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Why is Social Polarization Observed in American Society?

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WHY IS SOCIAL POLARIZATION OBSERVED IN AMERICAN SOCIETY?

By

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Abstract

American civic society is comprised of many social groups with internal identities and interests. Throughout American history, marginalized identities have been systemically disadvantaged through social institutions such as education, the economy, and government. Civic division is exemplified most clearly by political polarization, increasing as social groups strengthen calls on social reform from political measures; yet political polarization continues to rise, and society remains largely unchanged. Social polarization defines the sum of divisions between civic groups, including political polarization, serving as a generalization of the polarization observed across social dimensions. Historical recount and social theories suggest why deeply rooted systemic issues exist in the United States, however, it was unclear as to whether social polarization is attributed to an unidentified social factor or an identified social division that serves as the root of further division. Overarching social polarization was theoretically found to be quantified by three interrelated causes: wealth, deeply rooted differing identities and interests across society, and government. Class cannot be determined as the initial origin of social division in the United States; however, it intersects with identities and interests to be used as a foundation and catalyst for economic and social division since the county’s initiation. Identities and interests were also found to be in-part established by the economy but are observed to critically function comorbidly with wealth to create and exacerbate social polarization. The maintenance of wealth divisions and resulting polarization was found to be enabled and propagated by the United States government. Upper class identities and interests represent the social direction in which ideologies and wealth move to have influence over society as a result of the power from ownership over the means to labor and wage and within the
political atmosphere. The elite shape society and institutions to their benefit, causing the polarized disconnect between all other social groups and their abilities to meet their social needs.

*Keywords:* Social polarization, political polarization, politics, government, economy, class, identities, interests, collective consciousness.


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Introduction

In the United States, the civic majority has become increasingly socially divided. The state in which multiple elements of society pull apart in culmination, is observed to be the overall state of social polarization in society. Polarization in the social space is defined as the “splitting of a society into two distinct groups that are different ends of a spectrum, such as rich and poor, or white and black.” (Rogers et al., 2013) Polarization affects every dimension of society—politics, government, the economy, consciousness, and the United States as a whole.

Polarization is an observable pattern that represents underlying social issues that affect most Americans as well as, within and between social group dynamics. Social polarization is a critical issue, yet opaque in its roots. Most empirically apparent within the overall polarization, is the political atmosphere. Political polarization is a critical mirror of social polarization as citizens call for change to politicians because of social burdens that result from stark social divisions; suggesting the basic needs of social members are unfulfilled by the systems they created, fund, and uphold. However, political polarization, the divide between republicans and democrats, does not explain mass social divides across multiple dimensions of society. Society, however, has gone much unchanged, but for what reason?

The root of overarching social polarization is unknown but would provide insight as to why different spheres of society see polarization on the rise and why the political atmosphere has such tension. Social theories subjectively outline how society ought to exist, and in comparison, objective social data and historical evidence highlight the reality of American society. Gaps between subjective and objective data will propose discrepancies in society, suggesting why social polarization is increasing.
It is predicted that the powers that be, strengthened by maintenance of the current system and growth, create divisions among the civic majority—republican and democrat, white and black, male and female, etc. It is also predicted that wealth is the main function of power in American society; wielded in majority by the elite class, and economically and legally enabled by the American government. It is suspected that a relationship exists between wealth and government that produces the root of social polarization through the fulfillment of the elite class social needs and interests, over the needs of the civic majority.

Political Polarization & Social Data

Political polarization occurs in the United States as political groups foster “increasingly dissimilar attitudes toward parties and party members, as well as ideologies and policies.” Political polarization has trended upward and serves as one of the most socially prevalent and empirically tracked dimensions of polarization in the social space. Polarization in the political institution serves as the key indication towards social polarization due to the critical overlap between political values and social values.

Political polarization has statistically and qualitatively increased over time in the United States. The Public Religion Research Institute reported that “91% of Americans feel we are polarized — and 74% feel we are extremely polarized.” (Fredrick, 2020) Political data in the United States provides objective support for the divides felt in the social atmosphere. In 2014, Pew Research Institute identified that political polarization “is deeper and more extensive — than at any point in the last two decades.” The progression of political polarization identified by the
institute determined that Americans have rapidly identified with either Republican or Democratic beliefs and policy issues.

“Over the past twenty years, the number of Americans in the “tails” of this ideological distribution has doubled from 10% to 21%. Meanwhile, the center has shrunk: 39% currently take a roughly equal number of liberal and conservative positions. [...] This shift represents both Democrats moving to the left and Republicans moving to the right, with less and less overlap between the parties. Today, 92% of Republicans are to the right of the median (middle) Democrat, compared with 64% twenty years ago. And 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican, up from 70% in 1994.”

As citizens have increasingly identified with a political party, those identifying as moderate or holding mixed views have decreased. While political polarization occurs in the social context, views within the polarized groups have increased beside the political identification shift. “Since [1994], highly negative views have more than doubled: 43% of Republicans and 38% of Democrats now view the opposite party in strongly negative terms.” Increasingly negative views towards the opposing political party not only set the stage for political tension but have also changed American demographics.

“Nearly two-thirds (63%) of consistent conservatives and about half (49%) of consistent liberals say most of their close friends share their political views. Among those with mixed ideological values, just 25% say the same. People on the right and left also are more likely to say it is important to them to live in a place where most people share their political views, though again, that desire is more widespread on the right (50%) than on the left (35%).” (Pew Research Center, 2014)
It is more likely that social members belonging to a political party have social relationships with other members of the same party. It is also likely for members of a political party to desire to live in a geographic location along with others of the same party. These trends suggest that social issues represented by political beliefs have become increasingly important to American’s personal and civic lives.

The upward trend in polarization, or the occurrence of ideological uniformity towards ends of the political spectrum, indicates a social problem. Ideological uniformity is regarded as more complex than politicians and voters having dissimilar political views. Objectively, political actors are representatives of larger civic parties that debate the best way to go about achieving social success. While the values of Republicans and Democrats greatly differ, they simply represent two, among many, political perspectives that diagnose and propose remedies for optimum success of the whole American society that citizens rally behind. What is most important within polarization, are not the specific political parties and beliefs but rather, why there has been a social reaction of political radicalism and why it has consistently trended upward.

Polarization presents in society as citizens voicing, increasingly louder, to representatives they believe represent their perception of society as well as its ideal structure and function. The residual consequence of unmet needs and tension between the spectrum ends is conflict. As ideological uniformity rises internally, on society's surface, feelings of tension Republicans and Democrats hold for the opposing ideology increase both in quantity and magnitude. As an ideology is progressively internalized by a population, negative views towards the other ideology
increase creating a cyclical cycle of tension and conflict, and nearly confirms that polarization will indefinitely increase.

Government Efficacy

The purpose of the political institution to enact its prescribed duties and the authority it is granted to accomplish the prior, raises a basic question of whether current social structure and function meets social needs; whether the extensions of society have lost touch with the grassroots of society. Is it effective for citizens to believe in the current political system? If elemental needs of survival are not proven to be met by institutions, then growing political action and negative opposing views may be an unnecessary fault line in collective unity against reforming the current system in place to better meet their needs. Social data on the state of society indicates whether the political institution and its extensions accomplish prescribed goals.

Poverty is the crowning downfall in squashing the paradoxical relationship between the United States and its pride in wealth and hegemonic stature. Poverty rates are indicative of the existing population's ability to survive and are crucially correlated to outcomes in health, education, income, and quality of life. Mitigation efforts towards poverty are through public welfare expenditures, including cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income, and other payments made directly to individuals as well as payments to physicians and other service providers under programs like Medicaid. “In past decades, Western welfare states have devoted considerable effort to increasing the living standards of the least well off in society. However, in spite of these efforts, a substantial number of citizens in welfare states do not experience socially acceptable minimum
standards of living. Therefore, poverty alleviation is a continuing social policy concern in Western capitalist societies. The persistence of poverty in Western welfare states raises a fundamental question: do welfare states achieve any success in reducing poverty?” (Kim, 2000)

To first present a broad perspective, the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports, that “The average relative poverty rate (i.e., the share of people living with less than half the median disposable income in their country) was 11.7% in 2016 (Figure 6.4).” In comparison across the world's wealthiest nations, “Poverty rates were highest in Israel and the United States at almost 18%, while poverty in Denmark and Finland affected only 5-6% of the population.” (OECD, 2019) Narrowing the perspective on poverty to a national scope, The U.S. Census Bureau’s Annual Social and Economic Supplements (CPS ASEC) reports “The official poverty rate in 2020 was 11.4 percent, up 1.0 percentage point from 10.5 percent in 2019.” Notably, “This is the first increase in poverty after five consecutive annual declines.” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022)

Despite past efforts beginning in the 1960’s and current efforts in reducing poverty, the U.S. holds one the highest poverty rates of wealthy nations globally, and an upward trending national rate. In addition, the decline in the U.S. poverty rate seen since efforts in the 1960’s, the span prior to its recent increase, is not drastic in reflection of increasing mitigation efforts. “From 1977 to 2019 (in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars), state and local government spending on public welfare increased from $146 billion to $744 billion (411 percent increase).” Being, “the largest spending growth of any major expenditure program over the period.” (Urban Institute, 2020)
Deeper into the relationship between public welfare efforts and the rate of poverty, data presents the largest change in poverty to be occurring within the impoverished populations’ demographics. “Since President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the War on Poverty 50 years ago, the characteristics of the nation’s poor have changed: A larger share of poor Americans today are in their prime working years and fewer are elderly. In addition, those in poverty are disproportionately children and people of any age who are black, Hispanic or both.” (Krogstad, 2020) A highlight of current trends are presented by The U.S. Census Bureau’s data on income, earnings, income inequality, and poverty based on information collected in the 2021 and earlier CPS ASEC report. These statistics reflect both the shift and worsening of the impoverished demography, as well as the increasing national rate of poverty and its disproportionate effects.

