable deviations from modal norms within each of the two parties, the closing of ranks and the end of the Big Tent model for party- and consensus-building.

A Stable Equilibrium

A Widening Gyre does not die of old age.

When both parties abandon the structures which permit cooperative gameplay, the political advantages of exploiting attempts at cooperation by the other player, and the political disadvantages of pursuing attempts at cooperation are both exceedingly high. Think “peace for our time” after the annexation of the Sudetenland. Except, you know, without the Nazis. After all, these are problems, but they are still very much first world problems.

The strategies Donald Trump perfected in American politics do not go away when Donald Trump does, whether that happens in January 2021 or 2025. The embrace on the political left of performative wokeism, deficit-doesn’t-matter MMTism and blow-it-all-up court packing proposals doesn’t go away when *the other side starts playing nice*. They don’t go away because in the competition game, the defector against a friendly participant *wins. every. time*. And when every political issue has been transformed into an existential struggle, the electorate simply won’t tolerate those kinds of losses.

The stable equilibrium of the Widening Gyre is why this is a catalyst that we don’t wait to resolve. The stable equilibrium is why this catalyst of the pre-existing conditions of our electoral system is a justifiable reason to burn them the #@!* down.

And make no mistake, the combination of this catalyst with our electoral system is pure poison.

The strong equilibrium of the Widening Gyre creates a stable long-term bias toward out-group divergence. In a FPTP system, this *strengthens* the electoral viability of extreme (on the party

dimension) candidates who deviate more, on average, from the native preferences of a very large minority – perhaps even a plurality – of the electorate. It makes it more likely that those in uncompetitive districts under WTA will definitionally experience even *greater* divergence from their electoral preferences. That their vote will become a more abstracted, less effective instrument of their political will.

The strong equilibrium of the Widening Gyre creates a stable long-term bias toward in-group consolidation. In a FPTP system, this obviates the historical saving grace of FPTP in a two-party system: big-tent factionalization within parties. The consolidation of viable candidates into certain archetypes likewise makes even party members less capable of expressing mildly divergent views on any dimension (i.e. this is why you'd need to put out an APB to hear from Ben Sasse these days). It suppresses the emergence of new parties and the emergence of viable candidates with the potential to better express the political will of constituents not represented by the bi-modal preferences of the two parties.

And in the aggregate, the existential, competition-game nature of the Widening Gyre will inevitably make nearly every issue, every election “the most important election of our lifetimes”, one in which we “cannot waste our votes.” The pressure against new party, new faction and new candidate formation will be powerful, limiting the effective expression of citizens across the country, regardless of jurisdiction. Perhaps most importantly, the pressure in the absence of legislative cooperation to vest further power in the executive will continue to grow (“*we need a man who can get things done!*”), deepening the gravity of the underrepresentation of our winner-take-all Electoral College.

The Widening Gyre, the encroaching federalization of government and imperialization of the presidency, and the programmatic dilution of our representation in Congress conspire to transform the reasonable exchanges of our self-determination for stability, simplicity and state sovereignty into travesties.

None of this is to say that proportional representation or any of the remedies we might pursue to BITFD are without their problems. Tyranny of the minority and disproportionate Kingmaker power are real things. There are people who oppose it in good faith on these grounds. I think they are wrong in their weighing of the costs and benefits, but that's just my opinion.

There are far more, however, who will oppose BITFD on the inauthentic, cynical terms of the two-party Projection Racket. *There's no law stopping you from running as whatever you want! You really want to change the law because you can't win on the battlefield of ideas? Don't you believe in democracy?* Depending on the crowd, you could also go with: *Oh, so you want to get rid of Congressional districts? You want to make sure that individual geographic communities don't have a coordinated voice in their corner? Don't you believe in democracy?*

See how the Projection Racket works?

“Voting for Joe Biden is not about whether you agree with him. It’s a vote to let our democracy live another day.”

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

I am sure that you have felt the pull of the Widening Gyre, especially with the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the consideration of her placement. I am sure that you felt how it was spun to you as a reason to value your **vote** more dearly. In truth, it should show you how *rarely* it is that your vote HAS the kind of power that it *always* should. You can choose the mess of pottage, or you can fight for the genuine article.

How Do We BITFD?

So how DO we fight for the genuine article?

