June 2, 2016

To: Our Partners and Stakeholders

From: The Madison Initiative Team

Re: Update on our work to date and plans for a renewal of the Initiative

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The goal of the Madison Initiative is to help create the conditions in which Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for more Americans. This update memo provides an overview of our work to date and conveys our preliminary plans for how we might proceed in the future. We are sharing it with key partners and stakeholders so that you know what we have been up to, what we are learning, and the direction in which we are headed. We also want to solicit your input about our evolving plans as we prepare for a potential renewal of the Initiative by the Hewlett Foundation's board in November.

The memo begins with a recap of the origins, scope, and guiding principles of the Initiative. We then take stock of what we have learned so far regarding the prospects for partnerships with other funders, the current state of grantee capacity in the field, and the types of solutions and approaches that are most relevant for our goal. Next, we trace the evolving political landscape and consider what it entails for our efforts. From there we sketch out our emerging theory of change and five funding priorities to make it happen. The memo concludes with a description of the vital signs we will use to measure and assess our progress.

Thanks in advance for reviewing it. We look forward to constructive feedback from critical friends who can point out the blind spots and weak links in our emerging strategy.

I) The origins, scope, and guiding principles of the Madison Initiative

A functioning American democracy and legislative process matters – here in the US, of course, but also globally, given the practical and symbolic leadership role our nation plays in the world. That was the basic consideration that prompted us to begin thinking in early 2013 about the work that would become the Madison Initiative. At that point, Freedom House was observing that we were in the seventh straight year of a global "democratic recession," with more countries seeing significant declines in the political rights and civil liberties of their citizens than had experienced gains.[1] It did not help that democracy in the US was setting such a poor example. Indeed, later that year, political brinksmanship in Washington would shut down the federal government, prompting President Obama's lament that, "We're the United States of America—this is not some banana republic!"

In addition to wanting to support the democratic ideal at a fraught time in its history, we also appreciated that polarization in Washington was undermining the Hewlett Foundation's work in other domains. The foundation cannot always count on persuading government to adopt policies we favor in our different program areas, of course. However, our grantmaking in many of these areas – e.g., mitigating climate change, reducing poverty in the developing world, reforming education in the US – presumes a minimally rational and effective policymaking process in Washington

So in March 2014 we launched a three-year, $50 million exploratory effort to determine whether the Foundation could do something to alleviate the problems associated with polarization.[2] To ground the inquiry, we decided to focus our efforts on Congress, where these problems were most prominently on display and from which they were infecting other parts of the political system. Given the preliminary nature of our exploration, as well as the complex and dynamic nature of the political system, we chose to place a number of smaller bets across a range of potential intervention points in order learn where and how we might be able to have a positive impact.

Though we did not develop a full-blown theory of change, we did identify a few guiding principles to help us keep our bearings during the exploration. First, we recognized that this was a huge undertaking that would require collaboration across funders – programmatically and at the institutional level. We have been engaging with other foundations and their leaders accordingly. Second, as in any field, the assessment of the key problems and how to address them should be based on the best evidence available. We have thus sought to invest in and rely on the work of leading social scientists focused on the health of representative democracy, even when their research has run counter to the conventional wisdom of pundits or the longstanding ideals of democracy reformers. Third, given how closely divided we are as a nation, any practical solutions will require support across the political spectrum. We therefore have been working with leaders and organizations from the right, left, and center with whom we have goals in common. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Madison Initiative should remain agnostic about policy outcomes outside of democracy-enhancing reforms. To proceed otherwise would miss the point. Any assessment of a democracy's effectiveness should depend not on the adoption of particular policies, but on whether its representative institutions are addressing problems in ways the public can support.

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[1] "Freedom in the World 2013," retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2013.

[2] We identified three inter-related but distinct components to polarization: increased ideological coherence within and divergence between the Democratic and Republican parties; hyper-partisanship and the decline in institutional civility and norms of reciprocity; and legislative gridlock. For more on these components, see Nate Persily ed., *Solutions to Polarization in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 4-10.

II) What we have learned from our work so far

We are now in the home stretch of the exploratory grantmaking phase authorized by the foundation's board in March 2014. To date, we have made 140 grants totaling $40 million.[3] During this initial exploration, we have been working to answer three broad questions that the Board will consider in deciding whether a longer-term effort is warranted. First, are there solutions and approaches available that can help achieve our goal? Second, is there sufficient grantee capacity (or can we help build it) to pursue these solutions and approaches effectively? Third, are there funding partners with whom we can work to make it happen? We will tackle these questions in reverse order, beginning with those involving funding partners and grantee capacity, where we have the most confidence in our information and answers, then turning to our working hypotheses about the viability of various types of solutions and approaches.

A) Funding partners

We had several questions about foundation funding in this area as we began considering it in 2013. We knew that many different foundations were supporting different grantees on democracy-related issues. But we did not have a good understanding of who was funding whom, at what levels, and to do what? Would there be philanthropic partners we could join forces with? Where was the biggest need for more funding relative to that which already existed?

A key step toward answering these questions was an early joint effort with six other funders and the Foundation Center to create a comprehensive and freely available map of Foundation Funding for US Democracy. This data set incorporates all grants over $10,000 made to 5 categories and 18 sub-categories of democracy-related funding by the 1,000 largest US foundations, plus other funders who also submit their data for inclusion.

The good news, we discovered, is that there is a great deal of funding already flowing to support democracy in the US, and plenty of philanthropic partners to work with. To date, we have developed reciprocal relationships with roughly 20 foundations across the left, right, and center of the political spectrum with whom we compare notes on issues and organizations, jointly fund grantees, and / or undertake projects together with some regularity. This set of foundations alone makes grants totaling more than $150 million annually to support democracy-related work.[4]

Our ability to collaborate with other funders is shaped by several factors. For example, our close partnership with the Democracy Fund's Governance Initiative — which involves mutual input into each other's strategies, multiple common grantees, and jointly hosted convenings — benefits from shared goals, a common belief in the need to work with partners on both sides of the aisle, and the fact that our respective initiatives are at the same stage of development.

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[3] Details about each of these grants can be reviewed on our online grants data base at http://hewlett.org/grants/search?order=field_date_of_award&sort=desc&keywords=&year=&term_node_tid_depth_1=All&program_id=152

[4] The philanthropic institutions we have partnered with whose collective giving exceeds $150 million annually includes the following: the Arnold, Bauman, Bradley, Ford, Irvine, Joyce, JPB, Knight, MacArthur, Open Society, Peterson, Rodel, Rita Allen, and Smith Richardson foundations as well as the Carnegie Corporation, Democracy Fund, Pew Charitable Trusts, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Searle Freedom Trust, and Wellspring Advisors.

Other funding partners have different goals, are committed to working exclusively with partners on the progressive or the conservative side in order to realize specific policy outcomes, and have well-developed grant making strategies that they have been pursuing for years if not decades. In these instances, we and our potential co-funders may need to work harder to find common ground for collaboration, but in multiple instances we have been able to make it work. If foundations cannot find a way to work and get things done together in the face of disagreements over ultimate goals, how can we expect our elected representatives – accountable to much more demanding constituencies – to negotiate and compromise with each other?