• “In 2020, there were 37.2 million people in poverty, approximately 3.3 million more than in 2019.”

• “In 2020, 17.9 million people were in deep poverty. Meaning, 48 percent of all people in poverty earned less than half of the poverty threshold. Alternatively, 12.6 million people lived just above the poverty line.”

• “The poverty rate among children also remains high and grew much more in 2020 compared to the poverty rate for older Americans. In 2020, 16.1 percent of children under 18 were in poverty. Poverty rates for the elderly were lower, in large part, because of Social Security. However, while one-third of the 2020 federal budget went toward health and retirement benefits for adults, only 7.4 percent was spent on children.” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022)
Based on the prior statistics, the overall rate of poverty in the United States across time, is the highest in decades and appears abnormally high in comparison to other wealthy nations and mitigation efforts. Data reports a lack in the ability of millions of Americans to survive, meaning the social systems in place are not constructively valid. In addition, historically disadvantaged groups become further misplaced at higher rates.

Citizen Effectiveness

The impact of civilian voices in the political atmosphere is drawn into question as citizens are statistically moving closer towards ideological uniformity. This is because the championship of either polar end of the figure results in the representatives of their favor fulfilling their outlined and promised duties. By this direction, the question is recentered to whether political actors are aligned with majority citizen views and take initiative in constructing policy according to majority citizens views and needs, especially over a period of time. The reason why polarization increases may be unimportant as the triumph of either end is ineffective in producing assumed results.

“The first three columns of table 3 report bivariate results, in which each of three independent variables (taking all interest groups together, for now) is modeled separately as the sole predictor of policy change. Just as previous literature suggests, each of three broad theoretical traditions—Majoritarian Electoral Democracy, Economic Elite Domination, and interest-group pluralism—seems to gain support. When taken separately, each independent variable—the preferences of average citizens, the preferences of economic elites, and the net alignments of organized interest groups—is strongly, positively, and quite significantly related to policy change. Little wonder
that each theoretical tradition has its strong adherents. But the picture changes markedly when all three independent variables are included in the multivariate Model 4 and are tested against each other. The estimated impact of average citizens’ preferences drops precipitously, to a non-significant, near-zero levels. Clearly the median citizen or “median voter” at the heart of theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy does not do well when put up against economic elites and organized interest groups. The chief predictions of pure theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy can be decisively rejected. Not only do ordinary citizens not have uniquely substantial power over policy decisions; they have little or no independent influence on policy at all.” (Gilens et al., 2014)

The data posits that citizens' political voice is drowned by the interests of the economic elites, or wealthy, and organized interest groups such as lobbyist parties. It contends that not only do civilians have little control over political decisions, but that decisions such as legislation are also not made to reflect citizens' social needs and interests. This data also importantly highlights the influence that the economy and organized interest groups have on the whole of society.

Political polarization has critically increased resulting in two ideological uniform political groups, mirrored by increasingly negative views held towards the opposing ideology. The involvement of social matters in the political space and changes to the social space because of politics, suggest social issues are the underlying proponent behind ideological uniformity. The current government and political system have not been effective in producing basic social success, or the social structure has not been shown to meet social needs, as seen through social issues such as increasing poverty rates. The ability citizens have to affect the political space was not proven to be effective or outweigh the power interest groups hold in political changes. It
seems that social issues brought to the political space for resolution by citizens do not result in positive change, while social issues fester and increase tension between Americans and the political system, and conflict between political groups.

Theoretical Framework

Political polarization is key in observation of overall social polarization and its underlying causes because of the government's central role in society, and politics being citizens’ conventional outlet for social change. The occurrence of social polarization contradicts social goals of success, indicating a relationship of mutual exclusivity between social success of the majority and measurements of social polarization.

“Unemployment, inflation, growth, poverty, fertility and so forth: these objective phenomena, and the statistics that measure them, support description of social and economic situations, denunciations of social injustices and justifications for political actions. As references, these objects must be perceived as indisputable, above the fray. In fact, the traditional approach of public statistics was based on the assumption of independence, between measured reality and a measurement process: statistics was considered to be able to ‘objectively’ embrace the analyzed phenomenon. So, the problem concerning the relationship between ‘reality’ and ‘its measurement’ seems to be methodological.” (Antontelli, 2016)

In the context of social analysis, objective aspects are those that can be observed such as patterns of action, and empirical data. Observation of increasing polarization through data perceives an issue in societies grassroots because the occurrence of polarization across society defies social (including institutional) goals.
Social data serves to measure and highlight where in society polarization exists, and to what extent; systemic divisions such as the economy, age, and race, serve as empirical indications of polarization and issues within the United States. Investigation of social theory serves to explain why social polarization may exist in a society. Analyzing objective social data in comparison to subjective social theories will suggest the root of social polarization.

Literature Review: Origins of Polarization

Philosophical, sociological, and psychological theories speculate the synthesis of society and social elements such as government and the economy, as well as how, and why these social factors have changed and developed. The state of nature, social contract theory, class theory, and the concept of collective consciousness, propose key facts and predictions about society regarding social elements critical to the United States. A comparative analysis between social data reflecting current society, and social theories, can explain overall political polarization and the wider scope of social polarization.

The State of Nature & Society

Early political works written by Enlightenment thinkers discussed the state of nature, or the natural state of man. The state of nature is the theoretical existence of man prior to the formation of society and civilization. A state of nature transforms into a society when people act in unification that aids their immediate needs and self-preservation as an organized group. The United States is a society yet is lacking a central point of unification as observed by the occurrence of polarization. The United States was founded upon values established by
Enlightenment thinkers, making these fundamental theories insightful in comparison to the current structure and function of society. The existence of a basic society, compared against its alternative, a State of Nature, highlights differences between characteristics that define a society and social elements that do not facilitate the former. What makes American society—society?

Enlightenment thinker John Locke believed the natural state was individualistic but balanced on the notion of natural rights. He believed that man is born with the same potential for strengths and weaknesses, and contented that law kept order among individuals. In the transformation of an individual to a group, or society, Locke proposes the occurrence of change to depend on consent from among all social members.

“Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it. . . . This any number of men may do, because it injures not the freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the liberty of the state of nature. When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest.”

Locke argues the actions of society forming a collective can ease the struggle to survival that all men face. Society in Locke’s perspective is optimally defined to be a union among men founded upon bettering of themselves.
Like Locke, Thomas Hobbes believed that survival was the most prevalent and valued issue among individuals. Unlike Locke, Hobbes believed the struggle was so great that conflict arose. Hobbes’s publication of Leviathan in 1651 described the struggle of survival man faces being in the state of nature.

“Men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war is of every man against every man… In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Hobbes believed the natural state of man is one with survival that concerns every individual, with the idea of equality founded on the conditions of the same struggle for survival. He also believed that the whole of society is cyclically stunted by being unable to have concerns beyond survival. Society in Hobbes's perspective is an aid to survival struggles and propelent towards social progression.

Beyond the birth of a society, within a state of social organization, Rousseau, alike to Locke, contended that social success is only negated by man’s lack of efforts towards social goals, such as actions of corruption. This is like Hobbes’s belief that within a state of nature, individuals struggling to meet their needs can conflict against the natural rights of others in order
to meet needs. Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted corruption to primarily occur when individuals began to claim property.

“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say this is mine, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors Mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: Beware of listening to this impostor; You are lost if you forget that the fruits are everyone's and the Earth no-one's.”

