

The Madison Initiative's System Map

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 most Americans. This requires that Congress represent and balance the diverse and often conflicting array of interests, ideas, and agendas of the American people; that the public believes in the legitimacy of the process through which Congress is working; and that the process can support the refinement and improvement of past decisions as new circumstances arise.

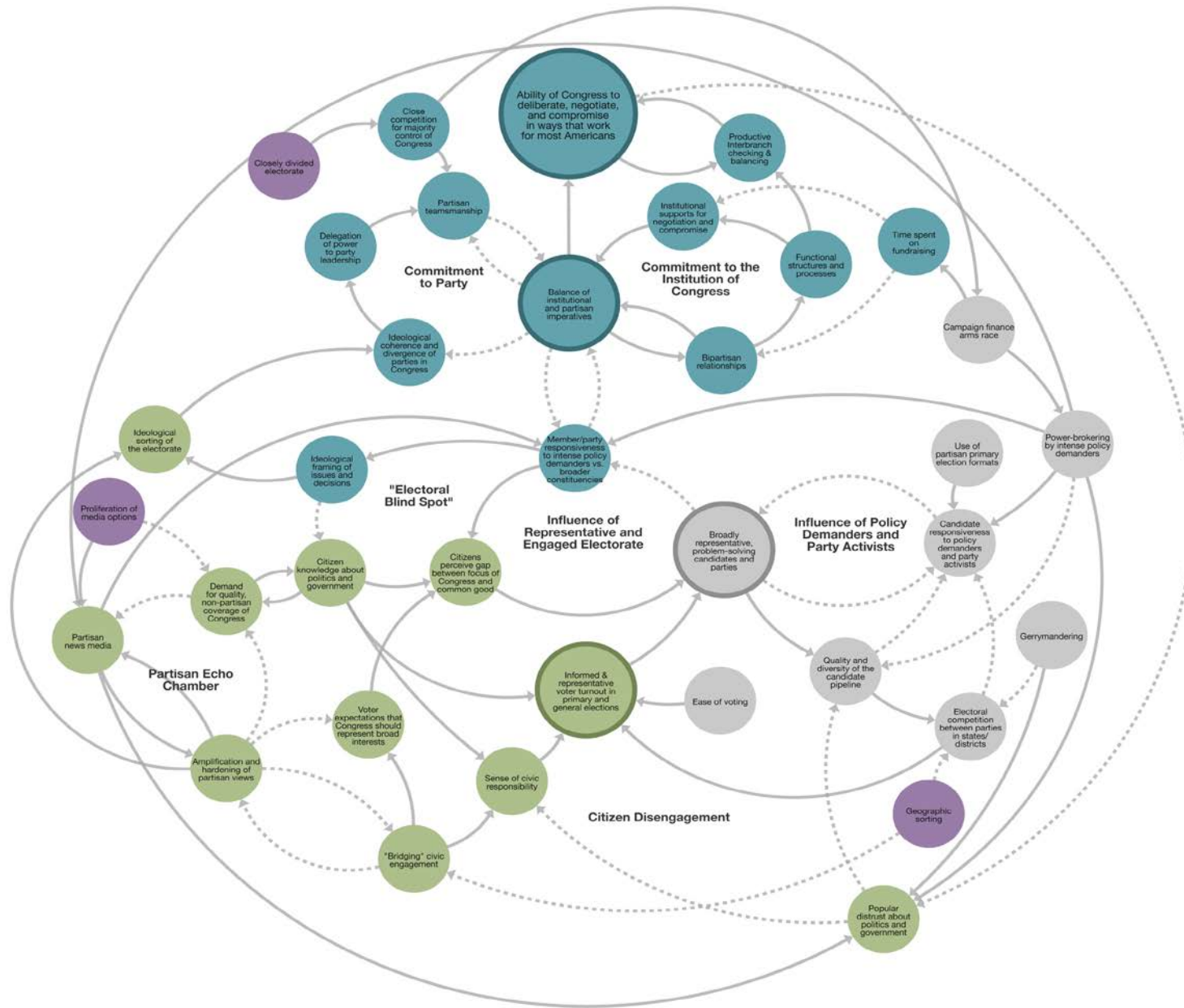
To explore and understand the complex dynamics currently driving the inability of Congress to function in this way, we are using a systems mapping tool called causal loop diagramming. The map reflects our current thinking about the underlying patterns and interactions that drive tensions and imbalances in the system. The map can also help us see the way forward as we work with others to improve the health of the system. The map remains a work in progress: it will evolve as we incorporate feedback from the field and learn from the work of our grantees and other partners.¹

Because systems maps can be overwhelming at first glance, we'd like to “unfold” the map for you. Let's start by orienting you to the basic features of the full map, which you will find on the next page. The circles represent our initial thinking on the key elements in the system – they are variables that can increase or decrease. The arrows show the nature and direction of the causal links between the different variables. A solid line represents a direct relationship running in the direction of the arrow. All other things being equal, we are hypothesizing that as the first variable changes, the second moves in the same direction. A dotted line, in contrast, represents an inverse relationship.