Rather than get caught up in what are often subtle strategic differences with our funding partners, in the course of this give-and-take we have found it helpful to proceed in the spirit of diffuse reciprocity. This is a norm that entails we support shared infrastructure, discrete projects, and grantees with and for other funders "without demanding or expecting an immediate payback or return, knowing that…others will do the same later and that we'll all be better off in the long run as a result. Diffuse reciprocity is an attitude, a willingness to give without demanding a precise accounting of equivalent benefits for each action, albeit because others in the community do so as well."[5] If funders only support work that is completely aligned with our own (different) strategies, then our prospects for philanthropic collaboration are greatly diminished. Fortunately, we have joined a funding community in which many foundations are taking this broader view.

B) Grantee capacity

This memo describes the development and emerging strategy of a foundation initiative, but we know that ultimately it is through the work of our grantees that we will have a positive impact. We are in the business of supporting others in the achievement of their missions. Hence the question from our board about the availability of strong grantee organizations aligned with our goals. The good news is that, having made grants to 84 different organizations thus far, we can say with confidence that we have an ample number of quality grantees to support in virtually every area we have been interested in exploring.

Balanced against this strength, a challenge: in aggregate, the field of grantees that we fund has a sustainability problem arising from the prevalence of the short term, smaller, and restricted project grants they receive. Consider a recent analysis we commissioned of funding patterns in six different subfields that the Foundation Center tracks in its data base. We learned that, out of more than 2,000 grants totaling $340 million over a three-year period, only 1% of the grants and 5% of the grant dollars were devoted to general support grants of $100,000 or greater with a duration of more than two years.

A few factors drive these funding patterns. The recurring two-year electoral cycle reproduces a boom and bust funding dynamic. Many foundations working in this field have themselves articulated comprehensive strategies in support of broader policy objectives, which can increase the temptation to fund grantees to work as contractors producing carefully specified "deliverables." And importantly, many grantees in the field — from national advocates to grass roots organizers — are simply too small to absorb and make good use of large six- or seven-figure grants in a timely way.

We have seen time and again how the predominance of project funding throws grantee organizations into the nonprofit "starvation cycle." In this cycle, nonprofits submit project grant budgets

[5] Larry Kramer, "Collaboration and 'Diffuse Reciprocity,'" *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, April 25, 2014, retrieved at http://ssir.org/articles/entry/collaboration_and_diffuse_reciprocity

to funders that do not fully cover the indirect or overhead costs that are necessary for their organization to function, produce results, and sustain them over time. They do so either because they are not fully aware of their true indirect costs and / or because they assume that funders will not pay them. For their part, funders accelerate the cycle when they impose arbitrary and low caps for indirect costs or refuse to pay for them altogether.[6]

However, whether foundations deign to pay for them or not, grantees still incur these indirect costs. Indeed, a recent analysis conducted by the Bridgespan Group found that the indirect costs of six US-based advocacy organizations (four of which are Madison Initiative grantees) ranged from 23% to 61% of their direct costs. The vast majority of project funding in this field thus simply does not pay what it takes to do the work in question, leaving grantees to scramble to make up the difference.[7]

We have come to recognize the ways in which our initial funding approach was inadvertently contributing to these problems. In 2014-15, the first two full years of the Madison Initiative, when we were intentionally making a range of smaller bets, roughly half of our grants were restricted for short term projects. And in funding a wide array of organizations, including many working in the same areas, we were perpetuating another problem in the sector: too many undercapitalized nonprofit organizations are caught up in the starvation cycle, pursuing the same limited amount of funding available. Grantees in this situation are more inclined to take on projects that, by not fully funding their indirect costs, are unsustainable in the long run, even if they help keep the lights on in the near-term.

We received some clear signals in this regard via a grantee perception report prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy, in which input from Madison Initiative grantees was benchmarked against that from the Foundation's other grantees as well as those of a customized cohort of 15 foundations of similar size and scope. Grantees rated us highly relative to these benchmarks for understanding their strategies and goals, for communicating our own strategies and goals to them, and for being transparent with and open to new ideas from grantees. This was affirming feedback. However, relative to these same benchmarks, Madison Initiative grantees perceived us as having less impact on their organizations, their fields, and public policy. While we might have expected these aggregate perceptions as a relatively new initiative, it is through such impact that our funding will in the end pay off. As we worked to make sense of these findings, we had to acknowledge that the strategy we have intentionally pursued in the first two years of the Initiative has kept us, and our grantees, spread thin.

These findings underscored for us that the time was ripe for a transition that we had planned and now have fully underway. We will be making larger, longer-term, general support grants in the sub-fields and grantees where we believe our funding will make the most difference. In the first two years of our work, our median grant size was $200,000, our average grant term was 20 months, and 50% of our grants were restricted for use in pre-set projects. For grants we have made and are planning to make in 2016, our median grant size has risen to $300,000, our average grant term to 27 months, and only 15% of our funding will be restricted to specific projects. We expect the size and duration of our average grant to continue to increase. Adapting our grantmaking in this way should enable us to have more of a positive impact in the work that we are supporting. To be sure, there is a trade-off here – more concentrated funding for select sub-fields and grantees means less funding will be available for others.

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[6] Ann Goggins Gregory and Don Howard, "The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2009.
[7] Jeri Eckhart-Queenan, Michael Etzel, and Sridhar Prasad, "Pay What It Takes Philanthropy," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2016.

The transition will thus need to be a gradual one that we communicate in a timely, clear and respectful way to minimize the potential disruption for the grantees and funding partners affected by it.

One last point about the need to improve how we fund grantee capacity. The Madison Initiative's budget as a percentage of the total annual funding for US democracy across all foundations is in the low single digits and will remain so under any renewal scenario. Adjustments in our own practices will not be sufficient to change the patterns outlined above. Fortunately, we are not the only funder concerned about these issues.[8] We plan to join with partner foundations to bring about needed improvements. We have to do so collectively if we expect a suitable return on the funding we are all investing in support of US democracy. Given the gravity of the problems we are addressing, we cannot afford to be penny-wise and pound foolish.

C) Solutions and approaches[9]

In this section we will review what we have learned in broad strokes about the types of solutions and approaches that are most relevant for our goal. (Further below, in the section on our emerging theory of change, we will get into more detail with five areas we are planning to prioritize for future funding). To gain a purchase on these overall lessons, we might start by comparing how we have allocated our resources with the $40 million in grants we have made to date with our initial thinking about where we would find opportunities. This data is arrayed in the table below.