Those positioning themselves on corruption are immoral actors yet gain benefit through aspects of society they claim as their own, but morally have no rights to. Those who have taken society by force, have power over others by an unfair resource advantage. With some rise of power, Locke and Rousseau’s contention was on the necessity of a social contract, in which individual members of society consent to give up some individual rights to the entire community. Despite the terminology, nothing is truly given up because “When the whole people decrees for the whole people, it is considering only itself.”

The state of nature is a crucial comparison to the current state of society in the United States because it exhibits basic elements of society to compare against social elements in the United States, and enlightenment values that have been endorsed since the birth of the nation. Enlightenment thinkers agree that the force of the collective can be as much of a threat to man as men can benefit from it. Locke contends that only man has the ability to use the power wielded by the collective against himself because of natural rights. Similarly, Rousseau believes this threat is first executed by individuals' claim of property that belongs to all, or privatization of
society. The theme between these concepts seems to be the consequential reaction from some men reverting to individualism in a society while still gaining benefits from efforts of the whole.

Natural Rights

Natural rights, or “constitutional rights”, or “human rights” are indicated to be endangered by the effects of polarization where man takes ideological and reactionary measures against each other despite social success, rather than pooling efforts to reach social success. In addition, increasing militarization and incarceration rates as a repression of conflict in the United States suggests public violation of natural rights. Overall, social, and political tensions, by both citizens and the government in action and reactionary terms that vary in escalation, produce an array of effects that infringe upon natural rights.

A recent example showcases some current threats to Natural Rights. In January of 2021, shortly after Joe Biden’s electoral victory, a civic coup d’état was staged by the Republican political party in hopes of blocking Congress’ verification of Biden's victory. Prior to, in mid-December, Trump began posting to social media about an organized rally in protest against Biden’s believed to be inadequate victory, for instance stating, “Be there, will be wild!” The rally turnout was estimated to be between 2,000 to 2,500 citizens. The lack of conventionalism of the rally was fueled by Trump issuing statements such as, “fight like hell” or “you’re not going to have a country anymore.” “Although Trump did not explicitly direct those in attendance to commit illegal acts, his generally incendiary language plainly suggested to many in the crowd that they would be justified in violently attacking the Capitol and members of Congress to prevent Biden from becoming president.” (Duignan, 2021). As a result, mobilized citizens
marched and forced past police officers into the Capitol building. Rioters demolished the architecture of the Capitol building, and violence left many injured with five dead and two police officers later committing suicide, as well as putting other citizens outside and inside the capitol building at high risk (NPR, 2021). In response to the violence, the government authorized the mobilization of 6,200 members of the National Guard (U.S. DOD, 2021). Eventually, the riot was repressed, the Republican party condemned the day's violence, and nearly 800 rioters faced charges including conspiracy, disorderly conduct, and obstructing or impeding an official proceeding. This event exemplifies social tension, or unrest that escalated to mobilization and acts of political violence, inhibiting citizens’ natural rights by the hand of citizens themselves.

In accordance with literature, the concept of social unrest or, “dissatisfaction, originates in a misfit between personal expectations and perceived reality. The expectations as well as the perception of how these expectations are met in reality depend on social and cultural norms and values. [...] The perception or actual experienced harm induced by an event or an activity is directly related to the degree of people’s dissatisfaction.” This was represented by supporters of President Trump aligning themselves with his values and revolting in response to their belief Trump won a second term. Social unrest is best conceptualized as “more a process of escalation than a finite state of the world” because of its expression through stepwise levels of increasing social dissatisfaction. A reference for significant elements of sequential escalation of social unrest was established by researchers.

“We assume that people who will engage themselves publicly on any subject have to be dissatisfied with their situation or perceive a problem that they would like to address. Even if people are dissatisfied nothing will happen unless that dissatisfaction is displayed in some kind
of public arena. Unsatisfied people have to become active (e.g. organization of protests). If public expression of dissatisfaction and the organization of protest does not help to improve the situation the probability for further social mobilization increases. Social mobilization goes beyond expressing dissatisfaction. It comprises all activities that require an organizational effort to concentrate forces, to develop and enact a strategy for gaining public attention and for putting pressure on those who are targeted to make changes. In the course of this process, activities may get more and more radical, in particular if these collective protest actions are ignored or even oppressed (examples may be wild strikes, regional boycotts or blockades). Then the continuum enters the next step: violent outbreak. This can ultimately lead to civil war.” (Jovanovic et al., 2013)

The capitol storming represents social unrest, but within it, also showcases dissatisfaction to the extent of citizens organizing and mobilizing to create change, following acts of political violence. Social unrest poses serious threats to natural rights and is congruent with John Locke’s stance that “Natural law forbids us to violate others’ natural rights. To say that a right is "natural" is to say that it is a self-evident, pre-legal or moral right. This means that it exists prior to and independently of the legal and political institutions of any given society and that it is neither necessary nor possible to derive it from some allegedly more basic moral principle (e.g. the principle of utility).” The consequences of infringing upon natural rights stems from the basis that freedoms and liberties of society are stripped, even for the violators, because the morals of humanity have departed from social morals and values. Natural rights, a fundamental concept the United States was founded on, of the citizens outside of those rallying (Capitol building employees, law enforcement, citizen bystanders etc.) seem to have been violated. The case of the
Capitol storming showcased citizens banded together for external protection, and who hold all power to act in peace, becoming their own greatest enemy through violating the nation’s Capitol building and other citizens safety. The violence observed was unconventional of any protest and a crucial emphasis of the consequences of polarization.

Privatization

Social threats towards natural rights extend beyond freedoms, to the physical grounds of society being citizens' bodies and the geographical land, as held by Rousseau. Natural rights can be physically rather than conceptually repressed, by for instance the discussion of limitations of freedoms through the prior acts of violence and destruction, can take more defined and legal forms and be discussed in a physical context.

Rousseau believed a direct democracy best protects natural rights because it conceptually reflects the entirety of citizens agreeing on legislation that governs themselves and the entirety of society. The importance of the concept is larger than government structure because it represents the coherency between social members and the society that is a reflection of them. A consequence to a lack of the prior coherency is highlighted by Rousseau stating, “In a well governed state, there are few punishments, not because there are many pardons, but because criminals are rare; it is when a state is in decay that the multitude of crimes is a guarantee of impunity” Theoretically, violating legislation under a direct democracy would only occur by those not sharing collective goals because the needs of all should be represented under decisions made by all. In the alternative occurrence of many violating legislation, it becomes clear legislation is not representative of many. In the case of the Capitol storming, while Trump
supporters were not morally correct for inciting violence, they acted with awareness of possible risks to their own rights such as incarceration and executed their will due to a perceived necessity of gaining rights. Outside of this case, viewing the whole society, the United States is observed as having the highest number of incarcerated adults in the world (2,121,600 in adult facilities in 2016), and the highest incarceration rate in the world (655 per 100,000 population in 2016) (Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). The high rate showcases that those who break the law, by either moral perception or necessity, have a separate ideology from society or that society produces conditions in which some struggle to survive, both existing at alarming rates. By Rousseau’s ideology, the United States government is not valid in purpose by the rate of criminalization, whereby it subjects citizens to law not in their interest and that they did not consent to. This represents a violation of natural rights in a physical context as citizens have been confined to incarceration or have their actions restricted because of criminalization. The nation does not reflect a “well-governed state” in which its concept of government violates natural rights.

Rousseau also contended that man limited their own natural rights by the theme of property privatization. Rousseau believed this occurred by man claiming ownership of property, however, this concept has evolved over time with economic and political interests as well as the digital atmosphere. “The empirical literature has always been divided on the question of relative efficiency of public and private enterprises. Until very recently, the balance of intellectual opinion has supported the position that ownership matters much less than market structure; it is competition that induces efficient behaviors” (Megginson & Netter, 2000). In modern society, man claiming ownership over elements of society such as land and the economy, only benefits
one and limits the majority to access the property. Privatization serves as a consequence in the United States, due to the social value that wealth holds. The goals of privatization to reduce labor costs and maximize profits derive from capitalist ideology that necessitates wealth. As a result of the structure of the economy within society, “the way in which cities, school districts, states, and the federal government deliver things like education, social services, and water profoundly affects the quality and availability of these vital goods and services. In the last few decades, efforts to privatize public goods and services have helped fuel an increasingly unequal society.”