If you agree with the arguments about the systemic erosion in your self-determination we have made here, then that’s at least half the battle. Expanding the group of Americans who recognize these as significant priorities in their lifetimes would be an achievement of a kind:

1. **We end first-past-the-post.**
2. **We end winner-take-all.**
3. **We fix our diluted influence of the people’s voice in government: the U.S. House of Representatives.**

That’s the **IT** of BITFD that we promised we’d explain to the small-c conservatives. If you’re like us and content to know the Process and leave the Answer for us all to determine together, feel free to stop here. Seriously. Everything from here on is just my opinion, a description of one possible plan among many. I happen to think it’s a good one, but if you decide to keep reading, don’t let it keep you from buying into the Process above.

And in fairness to the small-l liberals, I recognize that we haven’t yet explained **how** we propose to do any of this, so not describing any possible route seems like a cop-out. Part of why I am reluctant is because there are a lot of different routes this could take. Part of it is because achieving all of this is a path-dependent thing that trying too hard to prescribe will reveal as an exercise in futility. Part of it is because we just don’t know.

So what do we know? We know that turkeys don’t vote for Christmas. And we know that if there’s a fire you’re trying to douse, you can’t put it out from inside the house.

So we don’t.

We start from the outside.

We start from the bottom-up.

We start with a movement focused on engaging and influencing our state legislatures, one by one, to ratify the Congressional Apportionment Amendment as proposed to the states in 1789.

No, I am not kidding.

The only amendment that would have been part of the initial package that was approved by Congress but never ratified by a sufficient number of states, the Congressional Apportionment Amendment remains open for ratification. Indeed, eleven states have already ratified it (*New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Vermont and Kentucky...and depending on whom you ask, Connecticut*). To blow open the doors of the U.S. Congress and begin the process of returning it to the people, we need 27 more states to ratify the amendment. Twenty-seven more **state** legislatures, closer to the people, less dependent on national party and fundraising engines, supported by 2020's vastly weaker state party infrastructure, to convince, pressure and influence with *as much time as we need* to do it.

A focused national movement, executed state-by-state. One at a time. Not a movement of national protests or strikes that can be waited out. Not a voter initiative that can be blunted by the siren call of “the most important election of our lifetimes” and “wasted votes.”

And *when* we succeed – what happens? The US House of Representatives opens its doors to some 6,600 representatives, a veritable flash mob of just-out-of-college know-it-alls, communists, business leaders, theocrats, weirdos, libertarian bloggers, Vermont hippies, black community organizers, retired scientists, pipefitters union leaders, well-funded private equity managing partners, and probably a cultist or two, along with a well-coiffed and irritated looking Nancy Pelosi and an equally well-coiffed and irritated looking Kevin McCarthy.

You know. People. In the People's House. Imagine that.

What else happens? The change in the size of the House immediately dilutes the disproportionate power of the electoral college in small states (i.e. 100 electoral votes in a sea of 6,700) in complete concord with the integrity and original intent of our constitution.

What else? If we do it right, if the people are invested in seizing the People's House, and if the McCarthys and Pelosis of the world want to build a coalition to retain a shred of their former influence? **In exchange for the cooperation of the (I think) 10-25% of non-partied participants now necessary to make any legislation work, those participants demand in solidarity that the first law be a transition of our electoral model to a system for proportional representation in the House of Representatives.**

Yes, at first the House is *still* going to be chock full of lawyers turned GOP or DNC. Yes, you'd still have to work on the Senate. The presidency, too. Yes, if states began ratifying this 200+ year-old amendment, you'd better believe the parties would start the legislative and narrative machinery to act against it. Yes, 6,600 is an *insane* number, but more easily managed with 2020 technology than 100 would have been in 1793. Still, there is probably good reason to slim it down. A bit.

It is not THE answer, but it is AN answer. A path to break the entrenched power of the GOP and DNC. To break the two-party system. And once you break that power, it becomes feasible – at some point – to consider more challenging questions that were previously outside of our reach. We can consider more challenging questions because we will have broken the forces which presuppose the permanent existence of an electoral majority of some kind in the House. **Perhaps more importantly, we can consider more challenging questions because we will have remastered the paths to work through the legislatures of the several states to create change without relying on top-down solutions from the federal government.**

Either of those is a route which would allow the people and the states to decide if and how they are willing to move on from the current structure of the Electoral College and the election of senators, whether that takes the form of an amendment or of a coordinated, cooperative game in which states move their implementation of the Electoral College system to one of proportional representation, or the ground-up movement to drive action in state legislatures.

Then, I suppose, we will see whether we care more about the pretty stories we tell about state sovereignty or the political power we can make manifest by embracing it.

There are other routes. But if you truly want to take back your vote, I think this is the first volley.

And even if we never manage a single figurative shot in our lifetimes, recognizing the corruption embedded in our electoral system and shouting it from the rooftops will prepare the way for those who will.

FPTP delenda est. WTA delenda est.

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