Investment Areas	***Original plans***	***Actual allocations***
1) Congress: building bipartisan relationships among members and staff; improving the rules, norms, processes, and capacity of the institution.	30%	50%
2) Campaigns and elections: reforming election administration, campaign finance, primary elections, districting, ranked choice voting, etc.	30%	23%
3) Citizen engagement: primary election turnout, voter information, media coverage of Congress, "bridging" civic engagement.	30%	12%
4) Information and infrastructure: e.g., shared research, surveys on key trends in public opinion, platforms and data to help funders collaborate.	10%	15%

The initial plans we shared with our board had us investing in roughly equal amounts across Congress, campaigns and elections reform, and citizen engagement, with a bit left over to support cross-cutting information and infrastructure that would benefit the field as a whole. We gave our board the caveat that we would adjust these plans as we learned more about the funding opportunities that were

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[8] See for example the blog from Darren Walker, president of the largest funder in the democracy field, "Moving the Ford Foundation Forward," posted on November 8, 2015 at https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/moving-the-ford-foundation-forward/

[9] Although some of the subsequent discussion in this planning document may reflect or entail the passage of legislation, the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in the federal tax laws. The Madison Initiative's funding for policy work is limited to permissible forms of support only, such as general operating support grants that grantees can allocate at their discretion and project support grants for nonlobbying activities (e.g., public education and nonpartisan research). The Initiative may fund nonpartisan political activities by grantees in compliance with the electioneering rules. The Initiative does not engage in or use its resources to support or oppose political candidates or parties or support voter registration drives.

most relevant for our goal. We then developed a systems map to help us identify and assess intervention points and opportunities across all of these areas.[10]

In the subsequent two years, as we have sized up opportunities, made grants, and learned from our experience, we have ended up investing twice as much with grantees working in and around Congress as we have with those working on reforming campaigns and elections. We spent considerably less than we had planned on citizen engagement, and a bit more than we had planned in information and infrastructure. Insofar as budget allocations reveal an entity's actual (as opposed to theoretical) strategy, these proportions are a rough but sturdy indication of where we have concluded we can have the most impact with our funding.

The advantage of funding charitable work focused on Congress and its members is that the resources are directly concentrated on the institution whose health and performance we are dedicated to improving. Some of our partners and advisors have nevertheless suggested that we are grabbing the wrong end of the problem. They argue that what happens in Congress is determined by what is happening outside of it — the political and cultural forces at work in the society writ large. There is some truth to this. Were we to focus only on Congress, we would not be in a position to address the underlying factors that help determine which individuals end up running for and getting elected to Congress and how they behave within the institution. But we are not focused exclusively on what is happening in Congress. We also are persuaded that the institution and its members are not simply shaped by those larger political and cultural forces; legislators put their own stamp on them through their beliefs, behaviors, and what David Mayhew, the dean of congressional scholars, has termed their "actions in the public sphere."[11] We are persuaded that funding grantees working to improve how the institution itself operates can thus have a positive impact.

We have been encouraged in this regard by some additional developments. One is the profound dissatisfaction that many members from both parties have expressed – to journalists, to us in private conversations, and in their own writing about Congress – about how the institution is currently operating, and their corresponding desire for changes.[12] We have also seen an outburst of "procedural entrepreneurism" as members of Congress in both chambers, including not least House Speaker Paul Ryan, are actively looking for ways in which Congress can get its house in order and restore its institutional position as the first branch of government. There is a move afoot to establish a Joint Select Committee on the Congress of Tomorrow that would develop a comprehensive reform agenda for institutional reform as earlier joint committees did for Congress in 1946 and 1970.[13] Last but not least,

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[10] You can review our systems map at https://www.kumu.io/hewlettfoundation/hewlett-foundation-madison-initiative

[11] As Mayhew has observed, "Constitutions do not seem to march through time unattended by politicians. In the United States, it is impossible to comprehend the roles of House and Senate members without seeing them as, at least sometimes, performers at a constitutional level….the emphasis here is on the endogeneity of politics. This is the idea that preference formation, deliberation, and policy-making all tend to occur in a public sphere that engages both elected officials and at least an attentive sector of the public—as opposed to the idea that exogenously formed interests somehow simply penetrate into official processes to be registered." *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 27-28.

[12] See for example Mark Warren, "Help, We Are in a Living Hell and Don't Know How to Get Out," *Esquire*, October 15, 2014, retrieved from http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a23553/congress-living-hell-1114/; Anonymous, "Confessions of a Congressman," *vox.com*, July 12, 2015, retrieved from http://www.vox.com/2015/2/5/7978823/congress-secrets; Rep. Jim Cooper, "Opening the Debate," *Boston Review*, May 2, 2011, retrieved from http://bostonreview.net/cooper-fixing-congress; Rep. Justin Amash, "House GOP's 'Govern by Crisis" Model is Broken, *cnn.com,* October 4, 2015, retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/04/opinions/amash-house-gop-leadership-is-broken/.

[13] See Sen. Mike Lee and Rep. Jeb Hensarling, "A Stronger Congress, A Healthier Republic," *National Review*, February 2, 2016, retrieved from http://www.nationalreview.com/article/430703/step-congress-reclaim-constitutional-authority; Office of

there is a burgeoning coalition of advocates, researchers, and journalists working across the political spectrum in the Washington, DC policy community that recognizes the need for congressional reform and is collaborating with members and staff in both parties to help bring it about.[14] The combination of widespread frustration with the status quo and new levels of interest in institutional solutions bodes well for positive change.

The benefit of zeroing in on the rules of the game through which members campaign for and are elected to Congress is that reforms at this level have a systemic knock-on effect over time. They change the political incentives and calculations of challengers, incumbents, their supporters, and party elites. Moreover, when an electoral reform idea has a powerful consensus behind it, a lot of change can happen in a short period of time.[15]

But there are challenges and risks here, too. Much of this work needs to be done by grantees on a state-by-state and even a city-by-city basis. The conditions favoring a reform in one place may not apply in many others. Moreover, precisely because changes to the rules of the electoral game can be so decisive, they are hotly contested by political parties and other interests competing for power and influence. Finally, because of the political stakes and sweeping systemic effects, it is in this area where well-intentioned reforms can readily go awry and produce negative and even perverse consequences, as a number of political realists have pointed out.[16]

With all this in mind, we have proceeded with caution in supporting campaign and election reforms. We are focusing on a limited number of issues (about which, more later on) where the best social science suggests we have a reasonable chance of alleviating polarization and hyper-partisanship, all the while remaining wary of the unintended consequences problem. Thus we have decided, for example, not to fund attempts to replicate the nonpartisan redistricting process and the top two primary that California recently adopted. There may be other reasons to have redistricting and candidate selection done on a nonpartisan basis; however – counter as it may be to the conventional wisdom – based on the available research we do not believe that these reforms would play a major role in reducing polarization and hyper-partisanship. Indeed, they could actually serve to worsen it.[17]

Speaker Paul Ryan, "Task Force on Restoring Constitutional Authority Issues Mission Statement," February 24, 2016, retrieved from http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/task-force-restoring-constitutional-authority-releases-mission-statement; see also an overview of the Joint Committee proposal at http://conginst.org/congressional-reform-project/.

[14] See for example Kevin Kosar and various authors, "Restoring Congress as the First Branch," R Street Institute Policy Study No. 50, January 2016.