You will also notice the different color coding: blue variables have to do with the institution of Congress; gray variables have to do with campaigns and elections; green variables have to do with citizen engagement, participation, and media; and purple variables are aspects of our broader society that are not part of the other areas but that are materially shaping the dynamics within them.

In each of the sections there is a circle that is bigger than the others and ringed by a darker outer circle – these three variables represent the overall positive dynamics in that portion of the map that our grantees are collectively working to reinforce. Also, at the very top of the map there is one large circle in blue, labeled “Ability of Congress to deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for most Americans.” Bolstering this variable is in effect the ultimate goal of the Madison Initiative.

¹ Note that these materials were prepared as part of the Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative's internal planning and evaluation processes and do not represent actions to be taken by Hewlett Foundation staff or by grantee staff at the Foundation's direction. In particular, although the narrative and maps describe different variables of and pathways to democratic reform at the systems level, some of which relates to the passage of legislation or the conduct of elections, the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in the federal tax laws. The Hewlett Foundation'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). Further, the Foundation does not engage in or use its resources to support or oppose political candidates or parties or to influence the outcome of any election. The Foundation may fund nonpartisan political activities by grantees, but only in full compliance with the federal electioneering rules.



Congress

Campaigns & elections

Citizens

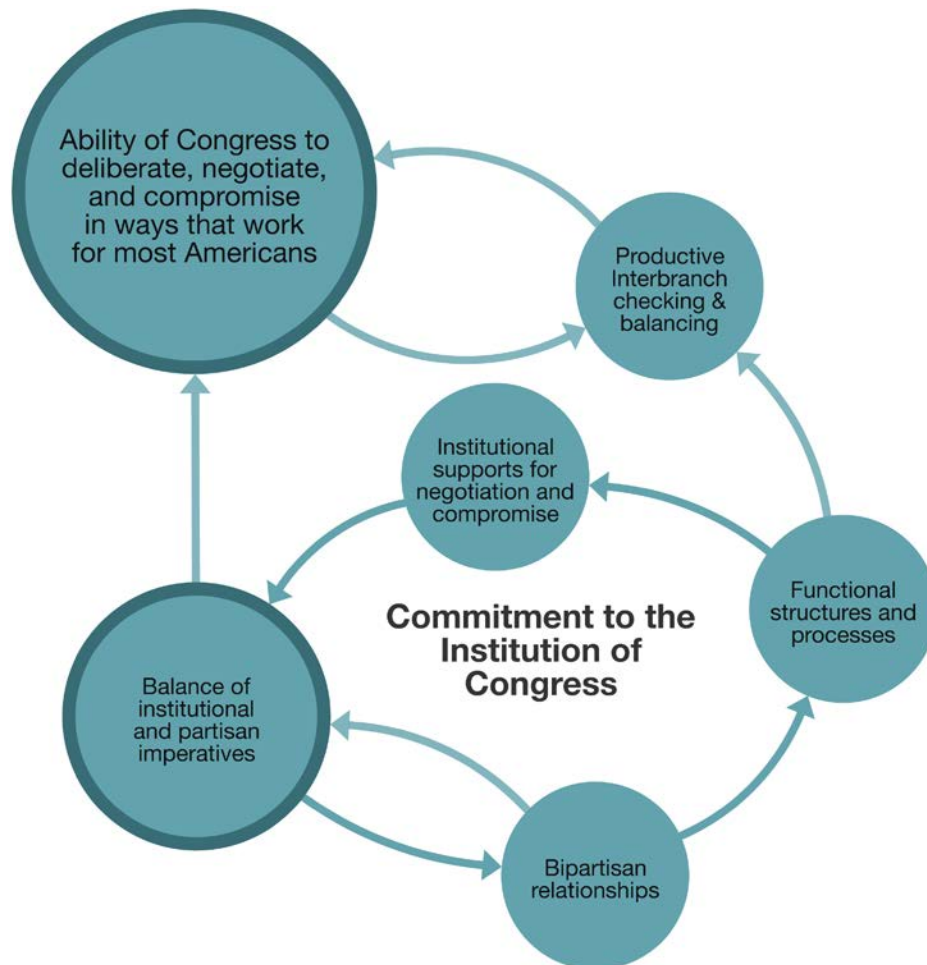
Other

Inverse Relationship

Direct Relationship

Commitment to the Institution of Congress

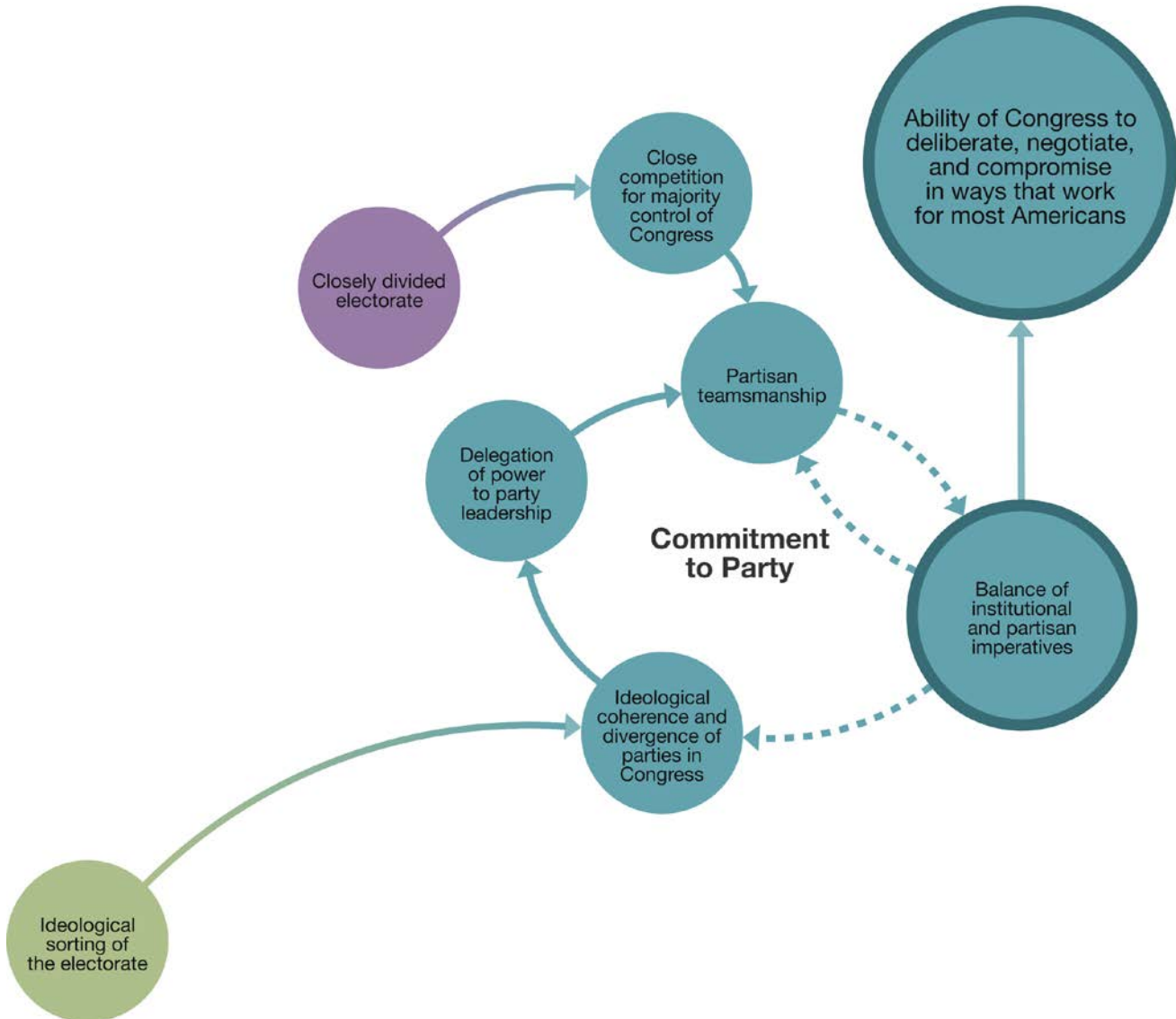
The ability of Congress to deliberate, negotiate and compromise in ways that work for most Americans requires a balance between inevitable party conflict and a commitment to the institution's primary role in our constitutional system, such that real differences can be represented in Congress without completely blocking necessary compromises.



This commitment to the institution includes a willingness to forge relationships across the aisle and the consistent use of structures and processes that support cross-party deliberation, such as the committee system and recurring processes for setting and funding national priorities via the budget process. As members interact with one another through these structures and processes, they are better able to engage in productive checking and balancing of the executive branch (e.g., through oversight, confirmations, etc.) that is neither too deferential nor too confrontational. Members with a commitment to the institution also appreciate and provide for the supports that in turn enable negotiation and compromise (e.g., Member and staff expertise as well as shared institutional offices and services that support the legislative process). The stronger these supports, the easier it is for members of Congress to balance institutional and partisan imperatives.