“The introduction of private interests into public goods and services can radically impact access for certain groups. In some cases, privatization can create parallel systems in which one system propped up by private interests typically serves higher income people, while another lesser quality system serves lower-income people. In other cases, the creation of a private system siphons funding away from the public system meant to serve everyone. In some situations, poor individuals and families can lose access to a public good completely. All these cases increase socioeconomic segregation, which often results in racial segregation. When they are privatized, public goods that were meant to serve everyone can morph into separate and unequal systems that further divide communities and perpetuate inequality.” (ITPI, 2016)

The subsequent impact of privatization is exemplified by the introduction of charter schools to the education institution in rivalry to public schools. Charter schools are publicly funded but independently organized to give schools the “freedom to design classrooms that meet their students' needs” (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools). However, research observes that charter schools perpetuate inequality in allegiance with properties of privatization.
“Research from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA documents the racial and socioeconomic segregation that occurs in charter schools. Their 2010 analysis found that of the 40 states, the District of Columbia, and several dozen metropolitan areas with large enrollments of charter school students, charter schools were more racially isolated than neighborhood public schools in almost every state and large metropolitan area. [...] Seventy percent of African American charter students attend schools where 90%-100% of the students are from underrepresented minority backgrounds” (UCLA, 2020)

In contrast to segregated charter schools, the public school system suffers due to a lack of funding. The education institution’s part in funding charter schools bears a large cost, financially, by diverting funds away from mainly minority students in public schools, and by the role of enabling segregation and systematic inequality in diverting funds towards charter schools.

“The school district estimated in 2014 that charter schools take $14.9 million each year from neighborhood schools. This means that the traditional public schools in the district, which contain higher proportions of lower-income students, students of color, and more expensive-to-educate children (such as those with disabilities) are financially strained, as the district is unable to reduce its spending proportionally with the loss of charter students due to unavoidable fixed costs. Unfortunately, this financial loss hurts the public school district’s ability to provide quality education to its remaining students.” (ITPI, 2016)

The data suggests that the transfer of public domain into private ownership is perpetually harmful to the majority of students enrolled in the education institution. This case is congruent with Rousseau’s belief on how natural rights come to be violated and highlights further effects of this concept with the modernization of society.
In discussing what makes society a society, to explain what defines American society, and where faults must lie in society to observe such polarization, there are some key findings. The Enlightenment thinker’s prophetic antitheses of society materialized by violations of natural rights and increasing privatization. Here, Locke’s consequential warning of man turning on himself as a result of the structure they created is observed by members of society storming the capitol as an attempt to gain rights by the hands of destruction of society and other men. Rousseau's main warning of men exploiting property of society for their own interests is also observed as social data highlights mass social polarization for instance, by educational segregation. Natural rights across the sum of social members of the United States were in violation through the actions of civic men themselves, high incarceration rates in the United States, and the privatization of the education institution.

Social Contract Theory & Government

The structure of society and organization produces a public body, or a functioning organism comprised of institutions. This body is separate from individual citizens themselves but is representative of the sum of all citizens. Institutional extensions of society are supported by and represent the whole community, as well as define the social structure and function of society. “Social institutions are mechanisms or patterns of social order focused on meeting social needs, such as government, economy, education, family, healthcare, and religion.” (Lumen, 2021). Government is most institutionally prominent among others as it is responsible for societies organization, including other extensions of society and creating and enforcing social rules.
“What, then, is the government? An intermediary body established between the subjects and the sovereign for their mutual communication, a body charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of freedom, both civil and political.”

The United States political institution has been established with certain purposes since the country's adoption of the Constitution or theoretical adoption of a Social Contract. Government is designed by social contract theory to externally secure, and not internally infringe upon, citizens’ natural rights. Social contract theory is based on the concept of consent between citizens and the political system—which is an extension of society, and thus citizen’s own power. The government is given power by individuals who exchange the rights to fulfill their own needs and security for the government having the authority to do so over the whole society. Locke highlights this consensual exchange to be beneficial to the whole society.

“Having created a political society and government through their consent, men then gain three things which they lacked in the State of Nature: laws, judges to adjudicate laws, and the executive power necessary to enforce these laws. Each man therefore gives over the power to protect himself and punish transgressors of the Law of Nature to the government that he has created through the compact.”

While some rights are given up by citizens to the public body for the benefit of maximizing protection from survival and efficiency of fulfilling needs for the whole community, alternative to what given up implies, Rousseau contends:

“The social pact, far from destroying natural equality, substitutes, on the contrary, a moral and lawful equality for whatever physical inequality that nature may have imposed on mankind; so that however unequal in strength and intelligence, men become equal by covenant and by right.”
Rousseau highlights that government enforces a form of equality that diminishes the influence of natural strength and intelligence from determining social equality as it would in the natural state of man. In order for government to act as a social equalizer, some individual rights must be given up, such as one’s free will to thieve or murder to gain a survival advantage. In exchange for free will, no citizen should struggle for equality among others and all citizens should be protected under the government.

Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau postulate great benefits of the social contract, however, there are two prerequisite factors in which the Social Contract is contingent upon. The first factor is consent between citizens and government. Enlightenment thinkers critically warn that if the relationship becomes nonconsensual, then society is no longer posited for the people that comprise it, and rather for the benefit of the group in power. The second factor is on the citizens' relation or involvement to the structure and function of society they exist within. Rousseau states that “As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State "What does it matter to me?" the State may be given up for lost.” (Social Contract, Rousseau) This is because citizens have forgotten both their purpose as members of society and their government's purpose as an extension of them.

Evidence of society's polarized state suggests that the American government is not able to maintain the freedoms of all social members, and some natural rights are violated. The goal of modern politics, policy, and all institutional extensions of society, is to preposition and guide--or frame--society into succeeding. The political system is, however, at the front of many polarized issues where some social groups grapple with success. Government represents the central social institution because of its legitimizized authority gained through protective abilities over society as
outlined in Social Contract theory. Its power extends a grand narrative by commanding the
count of society and other institutions, as well as being the conventional method in which
citizens seek social change. In seeing society pull apart, the validity of the American social
contract is critical to verify.

The United States not only bolsters itself upon the spirit of social contract but also obeys
to legal social contracts such as the Constitution and laws. In Locke’s “Men’s Uniting into
Common-Wealths” (par. 124), he imagines the state in which the social contract is violated.
“When the executive power of a government devolves into tyranny, such as by dissolving the
legislature and therefore denying the people the ability to make laws for their own preservation,
then the resulting tyrant puts himself into a State of Nature, and specifically into a state of war
with the people, and they then have the same right to self-defense as they had before making a
compact to establish society in the first place. In other words, the justification of the authority of
the executive component of government is the protection of the people’s property and well-
being, so when such protection is no longer present, or when the king becomes a tyrant and acts
against the interests of the people, they have a right, if not an outright obligation, to resist his
authority. The social compact can be dissolved and the process to create political society begun
anew.”

Violation of the social contract begins by “denying the people the ability to make laws for their
own preservation” which is objectively observed in the primary polarization data where citizens
are shown to have little impact on policy and the resulting fulfillment of their needs.

When the government is no longer for the benefit of maintaining the freedom of all social
members, Locke imagines that society is subsequently unraveled by violation of the social
contract. Natural rights become disproportionately accessible across social groups as the government no longer acts as the equalizer among men. As a result of the freedoms of all social members lacking protection, groups in society become more polarized by conflicting to establish their rights.

Social polarization among racial groups, for instance, is observed to occur because of unmet needs, social disadvantages, and threats from racism and white supremacy that the Black American community currently faces. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is an “international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, especially in the form of police brutality.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021). What fuels the purpose of the BLM movement is empirically striking, researchers observe “The highest rate of deaths from police violence occurred for Black Americans, who were estimated to be 3.5 times more likely to experience fatal police violence than white Americans.” Disproportional violence and mistreatment by the state is also discovered to be worsened by false data published by the United States government.

“Researchers estimate that the US National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), the government system that collates all death certificates in the USA, failed to accurately classify and report more than 17,000 deaths as being caused by police violence during the 40-year study period.” Accounting for “More than 55% of deaths from police violence in the USA from 1980-2018”. This issue disproportionately underestimates the prevalence of police brutality on Black Americans and suggests motivations for doing so are linked with the United States’ history of racism and are in allegiance with federal officers.” (IHME, 2021)
Not only is the state taking part in racial violence, but higher systems of authority in government enable racial violence, all together enabling and empowering beliefs of white supremacy that serve as the fundamental basis of the latter.

The persistence of racially charged ideology, enabled to the extent in which violence is erected by both citizens and the state, poses a severe threat to the well-being and lives of Black Americans and disables conventional routes towards establishing anti-racist policy. The existence of the Black Lives Matter movement and its properties proves a direct violation of social contract theory as Dr. Kajsa Hallberg Adu, professor of social contract theory, states, “The social contract, even in its cruelest, most authoritarian form…has one caveat -when your life is threatened…when your life does not matter to the leadership, the social contract no longer exists. You are back in the state of nature.” (Ammara, 2020) Not only are Black lives proven to not be protected by the government, but the cultural movement for human rights, or natural rights, is also repressed by the state's exacerbation of the issue and authority of the ability to act with solvency but failing to do so.