[15] We have seen this occur for example with support we have provided to help implement the bipartisan recommendations of the President's Commission on Election Administration (PCEA). Since Jan. 1, 2014, through the work of several grantees, including most notably Pew's Elections Initiatives and the Bipartisan Policy Center, 17 more states and the District of Columbia have implemented online voter registration systems (bringing the total to 31 states and DC), and at least 13 more states and the District of Columbia have joined the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a multi-state voter data sharing system to clean up and expand voter rolls (bringing the total to 20 states and DC), both improvements which the PCEA endorsed. We have funded grants of $1.5 million in this area and have an additional $1.5 million planned in order to take advantage of the window of opportunity opened up by the PCEA, and in the spirit of diffuse reciprocity given the interest among multiple democracy funders to support this overall effort.

[16] See Bruce Cain, *Democracy More or Less: America's Political Reform Quandary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Ray La Raja and Brian Schaffer, *Campaign Finance and Political Polarization: When Purists Prevail* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Seth Masket, *The Inevitable Party: Why Attempts to Kill the Party System Fail and How They Weaken Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); on political realism in general see Jonathan Rauch, "Political Realism: How Hacks, Machines, Big Money and Back Room Deals Can Strengthen American Democracy," Brookings Institution, 2015.

[17] See Nolan McCarty, "Reducing Polarization: Some Facts for Reformers," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 2016 for a review of the evidence on these and related issues.

We understand that the success of representative democracy hinges not just on what the representatives do, but also on the links between the representatives and those they represent. Of particular importance here is the extent to which the latter feel connected in some practical way with the legislators serving on their behalf and sense that their views and interests are being adequately represented. We have grappled with whether and how funding for work related to citizen engagement would contribute to our goal of improving deliberation, negotiation, and compromise in Congress.

If we were all model citizens – staying informed about the issues, weighing dispassionately which parties and candidates best represent our views and interests, voting accordingly in all relevant elections, communicating periodically with our legislators between elections when we want to convey something in particular to them, and recognizing that they are serving in a national Congress with many other legislators representing people and places that see the world differently – then most if not all of the problems we are seeking to address might be solved. But as political science has more or less consistently found, this ideal represents a "folk theory" of democracy that bears little resemblance to reality.[18] The vast majority of us are not model citizens, and as much as we might wish it so, this is not going to change. We thus decided early on that we were not even going to try to tackle diffuse issues like improving civic education or increasing voter turnout in general elections.

We have experimented with several lines of grant making where we sensed that targeted and nonpartisan investments could potentially have a positive impact on citizen engagement.[19] We have been pleased to support these various efforts and believe that they are making positive contributions. But we have also come to appreciate the challenges of building up their impact in ways that would ultimately resonate in Congress.

Looking back over our de facto budget allocations to these three broad areas (Congress, campaigns and elections, and citizen engagement), it is worth noting that they are more or less the inverse of the pattern for democracy funding in the field as a whole. We know from the Foundation Center's data base that over the past five years, democracy funders have collectively allocated more than 50% of their funding to support work in the areas related to citizen engagement that we are funding most lightly, a bit more than 10% of their funding to the reform of campaigns and elections that we are funding with nearly 25% of our resources, and less than 5% of their funding to the category of "legislative performance," where we are putting fully 50% of our resources.

There are two ways of looking at this inverse pattern. We have generally sought to complement rather than replicate the prevailing funding patterns. But the differences likely also reflect alternative hypotheses about the ways in which private foundations can maximize their impact on this complex system of systems, and about the potential sources of political and institutional change in our representative democracy. Relative to many of our peers, we are less optimistic about the prospects for

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[18] On this point Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[19] These have included grants for platforms that provide voters with better information about candidates and issues (to the Seattle City Club and Maplight's Voter's Edge); for academic research on ways to improve the accuracy and objectivity and increase the civility of political reporting and commentary, as well as the public's engagement with it in online platforms (to the American Press Institute and the Engaging News Project at the University of Texas at Austin); for initiatives working to bridge divides between different groups and perspectives that are at increasingly at odds in our society (to the Franklin Project, CIRCLE, Citizen University, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and Living Room Conversations); and for research on the effects of get-out-the-vote strategies in congressional primaries (to researchers at the University of California, San Diego and Yale University).

our making a meaningful contribution to bottoms-up democratic change, and more open to the possibility of helping to catalyze change via leaders and elites in our governing institutions and parties.

Related to this last point, about how change occurs in our system, we have one final observation about the solutions and approaches we have been supporting. Over and above any particular democratic reform, or any grant meant to advance it, we have increasingly felt the need to elevate a set of basic values and principles woven into the fabric of our Constitution and the system of government it created. Negotiation and compromise are typically seen as techniques or dispositions in politics, and—in an age marked by growing numbers of purists on both sides–as unsavory, even corrupting ones at that. Yet in our constitutional system, i.e., one of separated, checked, balanced, and decentralized powers governing a diverse society on a continental scale, negotiation and compromise are fundamental values. They are not just required to make the system work; the system itself was designed to evoke them in order to help it weather the pitched political contests and controversies that the Founders knew would inevitably arise. Our representative government is meant to channel these disputes in ways that result in a reasonable accommodation of competing interests, beliefs, and agendas. While it may be tempting for funders and reformers to focus on discrete fixes – solutions and approaches in our parlance – there is an overarching contest of values that must be won for the right solutions and approaches to take hold. Our funding is firmly on the side of negotiation and compromise in that contest.[20]

III) Making sense of the evolving political landscape

We also need to take stock of the evolving political landscape as we develop our plans for a renewal of the initiative. We see daunting signs in this landscape, but also some developments that could support a cautious optimism. From a global perspective, the challenges to democracy that prompted us to launch the Madison Initiative have only gotten worse. Freedom House observed in its annual report for 2016, entitled "*Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies*," that over the past year, "the world was battered by crises that fueled xenophobic sentiment in democratic countries…and led authoritarian regimes to crack down harder on dissent. These developments contributed to the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom." 72 countries witnessed a decline in democratic freedoms in the prior year, the biggest backslide since the democratic recession began.[21]

Moreover, we now are witnessing the growing influence of leaders and practices of "illiberal democracy," which blends nationalism and populism with disdain for "Western" values like freedom of the press and association in civil society.[22] There is increasingly widespread belief in the need for a strong leader to cut through parliamentary pusillanimity and squabbling—not just in Russia, Hungary, and Turkey, whose rulers openly profess to being illiberal democrats, but increasingly in France, the UK, and, alas, now in the US, where leaders of parties on the right speak of Vladimir Putin in flattering terms.

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[20] Jonathan Rauch, "Rescuing Compromise," *National Affairs*, Fall 2013, p. 125. See also Larry Kramer, "To Adjust These Clashing Interests: Negotiation and Compromise as Core Constitutional Values," 54th Annual Owen J. Roberts Memorial Lecture, University of Pennsylvania Law School, February 11, 2015; and Peter Berkowitz, *Constitutional Conservatism: Liberty, Self-Government, and Political Moderation* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013).

[21] Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016.

[22] Victor Orban, "Speech at the at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp," July 26 2014, Retrieved from http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp.