Commitment to Party

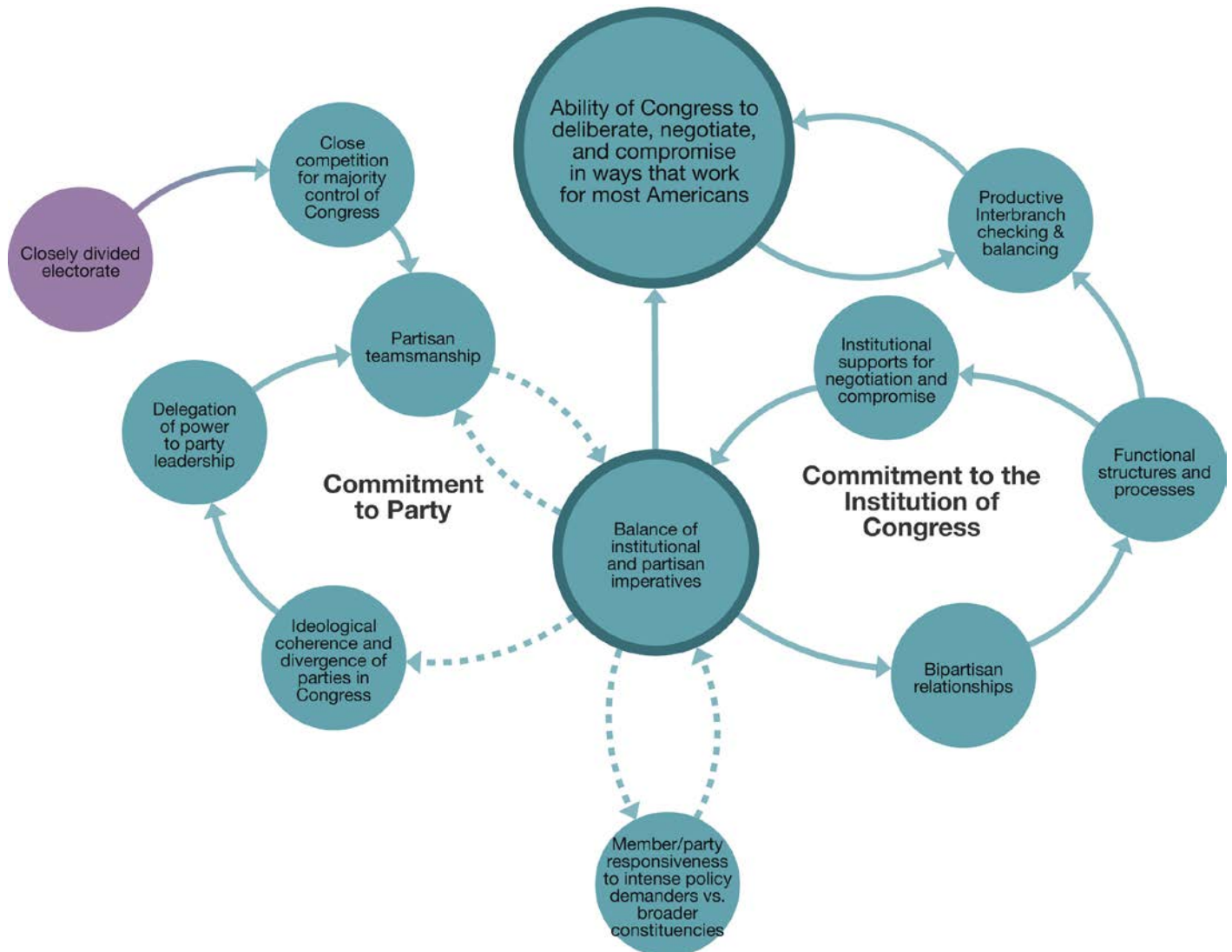
In the context of a deeply and more or less evenly divided society and the resulting close competition for majority control of Congress, members of both the majority and minority parties have incentive to act in concert with their fellow partisans to forestall legislative action that requires compromise with the other side.



With the growing ideological coherence within and divergence between the parties, members are more willing to delegate power to party leadership to control the legislative agenda and drive partisan messaging in hopes of increasing the party's electoral advantage. The result is what political scientist Frances Lee has termed "teammanship," i.e., more party line voting and the use of the legislative process to highlight party differences and gain political advantage even on non-ideological issues where there is no substantive difference between the parties' policy positions. This in turn drives even greater coherence within and divergence between the parties in a reinforcing cycle, increasing the imbalance between partisan and institutional imperatives.

Balance of institutional and partisan imperatives

When the system is functioning well, these two loops are in a rough equilibrium, such that partisanship serves a constructive purpose of representing real disagreements about substantive policy issues without preempting the possibility of negotiation and compromise.