The government's repression of human rights, for instance in protests, is a separate violation to the social contract and another factor perpetuating inequality, but also a result of the prior racial inequality and violence. Data on state efforts to repress protests establishes a case for disabling citizens from political participation, stripping their ability to affect politics and society, as well as denying a need to reform human rights violations.

“Floyd’s death while in the custody of Minneapolis police launched one of the largest waves of civil unrest — and arrests — in the nation since the Vietnam War. In the first two weeks, police arrested more than 17,000 people in the 50 largest cities that had organized protests, according to
a Post survey of news releases, arrest reports and aggregate data provided by police.” (Ramsey & Kornfield, 2020)

Incarceration has served as a non-violent method in disabling citizens from the political atmosphere and inhibiting their efforts towards reform while further burdening individuals with the criminal system. Alternatively, violent methods are observed to take extreme measures and use excessive force against civilians.

Reported “instances of police brutality against civilians and journalists during anti-racism protests have occurred in the past five months (June to October 2020), according to data collected by Bellingcat and Forensic Architecture and analyzed by the Guardian. The database shows more than 1,000 violations, including:

- more than 500 of instances of police using less-lethal rounds, pepper spray and teargas;
- 60 incidents of officers using unlawful assembly to arrest protesters;
- 19 incidents of police being permissive to the far right and showing double standards when confronted with white supremacists;
- five attacks on medics;
- and 11 instances of kettling.” (Gabbit et al., 2020)

Civic Participation & Commitment

Enlightenment thinkers also posit the social contract on civic involvement in society, making voter turnouts a foundational point of observation. Voting is a critical civic duty because it is intended to represent the citizens' voice in the political atmosphere that determines aspects of society, including their lives. The atmosphere of voting, however, appears socially polarized by political ideology and has relieved few social issues.
Data on political involvement highlights a historically low voter turnout for presidential elections in the United States, totaling 62% of the eligible voting population in the nation (University of Florida, 2021). While this rate sits above half of the population, past elections have seen lower, such as 54.8% in 2012. In addition, midterm elections see even lower rates of about 40% votes (FairVote, 2020).

While data suggests low political engagement in the civic sphere, there are significant limitations many face in becoming civically engaged. It was found that “As income and education levels increase, so does participation in a wide range of political activities, in particular, working with fellow citizens to solve community problems; attending political meetings; taking part in a civic or political group; attending a political rally or speech; working or volunteering for a political party or candidate; making political contributions; or getting in touch with public officials.” (Smith et al., 2020). In contrast to the low overall voter turnout, data supports the latter statement, as “In the 2008 presidential election, 80% of adults from families earning at least $100,000 a year voted, while only 52% of adults from families earning $20,000 or less cast a vote, according to data from the Census Bureau.” (CNN, 2012). The wealthy and educated are more likely to vote and participate in the community overall because economic ability to politically contribute and dedicate time away from labor and because "People with more income are likely to feel like they have more at stake in terms of taxes, public services and various benefits," said Lane Kenworthy, professor of social and political science at the University of Arizona. This effect alternatively leaves "People with lower incomes more likely to feel disillusioned, because they tend to feel like policy never changes."
In addition to social and economic voting limitations, intentional voter suppression also limits the ability of Americans to be civically engaged, which also disproportionately affects minority groups. Suppression efforts range from strict voter identification laws, criminal convictions, deadlines on voting, polling locations, to redistricting (ACLU, 2020). Despite recently higher voter turnout in the 2020 election, voter suppression exists systematically with the same consequences proportionally applied to the higher turnout. The concept of voter suppression is proven by voter results showing that legal voting policy systemically limits minority populations from voting. Some statistics on voting highlight the result of suppression methods:

- “Across the country, 1 in 16 Black Americans cannot vote due to disenfranchisement laws.
- In 2018, Latinx and Black Americans were twice as likely as whites to be unable to get off work while polls were open.
- 25 percent of voting-age Black Americans do not have a government-issued photo ID.” (ACLU, 2020)

The social contract has been proven to be broken by both the government's infringement upon natural rights and enabling of voting limitations, including intentional federal suppression, that result in disproportionately low minority turnouts. The states’ enabling of racial violence as well as being perpetrators of charged violence against minorities, especially Black Americans, at a disproportionate rate degrade the consensual and protectionary clause of the social contract. Social issues limiting income, and subsequent overall wealth as a result, are also shown to limit the ability of the civic body to engage politically. In an underlying layer, the social wealth divide
is shown to disproportionately limit minority groups and enable elite members to be
“overrepresented in the political process simply because they're more likely to participate in
it.” (Ingraham, 2021)

In discussing the purpose of government and what the social contract theorizes ought to
occur, the observation of social polarization is contradictory to the government's role in
maintaining the freedom of all and for the ability of all to exercise natural rights. Under the
United States government, polarization seems to occur as a result of differences in rights among
groups in society. The main factor of consent between government and citizens has absolved as
first, men can no longer make laws towards their self-preservation against the ability of interest
groups to effect policy for the benefit of its preservation. Secondarily, access to natural rights
have become critically unequal as the government fails to socially equalize men and thus devote
protection to all, as observed in the BLM movement case. And third, voting to determine future
social outcomes is limited by wealth and government policy. Social elements that divide men are
shown to be upheld by the government which exacerbates social polarization as men also
attempt to re-establish or exercise their rights through the political atmosphere.

Class Theory & Capitalism

Marxian class theory articulates the consequences of social and political elements of
society built upon and dependent on economic value. While his theory is mainly concerned with
class oppression and the resulting conflicts, the basis of his theory, and those conducive of, are
built on the apprehension of the socially adopted economic framework of capitalism--its goals
and what it requires from society to operate.
Capitalism is the privatization of the economic sector, characterized by capital accumulation, a minimally regulated competitive market, property ownership rights, and wage labor. Its purpose or goal is to capitalize upon or make a profit. By the same nature, social value is centered on wealth, members of society agree upon the value of wealth by the adoption and submission to a capitalist economy. Ownership of wealth becomes a necessity and is conducive to survival rates and quality of life in a society adopted by capitalism.

Capitalism inevitably produces two social classes: those who perform labor and those who own the means of production. Enveloped by capitalism, society predisposes its population to be divided by economic class and subsequent social class as a result of economic role, employment and wage. Social structure and function, as well as class identities and interests, becomes for the benefit of economic growth. Class identities and interests are a product of class divisions, conducive to the unequal distribution of wealth through the economic system of value. “It inevitably follows that a society thus divided into classes should stick together very unevenly. Members of the same class have much in common and can sympathize with one another, while members of different classes understand one another but poorly and easily become jealous and hostile. (1) This is the more true because the different classes, though very necessary to one another, usually find their immediate interests somewhat in conflict. (2) For instance, workmen heed employers to organize industry, and employers must have workmen; but in spite of this mutual necessity their immediate interests always tend to conflict, each trying to secure the largest possible share of the product of their joint effort.”

Class identities and interests separate and become divided by the existence of socio-economic class and are representative of significantly different social and cultural norms and
values that shape social perspectives. The dynamic of necessity yet conflict between classes not only shapes characteristics of class identities and interests, but prolongedly forces conflicting interaction between classes.

As the unequal ownership and distribution of wealth that creates class divisions and divergent social perspectives increases, the relativity, overlap, or commonality of class perspectives decreases. Additionally, as this divide between classes increases, the conditions for conflict also increase.

Unsimilar identities and interests become a threat towards the collective consciousness of society in the dividing nature of their existence. Due to this division and its increasing gap, the risk of higher conflict is born; infuriation of existing internal conflict between groups provokes a reaction upon society resulting in higher psychological conflict and a repetition of the cycle. In addition, there is a further consequence of unity among society. In forgetting the larger interests of society in place of class interests, the struggle between opposing classes poses two dangers described by Marx.

“First, there is a repression of social sympathies in the interest of class sympathies. People forget that they belong to the same religion, to the same nation, to the same race, and antipathies come in where society requires sympathies. If this is most conspicuous in the industrial field, it is only because this is the most prominent and the most unsettled part of our social order. Between the governing class and the governed, the learned and the unlearned, the military and the civilian classes, even between such closely allied classes as men and women, parents and children, we may observe temporarily or permanently this same consciousness of opposing interests, and something of a repression of the broader sympathies in consequence. The second result is the
natural counterpart of this, an extravagant and unreasonable development of the narrower sympathies in the interest of class solidarity. How often do workingmen or employers protect the unworthy among their number from their just deserts! How universally school-boys will protect one of their number from punishment, even though he have no standing among their number! (4) All this is due to an exaggerated sense of class importance, a feeling that class interests will suffer if any concession is made.” (Powers, 1899)

The whole that comprises society not only divides themselves by wealth systematically, but psychologically, by shifting the focus of social value from humanity to wealth. By abandoning the identity of the whole society, classes dangerously lose focus of society beyond the economy. Rising ideological conflict surrounding society and the economy are observed as polarization in the political sphere. Class opposition, as a result, facilitates a state of anxiety towards the pending championship of the other group, causing radical ideological strengthening of internal offense and external defense of the classes. Class members bolstering the existence of the group under a label of solidarity not only further affirms the existence of classes, but also accounts for the observed vertical increase in polarization.