Taking stock of these developments helps us to put recent events in the US in context. In many of the established democracies of Europe, we see similar patterns: increasingly polarized parties, the waning influence of pragmatic problem-solvers on the center-left and center-right, the growing appeal of politicians on the left calling for more far-reaching, even revolutionary reforms to reduce economic inequality, and xenophobic appeals by right-wing nationalists and populists speaking to the anger and diminished position of the white working class. From Budapest and Paris to London and Washington, a host of issues associated with globalization – trade, immigration, refugee crises, terrorism, etc. – are jumbling the traditional political divides of right and left. As the incumbent political parties struggle to respond to these erupting cleavages, citizens across the spectrum are concluding that these parties and their establishment leaders are part of the problem, that the "game is rigged," to use a battle cry from the current US presidential campaign.[23] This is not an environment in which the activities at the core of governing in representative democracies – deliberation, negotiation, and compromise among elites – are likely to enjoy much legitimacy.

Zeroing in on the US, the success of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders and the movements they have led in the current presidential campaign – which we certainly were not expecting when we began our work two years ago – points to a profound failure of the polarized party system in recent years. We can now clearly see that there has been much more anxiety and anger about the effects of globalization and Wall Street's role in the Great Recession than had previously been articulated by either party. The neo-liberal consensus on the benefits of globalization and the support for the financial sector in both parties, along with intense polarization and an unwillingness to compromise on a range of issues, has muffled deep-seated frustration in the electorate. In the absence of parties that are more responsive to widespread public concerns, and of policy-making in Congress that meaningfully addresses them, leaders calling for impractical or illiberal solutions will gain followers. Thus our sense of urgency to improve the conditions for deliberation, negotiation and compromise in Congress has only increased.

We also have a better feel for the problem of polarization. In our initial conception, we saw this as primarily a function of ideological polarization among elites. But we have come to understand how old-fashioned political and institutional combat drives much of it. As Frances Lee has pointed out, the two parties are bogged down in an unusually protracted battle for control of Congress. Traditionally, one party or the other has dominated, with ample majorities in both houses. The other party, relegated to a small minority, and with little if any hope of winning power in the near future, has generally seen fit to "go along to get along." For example, for the GOP controlled the vast majority of congresses from 1896 up to the New Deal. Then, from the early 1930's to the mid-1990s, the Democrats had a virtual lock on Congress. But the past 20 years have been marked by intermittent periods of red and blue control, and much narrower majorities. Those majorities are politically insecure, and thus loathe to work with the minorities working to unhorse them. For their part, the minorities want to do everything in their power to isolate and embarrass the majority party so as to increase their own odds of winning power in the next election. The last time we experienced such intense polarization was the Gilded Age, another period when the parties had narrow governing majorities and frequently traded control of Congress.[24]

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[23] Christian Caryl, "The End of Politics as We Know it," Foreign Policy, May 3, 2016, retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/03/the-end-of-politics-as-we-know-it-left-right-sanders-trump-corbyn/; Michael Lind, "This Is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like," *Politico*, May 22, 2016, retrieved from http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/2016-election-realignment-partisan-political-party-policy-democrats-republicans-politics-213909.

[24] Frances Lee, "American politics is more competitive than ever. That is making partisanship worse." *Washington Post*, January 9, 2014, retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/09/american-politics-is-more-

When we turn from the elite to the mass level, it seems as though the contest for control at the national level is coinciding with, if not accelerating, the sorting of the electorate into two increasingly hostile camps. Consider the following data from the Pew Research Center. In a 2014 survey of 10,000 Americans, Pew found that, "The overall share of Americans who express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions has doubled over the past two decades from 10% to 21%. And ideological thinking is now much more closely aligned with partisanship than in the past. As a result, ideological overlap between the two parties has diminished: Today, 92% of Republicans are to the right of the median Democrat, and 94% of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican."[25] This growing ideological consistency, or what researchers call "constraint" among citizens, is in keeping with what we have observed in comparative contexts.

But as with the polarization in Congress, this is not simply an ideological phenomenon. There is also growing partisan antipathy among Americans. The same survey data from Pew indicates that 2 out of 5 of us have come to hold "very unfavorable" views of the other party. In 2014, Pew added a new question to its recurring survey and found that 27% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans regarded the opposing party as nothing less than a "threat to the nation's well-being*."* It is not so much that that we like our own party more, it is that we really do not like those other guys! Social psychologists have a term for this growing antipathy – affective polarization. This is really about tribalism.

At the outset of the Madison Initiative, we told our board that it had taken the country several decades to tie itself into this political straightjacket, and it would likely take a decade or two for us to work our collective way out of it. The preceding discussion would suggest this time horizon still holds. That said, we should take note of what may turn out to be early signals of promising changes.

There have been some encouraging developments on Capitol Hill. The past year has witnessed a number of significant bipartisan legislative achievements of the sort that, in the doldrums of 2013, it seemed like we might not see again. These include the passage of trade promotion authority, Medicare reform via a permanent "Doc Fix," the reauthorization of long awaited transportation and education bills, a surveillance bill, and a two-year budget agreement. Indicators tracked by the Bipartisan Policy Center in its Healthy Congress index suggest that in some areas, e.g., bills being reported out of committees, amendments being considered on the Senate floor, and the use of conference committees, there has been some halting progress toward re-establishing normal legislative procedures.[26]

Moreover, the silver lining in the cloud that is the 2016 presidential race is that we appear to be witnessing a new dimension of political conflict emerging in each party. This fault line, stemming from the constellation of issues related to globalization and the state of the economy described above, cuts across the traditional left-right polarization between the parties. The opening up of intra-party conflicts could be a good sign insofar as it intermingles opposing party factions on different issues and helps speed the return of the bargaining and coalition-based politics between heterogeneous parties that characterized US politics for much of its history. However, at this stage, it is too soon to tell how all this will play out.

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competitive-than-ever-thats-making-partisanship-worse/; and Lee, *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2016).

[25] Pew Research Center, "Political Polarization and the American Public," June 12, 2014, p. 6.

[26] Bipartisan Policy Center, "Health Congress Index," May 6, 2016, retrieved from http://cdn.bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/BPC-Healthy-Congress-Index-2016-Q1.pdf

For all of the conflict and disruption in our politics, in fact because of it, we remain convinced that the over-riding imperative is to get Congress and its members back in the business of performing their institutional – indeed, constitutional – duties in ways that are more responsive to public sentiment, and that reflect the deliberation, negotiation, and compromise needed to govern in the US.

IV) Our emerging theory of change

The Hewlett Foundation strives to practice outcomes-focused philanthropy. This means that our grantmaking should be guided by a strategic framework consisting of a clear goal; a viable, evidence-based theory of change for realizing it; and measures for assessing progress (or the lack thereof) along the way. At the outset of our work, we identified the goal of the Madison Initiative as helping to create the conditions in which Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for more Americans. But given the complexity of the problem, we thought it would be prudent to wait to specify our theory of change and measures of progress until we had taken some initial exploratory steps and gained a better sense of the landscape, possible paths forward within it, and how we might tell if we were succeeding. Two years in, we find ourselves at a juncture where we can begin to sketch out the other components of our strategic framework.