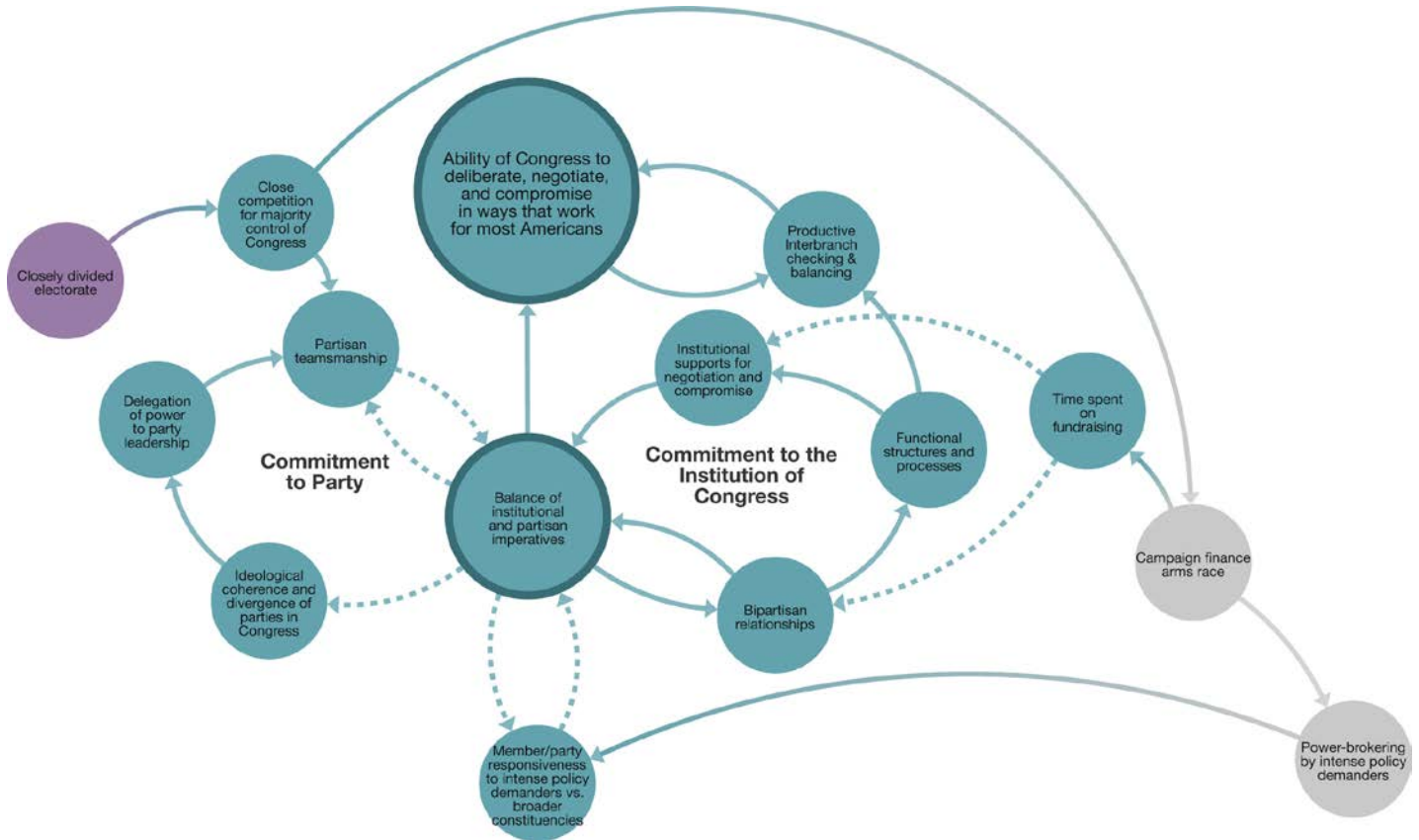
In the current climate, partisan imperatives have swamped institutional imperatives, too often stalling the ability of Congress to reach agreement among, and on behalf of, people and groups with different and often conflicting interests, beliefs, and agendas. This imbalance is reinforced by members' and parties' responsiveness to what political scientists have termed "intense policy demanders" – networks of highly organized interests and ideological factions that have come to be more or less permanently aligned with one party or the other (about which we will have more to say below).

Madison Initiative grantees are working to establish the appropriate balance between party and institutional imperatives through the following activities:

- Supporting reform of legislative rules, norms, and processes that could create a stronger climate for pragmatic compromise.
- Creating settings for engagement that enable bipartisan dialogue and relationships to take root in and around Congress.
- Bolstering the capacity of Members, staff, and the institution as a whole to engage in problem solving and productive negotiations.