Capitalist-adapted identity and interests do not genuinely represent the human society that capitalism utilizes to exist, and rather, predisposes the working class, that comprises the majority of society, to become alienated from society as a final consequence. In the third volume of Capital, Marx discusses the "human nature" which ought to be realized in a rationally organized society, assuming class divisions are a product, known as alienation. “According to Marx, the essence of self-alienation is that man at the same time alienates something from himself and himself from something; that he alienates himself from himself.” In breaking this
down, in Alienated Labor, Marx speaks about the four characteristics of self-alienation and its effects. Beginning with two characteristics of the alienation from labor, Marx proposes that the products of man's labor results in something unrelated to them. The thing produced is owned by the means of production, does not benefit the worker directly, and is exchanged for currency in a sum greater than total wages paid to workers. Stemming backwards, for man to be alienated from what he produces, he must also be alienated from the activity of production, or work, itself “because his own activity becomes for him an alien activity, an activity in which he does not affirm but denies himself, an activity which does not free but subjugates him.” The third characteristic is a consequence of the culmination of alienation from the product and activity, man alienates himself from all he does, or his essence. In being foreign in relation to the fruits of labor and labor production in exchange for a wage, man “Transform[s] his generic essence into a means for the maintenance of his individual existence, man alienates himself from his humanity, he ceases to be man.” The fourth characteristic is a result of man's alienation from other men, in occurrence because “Every relationship in which a man stands to himself, finds expression in his relation to other men. Thus, the alienation of man from himself manifests itself as the alienation of man from man.”

In discussing the nature of the economy, apparent polarization becomes defined in terms of economic distribution and subsequent results of unequal distribution. Capitalism exists as capitalization; its purpose is to procure a profit. The nature of capitalism places high social value upon wealth as it is needed to access survival. The nature of capitalism also polarizes society into two classes of labor, that are those who perform labor and those who own the means of labor production. By capitalism being inherent to labor division, the division of labor creates
social classes that have systematically unequal access to wealth, thus social resources, and conflict with each other as a result. Economic observation on the polarization of wealth in the United States, showcases results of labor and income division.

“The period from 1983 to 2001 was relatively prosperous for families in all income tiers, but one of rising inequality. The median wealth of middle-income families increased from $102,000 in 1983 to $144,600 in 2001, a gain of 42%. The net worth of lower-income families increased from $12,300 in 1983 to $20,600 in 2001, up 67%. Even so, the gains for both lower- and middle-income families were outdistanced by upper-income families, whose median wealth increased by 85% over the same period, from $344,100 in 1983 to $636,000 in 2001. (Figures are expressed in 2018 dollars.)” The gap has continued to grow wider in the recent century as well, increasing the distance between upper-income and lower-income families while diminishing the medial share of middle-income families. “Upper-income families were the only income tier able to build on their wealth from 2001 to 2016, adding 33% at the median. On the other hand, middle-income families saw their median net worth shrink by 20% and lower-income families experienced a loss of 45%. As of 2016, upper-income families had 7.4 times as much wealth as middle-income families and 75 times as much wealth as lower-income families. These ratios are up from 3.4 and 28 in 1983, respectively.” (Horowitz et al., 2020).

The wealth gap has continued to increase throughout time and is still rising, suggesting that the issues creating the division are also persisting. The direct result of class polarization is proven by economic data displaying middle- and lower-class economic shortcomings. For instance, shelter is one of the foundational aspects of survival, yet millions of Americans struggle to find and afford housing and millions are left homeless. For reference, in 2019, 82.3 million workers
receive minimum hourly wages, making up 58.1 percent of all eligible workers (BLS, 2020). “For 2019, the [state average] Housing Wage is $22.96 and $18.65 for a modest two and one-
bedroom flat respectively based on the "fair market rent". A worker earning the federal wage would have to put in 127 hours every week - equivalent to more than two full-time jobs - to afford a two-bedroom apartment.” (Richter, 2019). In addition to the many struggling to afford housing, approximately half a million (known) Americans live in a state of homelessness (Statista, 2021).

Corporations such as Walmart and Amazon represent a prime example of the warnings Marx had given towards capitalism and ensuing social classes. Walmart represents the largest employer in the United States and one of the largest profiters. Walmart’s labor and wage exchange is also representative of the larger economic wealth divide. “The three years of wealth data from 2007 to 2010 just provides an extreme example of how the economic fortunes of Walmart’s owners have diverged from those of typical American households. Concretely, between 2007 and 2010, while median family wealth fell by 38.8 percent, the wealth of the Walton family members rose from $73.3 billion to $89.5 billion (note that the 2007 wealth number is slightly larger than was reported at the time—to provide an inflation-adjusted comparison, I converted the 2007 wealth value of $69.7 billion to 2010 dollars using the consumer price index (the CPI-U-RS, to be specific)). In 2007, it was reported that the Walton family wealth was as large as the bottom 35 million families in the wealth distribution combined, or 30.5 percent of all American families. And in 2010, as the Walton’s wealth has risen and most other Americans’ wealth declined, it is now the case that the Walton family wealth is as large as the bottom 48.8 million families in the wealth distribution (constituting 41.5 percent of all
American families) combined.” (Curry County Democrats, 2020). While controlling the means to labor and wages, Walmart has been shown to increasingly profit off of consumers yet inhibit employees’ wages from seeing the same increase, which also in turn increases Walmart’s profits. In comparison to Walmart's profits, “Earlier this year [2021], Walmart announced it would raise wages for 425,000 employees to $13 an hour, emphasizing it would increase the company’s average hourly wage to more than $15 an hour.” (The Guardian, 2021). Further removed from the working class than Walmart’s owners, “It would take the combined wealth of 2.3 million Americans to equal the $127 billion that the Amazon co-founder is now estimated to be worth.” In comparison to Amazon's profits, “The median Amazon worker made $29,007 in 2020, according to the company's annual proxy statement.” (CNBC, 2018). Beyond the stark comparison of income between the owners of means of production and the working class, the wages paid to the majority of the working class do not fulfill survival necessities. “The living wage in the United States is $16.54 per hour, or $68,808 per year, in 2019, before taxes for a family of four (two working adults, two children).” (Nadeau, 2020). With neither of the United States’ top corporations in profit and employment paying employees a livable wage, the image of society divided by class and comorbidly by other social divisions envisioned by Marx has become a reality under the current capitalist state. The cases of Walmart and Amazon also showcase where the objective problem with capitalism lies through its application. Owners of means to production also dictating wages creates an oppressive method of control over the working class.

The stratification of wealth is also resemblant to that of the polarized state in which politics is observed, suggesting there is relationship between class and politics that is involved
with identities and interests, beyond the surface of factors like policy and media that draw class and politics together. "The association between economic inequality and political polarization is not only statistically significant but also economically meaningful. We find that a 0.1 increase in Gini coefficient [accounting for economic inequality] will lead to a 4-8% increase in political polarization when different measures of political polarization are used." (Gu & Wang, 2021). The connection between wealth stratification and political polarization shown by data highlights that when social inequality increases, political polarization also increases. The most obvious correlation between class and political polarization seems to be economic influence in the political sphere. This is corroborated by Marx’s belief that wealth opens access to resources, thus power and control, which can be exercised in the political domain. There are many avenues in which wealth reaches politics, however, campaign funds, donations, and lobbying are the most prominent. Funding towards political races have been correlated with wins, for instance, “For House seats, more than 90 percent of candidates who spend the most win. From 2000 through 2016, there was only one election cycle where that wasn’t true: 2010. In that election, 86 percent of the top spenders won.” (FiveThirtyEight, 2018). While there is no proven causality between funds and votes, advertisements, speeches, and name recognition are made possible by funding. Of the prior funding, it is important to note that the majority of it comes from interest groups and wealthy individuals. For example, “During the springtime primaries leading up to the 2016 election, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton raised about $160 million, and the super PAC Priorities USA Action raised over $55 million for her. Assuming a maximum donation amount of $2,700, approximately 73% of Clinton’s raised funds were large individual contributions.” (Davis, 2022). Outside of campaign results, interest groups and the wealthy also
influence policy by donations and lobbying. A case study on 401,557 corporate leaders and 14,807 corporations in the United States found that “donations increase by 11% when a politician is assigned to a [Congressional] committee dealing with policy issues relevant to a corporate leader’s company.” Importantly, donations are proven to be a tool of political influence as “The effect is driven by donations to MCs [members of Congress] with the greatest power in the committees.” The results of the study show “that (i) 13% of the observed gap in corporate leaders’ donations to policy relevant versus other MCs is driven by an influence-seeking motive, and (ii) the total corporate leaders’ donations that are driven by the influence-seeking motive are about 53% of the overall donations by their companies’ PACs to all MCs over the same.”