Our emerging theory of change for realizing our goal is an unconventional one. It does not presume to go all the way down to the root causes of the problems we are seeking to address but rather to ameliorate some of their more prominent symptoms and by-products. Several critical friends have pointed out to us that polarization is not a cause but an effect of deep-seated historical and cultural forces. We agree. These forces include, first and foremost, the political realignment set in motion by the success of the civil rights movement, whose ramifications in the ensuing decades sorted out the parties such that the Democrats became uniformly liberal and the Republicans uniformly conservative.[27] The forces also include the entrenched political conflict that flared up between "intense policy demanders" on the right and left in response to the expanded size and scope of government in the 1960s and 1970s, a battle that continues unabated to this day.[28] And they include more recent developments described earlier — hyper-partisanship in Congress fueled by the protracted electoral contest for control of the institution over the past two decades and the rise of affective polarization among citizens taking in all of these developments.

The solutions and approaches we are supporting are not going to reverse these forces on their own. Any reversal would require a reshuffling of the parties at the elite and mass level such that ideology and party affiliation are not so heavily correlated. Such a resorting is likely to occur at some point, and its beginning may already be visible in the intra-party debates of the 2016 campaign. A reversal of these forces may also hinge on the emergence of a dominant party in Congress to resolve the chronic political conflict arising from insecure majorities within the institution and overcome the decades-long impasse over the proper role of government. In our view, these developments are largely

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[27] See Rick Pildes, "Why the Center Does Not Hold: The Causes of Hyperpolarized Democracy in America," *California Law Review*, April 2011, pp. 273-334.

[28] On the origins of this conflict, see the essays in Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, eds. *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). On the interplay between "intense policy demanders" and our polarized political parties, see Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Demands, and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics*, September 2013, pp. 571-597; and Hans Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

beyond the legal and practical capacity of private foundations and their grantees to shape in any material way.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that polarization is not just an effect; in the complex political and governmental system of systems in which it now prevails, it is also serving as cause in its own right through a myriad of negative feedback loops. The ideological divide between the parties raises the stakes for control of Congress, exacerbating tit-for-tat partisanship and brinksmanship within the institution. These factors in turn produce deadlock that further mobilizes partisans and ideologues while marginalizing members and citizens inclined to support negotiation and compromise.

Steps that work to counter-act these negative cycles can potentially help enable more instances of collaboration within a polarized Congress, contribute to the forces spurring the awaited resorting, and make cooperation easier and more routine as the political conditions arise to support it. These efforts can thus help Congress and the broader political system cope with polarization, not least by supporting the values of negotiation and compromise that are essential and even constitutional in the American system. If and when the broader historical and cultural trends that have polarized our politics change, giving the parties and representatives more room to maneuver, these same interventions will have set the stage for a quicker recovery amidst the opening. We do not believe that any one intervention will be dispositive. But in aggregate, over time, they can have a beneficial cumulative effect.

The remainder of this section reviews five lines of grantmaking that we are planning to focus on in our future work should the Foundation board renew the Madison Initiative: building bipartisan relationships among policy-makers, strengthening Congress as an institution, improving campaign finance, making elections more representative, and shoring up media coverage of Congress and its members.

A) Building bipartisan relationships among policy-makers

We see building bipartisan relationships among members and staff in Congress as a necessary though insufficient step along the way toward the realization of our ultimate goal. Elected officials and the staff they rely on need to have personal relationships with each other, and ultimately a modicum of trust, in order to engage in the reciprocal give-and-take that is needed for productive policy-making. We fund a number of organizations that work in different ways to cultivate these connections.[29] They do so through hosting meetings, dinners, retreats, trips of various sorts, as well as ongoing caucuses in which the participants are drawn from both major political parties. In many instances family members also participate. Some of the groups focus on substantive policy issues, others on shared experiences or practical matters pertaining to different legislative roles.

A recent assessment conducted by the Center for Evaluation Innovation gave us a better feel for the work being done by our grantees in this area. The participation is more extensive — and bipartisan — than we had expected. An analysis of program data from seven grantees indicated that, over the last two congresses, approximately 65% of legislators or their staff representatives participated in at least one event sponsored by these organizations. This included 76% of Democrats and 48% of Republicans in the House, along with 86% of Democrats and 83% of Republicans in the Senate.

[29] Grantees include the Aspen Institute's Congressional and Rodel Fellowship programs, the Bipartisan Policy Center, the Congressional Research Service, the Faith and Politics Institute, the Library of Congress, the Lugar Center, the Millennial Action Project, the National Institute for Civil Discourse, No Labels, and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Is this bipartisan programming and participation having a positive impact? At this point, given the preliminary and incomplete nature of the data, we are not in a position to draw firm conclusions. However, the evaluation did discern a weak but statistically significant relationship between participation in bipartisan programs and bipartisan behavior in sponsorship patterns for legislation. This relationship was stronger for Republican participants. These correlations should not be mistaken for causation, but along with our observations of and conversations with congressional participants, they give us some confidence that we should continue to support work in this area. We are encouraging grantees to track program data more systematically, and we are funding new waves of scholarship on the pre-conditions for successful negotiations in Congress in order to gain more insight into how to proceed with this line of grantmaking over the longer term.[30]

B) Strengthening Congress as an institution

Polarization and hyper-partisanship have undermined the ability of Congress to carry out its Constitutional responsibilities, from law-making and exercising the power of the purse to overseeing the administration of policy and generally checking and balancing the other two branches of government. With the grantees that we support in this area, we are endeavoring to help strengthen the institution as a whole by improving the rules and norms, core work processes, and staff capacity of Congress so that it is in a better position to carry out these responsibilities.

Examples of evolving rules and associated norms that are hampering Congress include the increasingly routinized use of the filibuster by both parties when they are in the minority in the Senate and the self-imposed constraint of the so-called Hastert Rule (really a norm) observed by Republicans in the House. We recognize that both the gradual evolution in rules and norms as well as sudden changes in their use are inherently political and driven by the contest for control of both houses of Congress. There are limits to what researchers and advocates can directly do to inform how these rules and norms are observed and adapted over time. That said, several of our grantees have developed (or are developing) proposals and commentary for how Congress might proceed when the time is ripe for considering such changes.[31]

We believe there is more room for our grantees to contribute to broader improvements in the institutional processes and staff capacity of Congress. For example, several of our grantees have been playing a leading role in exploring how Congress might improve the core processes it uses to exercise the power of the purse.[32] Reform in this area will not magically fix deep disagreements over taxing and spending priorities; we see the truth in the old Washington budgeteer's saw that "the process is not the problem, the problem is the problem!" That said, if Congress is going to meet its Article I responsibilities,

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[30] See for example the Social Science Research Council's recently announced Negotiating Agreement In Congress Research Grants project at http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/view/negotiating-agreement-in-congress-research-grants/

[31] These grantees include the Bipartisan Policy Center, the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, the Federalist Society, the Hudson Institute, the National Conference on State Legislatures, New America's Political Reform Program, and the R Street Institute's Governance Project.

[32] Here we are referring not only to the work of the budget committees and the formal budget processes in both houses of Congress, but to all aspects of the congressional taxing and spending power, including those that intertwine with executive branch budgeting functions and involve the relevant work of the Ways and Means / Finance, authorizing, and appropriations committees in both chambers. Grantees in this area include the Brookings Institution's Economic Studies program, the Center for a Responsible Federal Budget, the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, and researchers at George Mason University and George Washington University.

it needs to find a way to negotiate and compromise more effectively in this mission-critical set of institutional processes.