Campaign finance arms race

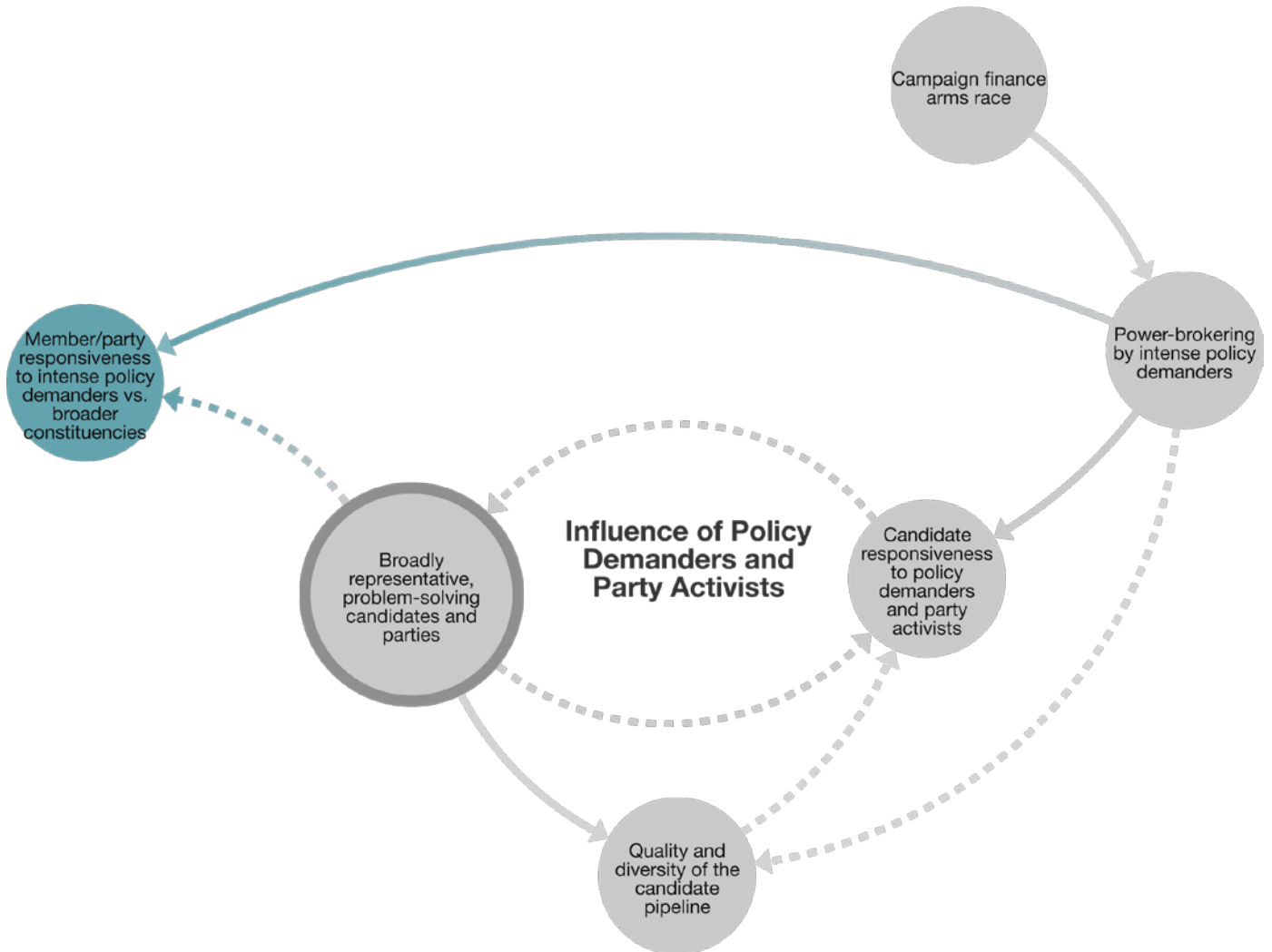
A series of court decisions that have served to deregulate the financing of political campaigns, when combined with the escalating cost of the campaigns themselves, have produced a campaign finance arms race.



This arms race is in turn further accelerated by the close competition for majority control of Congress and adds to the outside influence of intense policy demanders on the political and policy-making process. As the time members of Congress spend raising funds and endorsements expands, they have less time to invest in the core responsibilities and relationships necessary to being a legislator. These dynamics further erode members' commitment to the institution and impede the ability of Congress to fulfill its constitutional functions effectively.

Influence of Policy Demanders and Party Activists

In addition to their ongoing lobbying efforts, policy demanders influence the behavior of parties, candidates, and members of Congress by vetting potential candidates and marshaling campaign funding to support those candidates they expect to deliver on the policies they are demanding (and to punish those who fail to do so).