Overall, this data highlights a significant relation between the identities and interests of class and observed political polarization. For instance, the outcome of politics is influenced by the upper-class interests, if policies increase economic inequality, then polarization also increases. This data serves as an indication that class is related to politics, but most critically, that class issues have much relation to the outcome of the political polarization we see today.

While the wealth gap represents the primary issue, the internal effects of polarization among social identities and interests lead to psychological displacement of the working class from society. “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.” (Marx & Engels). Marx believed social alienation to materialize by control over mental production, done so for instance by the social value declared
on wealth, and the conditions of the division of labor on the working class, in which they have no ability to determine social value. Social alienation represents the resulting psychological detachment from one's labor, one's products of labor, and finally oneself, as the only relation labor truly has to people is "that it is a way of filling my belly and keeping a roof over my head.” Labor becomes not an expression of life, but "merely the means of self-preservation and survival." Marx states, “These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.” (Horowitz, 2020). Marx describes the working class adopting a social structure and function, both internally and externally, that represents the identities and interests of the owners of production rather than themselves. With the conditions for alienation present in modern society, it is likely the psychological toll of adaptation to capitalism is also present.

The interests of capitalism appear concurrent with the existence of social polarization as labor and wealth divides have become polarized and further produce effects of polarization. First, the wealth divide is at an all-time high and continues to rise, appearing as a shrinking middle class and growing polarization between high- and low-income classes. This is exemplified in cases of large corporations, owned by the upper class, owning the primary share of wealth in the United States as a result of ownership over the means to production of labor and control over the value of labor, and the market through wages and production. As long as wealth control is maintained, polarization in wealth will continue to increase with the rise in corporate profits that are disproportional to the increase in wages paid to the majority of the population's workers. A concurrent trend with the rise in income inequality is political polarization. This
interaction is critically caused by the wealthy’s influence of money in the political atmosphere. Campaign funding, and donations from interest groups and individual wealthy contributors to effect policy are correlated to favorable winning outcomes, suggesting subsequent policy following their class interests.

Collective Consciousness & Identities and Interests

By nature of society and social organization, society's population is theorized to share identities and interests. The spirit of overarching sameness of those in a society is known as the collective consciousness. In The Division of Labor in Society (1893), Durkheim states, "The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience." ... "It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains." (Page 79-80).

Collective consciousness is formed by social interactions in accordance with shared identities and interests of the whole society. These identities and interests are represented in society as for instance, by social norms, and laws. Collective consciousness transitions into a “determinate system,” as shared identities and interests become externally represented and enforced in society by the rules of norms and laws.

Externalized social forces project an effect back onto members of society by establishing a force that governs and binds individuals. In an individualistic sense, collective consciousness then functions as an internal governing force or social framework in perception to identify, organize, and interpret sensory information offered by social experience (Spielman et al., 2014).
Members of society look towards and obey the collective conscience system for informance, however, the group as a whole also holds the power to define the system.

Collective Consciousness ultimately explains why identities and interests are constant across a society. By the nature of a collective, members of a society ought to have similar shared identities and interests and exist within a larger society that directly reflects the majority of the sum. This mainly raises the question as to why society in the United States does not experience this phenomenon across society, as reflected by social and political polarization data. A lack in consistency of identities and interests, or overall ideology, across society signifies an absence of collective consciousness. Alternatively, collective consciousness can still be observed in ideological consistent groups, however, being those such as race, religion, and political groups that do not encapsulate the full society and often conflict.

Collective consciousness, the psychological foundations common to all human beings, is inherited from generation to generation. Thus, history plays an important role in collective consciousness as it serves as a database for memory and recollection as well as guiding social interactions.

"History," comments Hegel in Philosophy of History, "combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both res gestae (the things that happened) and historica return gestarum (the narration of the things that happened)." "This is no coincidence," he goes on to explain, for without memory of the past there is no history, in the sense of the events that are meaningful to the collective, events experienced by a collective that is aware of them. Collective consciousness presumes collective memory, as without it there is no law and justice, no political
structure, and no collective objectives. Without "history," there is no history and no state.” (Funkenstein, 1989)

As a result of consciousness reliance on the past, “Collective consciousness is heavily structured through historical referents and the practices of rituals, rites, and commemorations. In part, these serve to strengthen a common sense of the collectivity through shared history.” (Science Direct, 2015). History is important to representing and strengthening collective consciousness, but collective consciousness is also shown in cases to have an impact on the accuracy of the history itself due to social interaction. This is believed to be because “People depend on others to help them decide which experiences to forget and which to remember and what interpretation to place on an experience. People develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring, and agreeing on memories.” (Thelen, 1989). A false sense of history not only establishes the basis of knowledge to also be false in the basis of collective consciousness, but the account of history is, in an objective sense, incorrect and left up for debate among society. Polarization data proving there is a numerical absence in societies collective consciousness also prove there is a strong presence of collective consciousnesses guiding the polarized ends. Overall, societies collective consciousness seems to have absolved into different smaller group consciousnesses of identities and interests. Historical discrepancies have the ability to erode societies collective consciousness, as it is based in history, and facilitate conflict between groups of different consciousnesses as it forms current consciousness. Conflicts between polarized ends are also observed through data, however the historical discrepancies in memory and perception causing differences in consciousness is not likely limited to a single factor, but many culturally relevant issues.
To showcase the relationship between history and collective consciousness, the case of Christopher Colombus represents a worthy example. Columbus was an explorer known for opening the gates to European expansion and is celebrated with credit for being the first to discover the Americas (History Network, 2009). Christopher Columbus’ memory is preserved by historical transcription and by honor of a federal holiday in October of every year. Alternatively, the reality of Columbus’ legacy should not be credited with praise or in celebration. Historical accuracy cites Viking tribes to be the first to voyage to the Americas, and millions of indigenous people to have already inhabited the Americas. In the era of the growing International Slave Trade, Columbus opened the Americas to its consequences as well as perpetrating issues himself during colonization. Common tactics were “the use of violence and slavery, the forced conversion of native peoples to Christianity and the introduction of a host of new diseases that would have dramatic long-term effects on native people in the Americas.” (History Network, 2019). In reality, expansion meant colonization, and entailed gross harm to indigenous people and morals of humanity.

The way in which Christopher Columbus is remembered is not fully agreed upon by United States society as some celebrate him for his legacy and others cannot, in remembrance of his legacy. The way in which information about Christopher Columbus is transferred to new generations has much to do with its effect on perceptions about his legacy in current and future social interaction. One case is studied in a classroom, where students are learning about Columbus from school issued textbooks, a publicly approved transcription of history. The picture of history becomes less synonymous with its reality “when you factor in teachers and schools, which often rely on textbooks, materials, and lesson plans inundated with Anglo-American,
mono-cultural viewpoints.” (Anderson, 2015). Often, textbook accounts of Christopher Columbus leave out his legacy of genocide and colonization. The observation of different perceptions of Columbus is critical to studying collective consciousness on this issue and applying the theory of the issue to societies degrading collective consciousness.

In the case of Columbus studied in the classroom, students were instructed to first posit preconceived knowledge about Columbus in order to establish their perception on the topic prior to new information. This knowledge was then discussed by students in which they found contradictions between their perceptions.

“To the first day of our American studies classes, we distributed an opinionnaire to determine students' preconceptions about some topics they would soon study: culture, history, race and progress, and others (See Appendix A). Students chose to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the items. Then they met in small groups of four or five to try to reach a consensus on all the items. As with professional historians, this was not easy. Students tried to convince one another of the correctness of their opinions through examples from other classes, from books they have read on their own and from their lives. When the whole class reassembled, we considered the most persuasive examples different groups had come up with. [...] The discussion was especially interesting when students found contradictions in their classmates' responses. Some students announced that they had changed their minds after hearing examples from other students; other students adamantly maintained their original opinions. Either response was fine with us. [...] This activity, which was inspired by Kahn, Walter and Johannessen's Writing About Literature, allows students to interpret complex implied relationships involving
character. In this case, students were about to judge the very complicated character of Christopher Columbus.” (O’Connor & Como, 1998)

This information is crucial because it highlights first, different realms of consciousness, or perceptions surrounding the legacy of Christopher Columbus. It second, showcased the students’ reactions to disagreements in perception, with some students importantly changing their minds to agree with others. After student discussions, they were given the opportunity to read the school issued textbook to learn more and compare what they already know, from a standardized source, about Columbus. Finally, students were instructed to write letters to the textbook publishers dictating their opinion on the textbooks accuracy of historical recounts.