Another process that needs to be improved in ways that could alleviate polarization and hyper-partisanship is congressional oversight of the executive branch.[33] Several Madison Initiative grantees in this area are led and staffed by experienced practitioners working to provide training and technical assistance on how to conduct more productive oversight to members and staff on a bipartisan basis. Other grantees have been working to elevate the importance of oversight as a priority for Congress in the Washington policy community and to develop new approaches (or underscore time-tested ones) for how it can and should be conducted.[34]

Congress needs ample expertise and staff capacity if it is going to play its appointed role in our constitutional system. This seems like a straightforward statement that members of Congress themselves would acknowledge. Alas, in recent decades Congress has been miserly in equipping and funding itself to carry out its core functions. Several Madison Initiative grantees have played a leading role in highlighting the need for Congress to provide sufficient funding for the institutional, committee, and office staff resources it needs to carry out its responsibilities more effectively. We are also supporting work to enable individual legislators to optimize the functioning of their staff and offices, not least by gaining a better sense for the deliberate and informed opinion of the constituents they represent.[35]

Finally, we are currently exploring some additional types of support in and around Congress that we *may* decide to expand and deepen as we proceed. These include helping members and congressional staff get better at negotiating with each other; bolstering the problem-solving disposition of potential candidates for Congress; and underwriting pragmatic policy advocacy on the left, right, and center that acknowledges the need for members to negotiate and compromise across the aisle.

C) *Improving campaign finance*

To state the obvious: the congressional campaign finance system is something of a runaway train. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, in the 2013-14 election cycle, $3.8 billion was spent on congressional elections. We see three problems with this situation that make it relevant for our work. The first is prosaic, but also perhaps most germane: many members of Congress have to spend so much time raising money that their legislative responsibilities, roles, and relationships get short shrift. The second is that, as members go about raising this money, whether it be from large or small donors, they are doing so from contributors that are more likely to hold more partisan and ideological perspectives than their noncontributing peers, which worsens polarization. Finally, the problems of the current system of campaign finance undermine public trust in Congress and the electoral process.

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[33] Here also we define the process broadly to include oversight hearings, investigations, and ongoing monitoring carried out by various committees and sub-committees in Congress, as well as by entities that work in service of Congress such as the Government Accountability Office and the inspectors general.

[34] Grantees providing training and technical assistance include The Constitution Project, The Levin Center, the Lugar Center, and the Project on Government Oversight. Grantees working on policy include the Federalist Society, the Hudson Institute, New America's Political Reform Program, and the R Street's Institute's Governance Project.

[35] Grantees include the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, the Congressional Management Foundation, New America's Political Reform Program, the Pew Charitable Trust, R Street Institute's Governance Project, the Washington Monthly, and Voice of the People. Other partners working in this area include the Congressional Institute and PopVox.

One objective of our initial grantmaking has been to illuminate how patterns of campaign finance are rapidly evolving, for example through the rise of Super PACs and the shift from television to social media-based political advertising. Our basic assumption is that any workable solution has to be based on the latest and best data about how campaign finance is actually flowing. A focused evaluation of the work we have supported in this area concluded, in fact, that it is essential for informing the broader public debate.[36]

Another objective of our early grantmaking has been to support the development of a bipartisan movement for campaign finance reform, which we believe is critical to adopting and sustaining a reform effort over time. Given the prevalence of campaign finance reformers on the progressive side of the debate, we have focused on helping to identify and fund advocates calling for reform from the right of center or working on a demonstrably bipartisan basis to do so.[37]

We have not yet found a specific reform agenda that we see as *the* path forward. There are some interesting experiments in public financing now underway in New York City and Seattle that are focused on giving more citizens a real voice in the system, and we are supporting grantees who believe this general approach may hold promise for broader application.[38] We are also supporting grantees seeking to put political parties on more of an equal footing with outside groups in campaign finance. They acknowledge the crucial intermediary roles that political parties play in aggregating interests and assembling workable majorities.[39] Another potential route we are considering has been opened up by the vacancy on the Supreme Court. The judicial precedents that have made effective regulation difficult could now be revisited through a litigation-based effort. However, given the litigation strategies already launched by those seeking to further deregulate campaign finance and those seeking to re-regulate it using traditional reform frameworks, it may be hard to move things in an alternative direction.

D) *Making elections more representative*

One of the challenges with our single member district, top-of-the-heap system of congressional elections is that it effectively forces voters to make binary choices that may poorly reflect their actual preferences. When this system of election is combined with primary elections to nominate candidates in which a small subset of more ideological and partisan activists turn out, the mismatch widens between the preferences of less ideological and partisan voters and the candidates they have to choose between in general elections. We are interested in supporting electoral innovations that would move beyond these winner-take-all dynamics and elect legislators that better represent the range and diversity of preferences among their constituents.

One way of going about this is through ranked choice voting, whereby voters order their preferences across all candidates they would support for a given office. This method provides a finer-grained register of public opinion as it is aggregated across each individual voter. It also produces different campaign dynamics, as candidates have a practical interest in ranking higher on the ballots of voters for whom they may not be the first choice. Several cities use this form of voting for municipal offices at present, and this fall the voters of Maine will decide on a state-wide initiative to establish

[36] Grantees here include the Center for Responsive Politics and the National Institute for Money in State Politics. We also have supported researchers at multiple universities through a grant to New York University under the auspices of a task force led by Professor Nathan Persily of Stanford University and attorneys Robert Bauer of Perkins Coie and Benjamin Ginsberg of JonesDay.
[37] Grantees include the Campaign Legal Center, Issue One, and Take Back Our Republic.
[38] Grantees include the Brennan Center, the Campaign Finance Institute, and New America's Political Reform Program.
[39] Grantees include the Brennan Center, the Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program, and researchers at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

ranked choice voting in both primary and general elections for congressional offices as well as for the governor and state legislative offices.

Another way of moving beyond winner-take-all dynamics is through the use of multi-member districts for legislative offices, potentially (though not necessarily) in combination with forms of proportional representation. Currently 15% of state house seats nation-wide represent multi-member districts. Several states were using multi-member districts for Federal House seats up into the 1960s. We recognize that electoral innovations of this sort face long odds, at least at the national level. But we are persuaded that the potential improvements in representation warrant ongoing investment in these possibilities.[40]

An incremental improvement that could make our current electoral system more representative of citizen preferences would be scheduling congressional primaries to optimize for turnout, especially in mid-terms where the number of eligible voters casting ballots often dips into single digits. This could involve establishing a national primary day that would focus media and public attention on these races. There may also be regional permutations. This would be no easy task given that state parties and election officials control the scheduling of primaries. But it would strengthen democratic participation and accountability in our elections.[41]

E) Shoring up media coverage of Congress and its members

Much of the conventional wisdom about media coverage of politics is that it has become overtly partisan. People are getting their news served up without any opposing viewpoints in polarized echo chambers. Perhaps a bigger problem is that most people are not really getting much news about politics and government at all due to the proliferation of media options and the difficult economics of political journalism. A report we commissioned from the Pew Research Center on media coverage of Congress found that 21 states have no reporter from an in-state media outlet covering government and politics in Washington.[42] Too many citizens are simply uninformed about what Congress and its members are doing, and how this relates to the lives they are living in Sacramento or Paducah. A core link of accountability between members of Congress and their constituencies is thereby fraying.