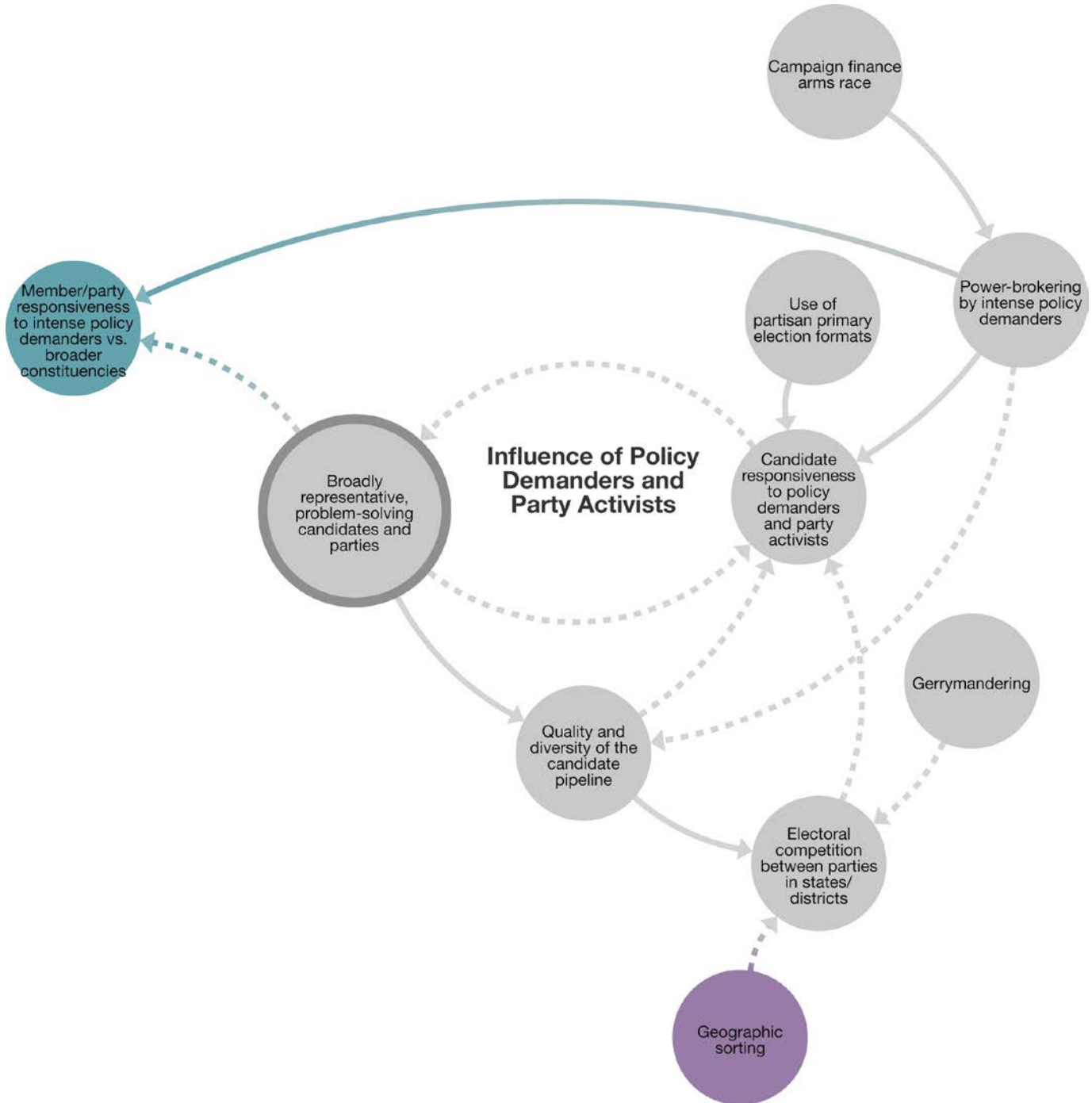


As campaign finance has been deregulated, the cost of campaigns has dramatically increased, and voter turnout remains disproportionately strong among more partisan and ideological activists, the most successful candidates are those who are aligned with and attract the resources and influential backing of policy demanders and party activists.

These political patterns contribute to the growing coherence within and divergence between the political parties because, over time, organized groups of policy demanders have become more or less permanently affiliated and aligned with the two major parties.

Candidate responsiveness to policy demanders and party activists

These dynamics are accelerated by the current partisan, winner-take-all formats for selecting candidates in chronically low-turnout primary elections. This is particularly the case in the growing number of noncompetitive states and districts, where members of Congress are effectively chosen in the primary rather than in the general election.