“After the opinionnaire debate, students read their textbook, Exploring United States History, alongside excerpts from Peter Matthiessen's Indian Country, Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States and Samuel Eliot Morrison's The Great Explorers. Students were surprised to see so much disagreement about the events surrounding Columbus's voyages, and having just debated similar issues themselves, they read with a clearer sense of purpose.” [...] “Working with the assumption that textbooks strive to offer a fair and reasonably balanced view of historical events, we next asked students to write a letter to the textbook publisher evaluating the textbook's treatment of Columbus.” [...] “On the whole the letters were severely critical of the textbook. While it is true that some students enjoyed the opportunity of bashing a school sanctioned text, the vast majority of the letters were well grounded in historical support. The text, for example, does not mention the number of Indians killed, nor does it mention the diseases Europeans brought with them to the New World. However, not all the letters were
critical. Many applauded the textbook for not judging fifteenth-century historical actors by twentieth century standards.” (O’Connor & Como, 1998)

The differences in students' responses to publishers highlight the group's different collections of consciousness surrounding perceptions of Columbus. In addition, students' perspectives that are founded in historical accuracy and differ from the textbook, not simply other students' perceptions, highlight how collective consciousness has an impact on the collective memory of accurate history. The textbooks' at least partial inaccuracy, due to a lack of information, also highlights how consciousness can be handed down incorrectly. The textbook publisher responded to students, contending page restrictions and the changing focus of school curriculums is at fault of the main discrepancies between Columbus' accurate history and what is written in the textbook. However, Past textbooks have also been shown to include different information which becomes more problematic as the information overall still lacks key characteristics on Christopher Columbus and does not transfer accurate history to students.

“On Mr. Lewin's suggestion, we looked at the previous editions of the text and found that coverage of Columbus (both in substance and in quantity) varied considerably with subsequent editions. Our 1984 edition spent 21 lines on Columbus; whereas the 1974 edition spent 110 lines, and the 1986 edition spent 55 lines. However, these editions also diverged widely on the aspects of Columbus's expeditions they focused on: The 1974 edition concentrated on navigational triumphs; the 1986 edition spent more time on Native American culture.” (O’Connor & Como, 1998)
There is little basis for students to understand the history of Columbus from the school curriculum which either leads to, or strengthens already established, inaccurate and separate collective consciousnesses on the issue.

Societies diminishing collective consciousness seem to be supported by a mirroring rise in polarized ideologies that are less consistent across the board and that conflict. The element of consciousness is at play as conflicting ideologies are echoed by increasing polarization.

The case study on Christopher Columbus has helped conceptualize societies' issues with collective consciousness by identifying the relationship that history and collective consciousness have with each other. For instance, as observed, students had preliminary disagreements in Columbus’s legacy, some were shown to depend on other’s perspectives, and when reading the textbook some students did not agree with the account of history written. Mainly, the text leaves out issues of colonization and crucial aspects of Columbus’s role in slavery and treatment of Native Americans. This serves as an example of social structure (education) predisposing society to polarized beliefs by attempting to enforce a certain historical legacy of Christopher Columbus, or separate consciousness of his legacy.

The United States is especially known for the depiction of a “melting pot,” where a variety of cultures and ethnicities have come together to form the nation. This makes it unlikely the source of polarization is a singular point of historical disagreement or dividing cultural factor. However, the existence of separate and conflicting identities and interests impact groups’ ideologies and action underlying social polarization and throughout other social dimensions such as politics and the economy. Regardless of how the collective consciousness in the United States has both, diverged into social groups and become less similar in identities and interests, the
occurrence of diverging identities and interests in society is a critical indication towards the increase in social and political polarization.

**Results**

The observation of political polarization is observed to be a mirror exhibit to social polarization because the government is central to society. Increasing political polarization serves as an indicator of increasing social polarization exercised through conflict between political ideologies and citizens using conventional methods to affect society. Politics are the method of conventional control for citizens; however, wealth was found to be the primary factor to limit citizens' effectiveness and ability to participate in politics. Political polarization is a hollow call to structures designed to benefit the interests and identities of the upper class, yet an accurate measure of social polarization. Political polarization worryingly increases because it indicates the increase of economic inequality as social issues become increasingly voiced to representatives intended to serve their interests.

The observation of social polarization and its underlying causes are observed in social elements by the nature of society itself, institutional extensions of society--mainly government, the economy, and the psychological nature of society. Discrepancies and similarities between theories and society, as well as the observation of interaction between elements of society that produce further polarization, highlight key findings in why polarization exists en masse beyond elements of society, means of current control, and solvency explanations.
In the United States, polarization seems derived from the social value of wealth because it is necessary for nearly every life opportunity, including survival. The upper-class controls elements of social structure by purchase and shapes it to their benefit resulting in inequalities such as education across racial groups. Wealth is necessary in society's structure to be exchanged for fulfilling survival needs which predisposes society to further labor and wealth polarization, as well as conflict between polarized groups. The conflict between polarized groups is represented by different interests and identities that violate the natural rights of the other group's existence, as warned by Locke. As warned by Rousseau, privatization of society is occurring by the upper class’s interests accessed by wealth.

In government, polarization seems to be created by wealth divisions and exacerbated by the government's active violations of the social contract. Interest groups’ monetary contributions to politics in order to affect policy, is greater than the power man holds to effect policy for his own self-preservation. The government fails to represent the majority of citizens and rather, upholds structures that dissolve the equality of men in the interest of the controlling group. This is shown by the state's exercise of disproportionate police brutality on Black Americans, and failure to protect the freedoms of all, by the existence of the BLM movement and repression of the movement actors. The government also fails to ensure voting equality as economic limitations and federal limits to voting allow wealthier individuals to have a larger impact on outcomes because they have access to being more statistically represented.

By the state's economic adoption of capitalism, wealth becomes of primary social value and the conditions for polarization in labor roles and income are facilitated. Capitalism is shown to also exacerbate social polarization as it produces further income inequality such as the cases
of Walmart and Amazon versus the working class, and as wealth influences the political atmosphere by determining the win outcomes of politicians and influencing policy beyond the majority of voters. Increasing income inequality positively correlates to the statistical increase in political polarization initially observed. Political polarization increases as a result of economic influence from the interests and identities of interest groups and wealthy individual contributors determining political outcomes. This produces political changes for the benefit of their interests and identities, leaving the majority of society's needs unmet by the economy. Social polarization is seen through an economic lens as a result of labor roles, employment and income, and the ability to access political participation and outweigh the political influence of interest groups.

A lack of collective consciousness across society is present as groups of polarizing ideologies are observed to increase and become less similar towards each other. Collective consciousness represents the ideological consistency of identities and interests across a group, suggesting that the rise in separate and conflicting ideologies in the United States is representative of a broken collective consciousness across the whole society. While collective consciousness derives from historical recollection, the consciousness of different social groups is present at every social dimension, primarily politics, government, and the economy through ideologies and actions such as voting and employment. Ideological differences between groups within different dimensions of society, derived from increasingly different and conflicting interests and identities, has divided the collective consciousness of the whole.

Discussion
Social polarization is best explained by the dissolution of the foundation of societies' internal and external elements, by result of three major and interrelated causes that arise from the prior research: wealth, government, and deeply rooted differing identities and interests across society. The theme of wealth is consistent throughout all aspects of society. Capitalism as the root driver of social value transforms wealth into being the focal point of existence. Identities and interests across all elements of society are established by the economy through labor division and are observed to function comorbidly with pre-acquired or generational wealth and social factors to create and exacerbate social polarization. Upper class identities and interests represent the social direction in which wealth moves to have influence over society as a result of ownership over the means to labor production and the majority of wealth. As noted by Rousseau, staking claim over social property, or otherwise, social elements the elite own, allows those in control and who have political influence over control of social property, to determine further social structure and function that benefits their identities and interests, as seen in the case of educational segregation. Control over social structure and function allows for the disproportionate control over wealth in the status quo to be maintained through labor and income division, as seen in the case of America’s large corporations. Control over social structure and function is also politically extended as wealth influences the controlling party ideology and policy for the benefit of interest groups controlled by the upper class and individual members of the upper class. Government as its own social actor, enables the elite class to have and maintain economic control, and uses the elite's wealth through campaigns, donations, and interest groups in exchange for favorable political outcomes on behalf the elite class. Citizens are limited from effecting government and future policy by wealth, yet also increasingly shout to the political
atmosphere to repair life-threatening effects of social structure and function caused by wealth polarization, resulting in little political progress and increasing polarization by conflict. Wealth inequality upheld by the government and subsequent conflicting identities and interests between the elite and working class not only answer political polarization, but also the overarching social polarization across multiple social dimensions.
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