To see whether we can help shore up this link, we are funding some experiments to help nonprofit news outlets substantially improve coverage of their congressional delegations about what they are doing and why in ways that are relevant for local audiences.[43] We are also exploring ways of encouraging and stimulating similar coverage from more media outlets across the country. Another goal would be to change the tone, focusing more on explanatory and less on "gotcha" stories, with a more positive balance of solutions- and problem-oriented journalism. An initial inquiry we conducted with a range of media outlets and funders, journalists, and congressional observers suggested that these ideas hold some promise.

[40] In 1967, Congress passed a law requiring states to use single-member districts for House seats. This law would need to be repealed to return to the use of multi-member districts and their permutations in House elections, but the barrier is statutory, not constitutional. Grantees in this area include FairVote, New America's Political Reform Program, and Stanford University's Center for American Politics in Comparative Perspective.

[41] Grantees addressing this issue include the Bipartisan Policy Center and Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program.

[42] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/07/in-21-states-local-newspapers-lack-a-dedicated-reporter-keeping-tabs-on-congress/

[43] Grantees include the Texas Tribune and New York Public Radio.

V) Vital signs for measuring progress

We are pursuing a lofty goal that in the best case would take a decade or more to achieve. This raises the question: how would we know if we were making progress towards it? How would we know when we realized it? We need indicators that will help us understand whether, how, and to what extent the patterns of deliberation, negotiation, and compromise in Congress that we seek to support are materializing. We have begun evaluating clusters of grants we are making in different areas, and the evaluation of these “micro” effects will in turn inform the evolution of our grantmaking and broader strategy. Yet, at the same time, we also need some “macro” indicators that can tell us how the broader system of representative democracy whose functioning we are seeking to improve is faring, over and above the evaluation of the specific work we are funding.

We are calling these macro indicators “vital signs.” The analogue to the basic information gathered about a patient at the outset of a doctor’s appointment is apt here, e.g., weight, blood pressure, body temperature, pulse, reflexes, breathing patterns, etc. Typically none of these indicators is by itself dispositive, but collectively they provide important information about the patient’s health, especially when the results of individual indicators are juxtaposed with and related to others, and when the indicators are compared with longer run trends in the patient’s medical records.

The list below outlines an initial set of indicators that could potentially serve as vital signs for the Madison Initiative. While not an exact progression, as we work down the list we move in the terms of evaluation from inputs at the top to outputs and intermediate outcomes in the middle to the ultimate outcome at the bottom of the list, namely, public support for the institution of Congress.

- *Ideological polarization*: The standard indicator here at the elite level is the distribution of DW Nominate scores as developed by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal for individual members of both houses of Congress. For constituents, the Pew Research Center’s political typology survey has tracked a set of measures of ideological polarization and party affiliation for more than two decades.

- *Congressional Work Schedule:* Key indicators here – House and Senate working days and days in session – are now being captured and reported in the Bipartisan Policy Center’s Healthy Congress Index on a quarterly basis in a format that enables comparison with recent congresses. (Subsequent indicators that are also tracked in BPC’s Index are marked below with an asterisk).

- *Use of Committee Process and Regular Order:* There are several potential indicators here, including bills ordered reported by committees in the House and Senate*; timely agreement on the annual concurrent budget resolution and subsequent passage of individual appropriations bills by both houses; the proportion of congressional appropriations that are unauthorized; and the appointment of conference committees and adoption of their reports by both chambers.*

- *Openness of floor debate:* In the House, indicators would be the use of open, closed, and structured rules for floor debate; in the Senate, indicators would be use of the filibuster and the number of amendments considered from the minority party.*

- *Bipartisanship:* One macro indicator here would be the proportion and number of party unity votes in a given Congress in which a majority of Democrats oppose a majority of Republicans in each chamber. Another indicator would be patterns of bipartisan co-sponsorship of legislation for individual members and the institution as a whole, a focus of the Lugar Center's Bipartisan Index.[44]

- *Legislative productivity:* We would want to avoid the simplistic standard measure of the number of bills passed in a given session. Alternatives could include the number of bills passed that address the most salient issues facing the nation as tracked, for example, by Sarah Binder's measure of legislative gridlock.[45] We are also underwriting a project led by Scott Adler at the University of Colorado to systematically identify the number of expiring legislative provisions in a given period and whether Congress is revisiting them in a timely way, consistent with the plans it has set for itself in earlier legislation. That could also provide a useful benchmark of productivity.

- *Public Support of Congress as an Institution:* Indicators here include public approval rates for Congress or the public's confidence level in Congress vis-à-vis other public institutions, both of which are tracked by Gallup on an ongoing basis. This is in many respects the indicator that best tracks the ultimate outcome we seek, namely, citizens expressing a modicum of approval of and confidence in their national representative institutions, apart from their support for any particular policy or party. We know that this is a messy indicator and many factors feed into it, some relevant, some not. We also know that public approval rates for Congress rarely rise above 50%. But we have also observed that in periods when Congress is reaching workable compromises, e.g., with Social Security and tax reform in the 1980s, welfare and budget reform in the 1990s, or the response to the Financial Crisis, these approval rates have fluctuated in the 30-45% range.[46] That may be a reasonable standard. It is a low bar, to be sure, but even that would be a 3x improvement over where things stand today.

Of course, anyone of these indicators, taken on its own, can mislead as much as it can illuminate.[47] We are thus seeking to identify a set of indicators that, when considered collectively, in relationship to each other, can help us assess patterns of deliberation, negotiation, and compromise in Congress.

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Thank you for reviewing our emerging plans as we prepare for a potential renewal of the Madison Initiative later this year. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and candor that colleagues have brought to conversations about our work thus far, and we look forward to getting your questions and feedback about this document.

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[44] http://www.thelugarcenter.org/ourwork-Bipartisan-Index.html

[45] http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/05/27-polarized-we-govern-binder/brookingscepm_polarized_figreplacedtextrevtablerev.pdf

[46] See Jessica Gerrity, "Understanding Congressional Approval: Public Opinion from 1974 to 2014," in Congressional Research Service, *The Evolving Congress* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2014), pp. 189-216.

[47] Consider the widespread reliance on DW Nominate scores as a measure of ideological polarization in Congress. Nominate scores are based on a series of ordinal (spatial) rankings of roll call votes that are then converted to one cardinal ranking, which can suggest a false precision in measuring the ideology underlying these votes. Moreover, as Frances Lee, Sean Theriault and others have pointed out, there is more than ideology reflected in the scores. For example they also capture strong norms of party discipline on procedural votes as well as partisan in-fighting driven by the closely contested struggle for control of Congress, which leads to the structuring of roll call votes meant to highlight differences between the parties.