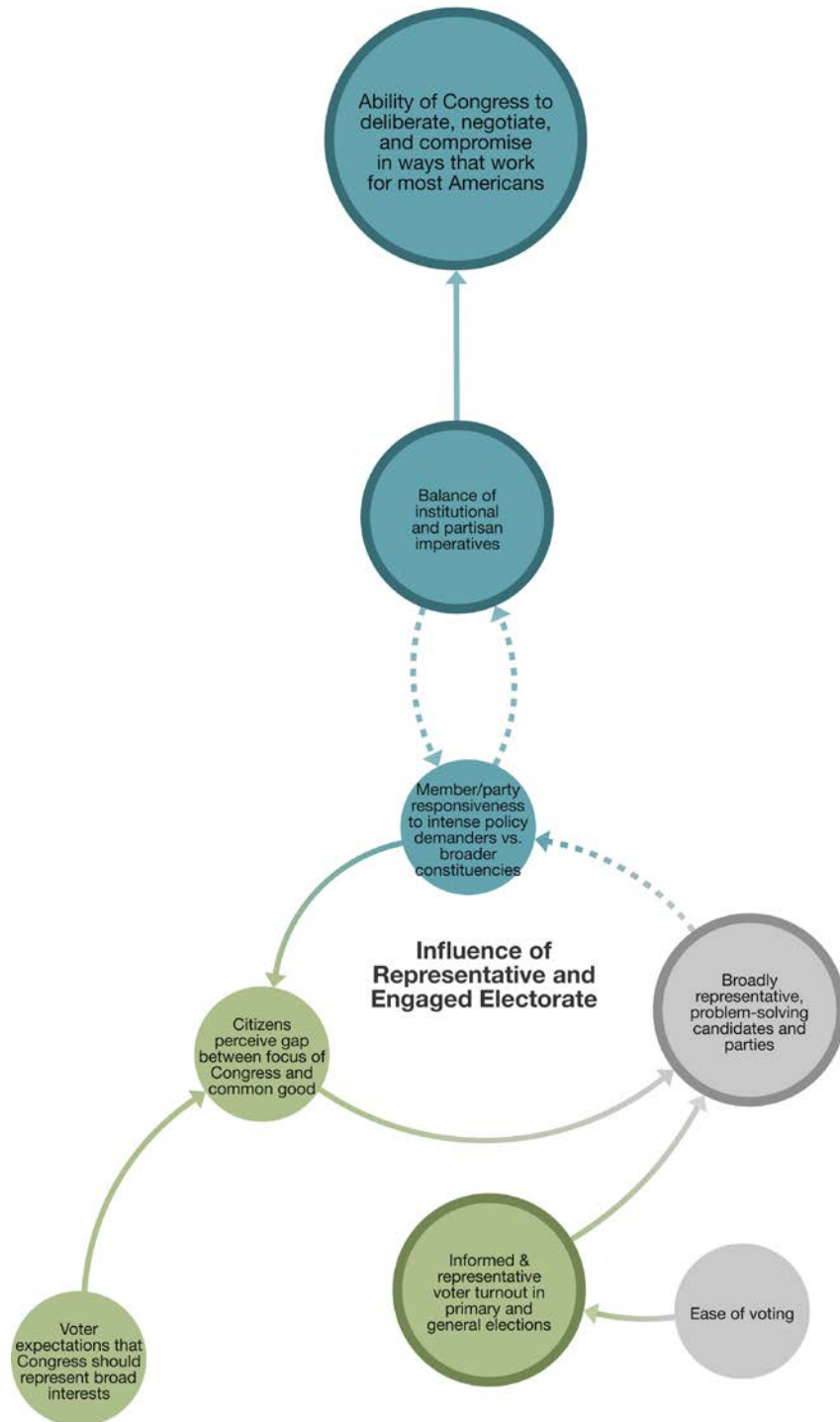
We should note here that we have not been persuaded by the conventional wisdom holding that partisan gerrymandering is the primary driver behind noncompetitive districts; rather, we see the geographic sorting of the electorate into increasingly “blue”

urban and coastal enclaves and increasingly “red” hinterlands as the central cause of this phenomenon.

In this context, citizens who have a pragmatic, problem-solving orientation are typically not actively recruited and indeed are discouraged from running for their party’s nomination. Those who do run must be prepared to align with and cultivate the support of intense policy demanders and party elites, thereby continuing the cycle.

Influence of Representative and Engaged Electorate

In theory, a representative and engaged electorate monitors members' and candidates' behavior and judges them against their expectations for performance. A much more engaged and representative electorate could potentially offset the disproportionate influence of intense policy demanders and party activists by more effectively monitoring members' and candidates' behavior and voting accordingly -- in greater numbers.

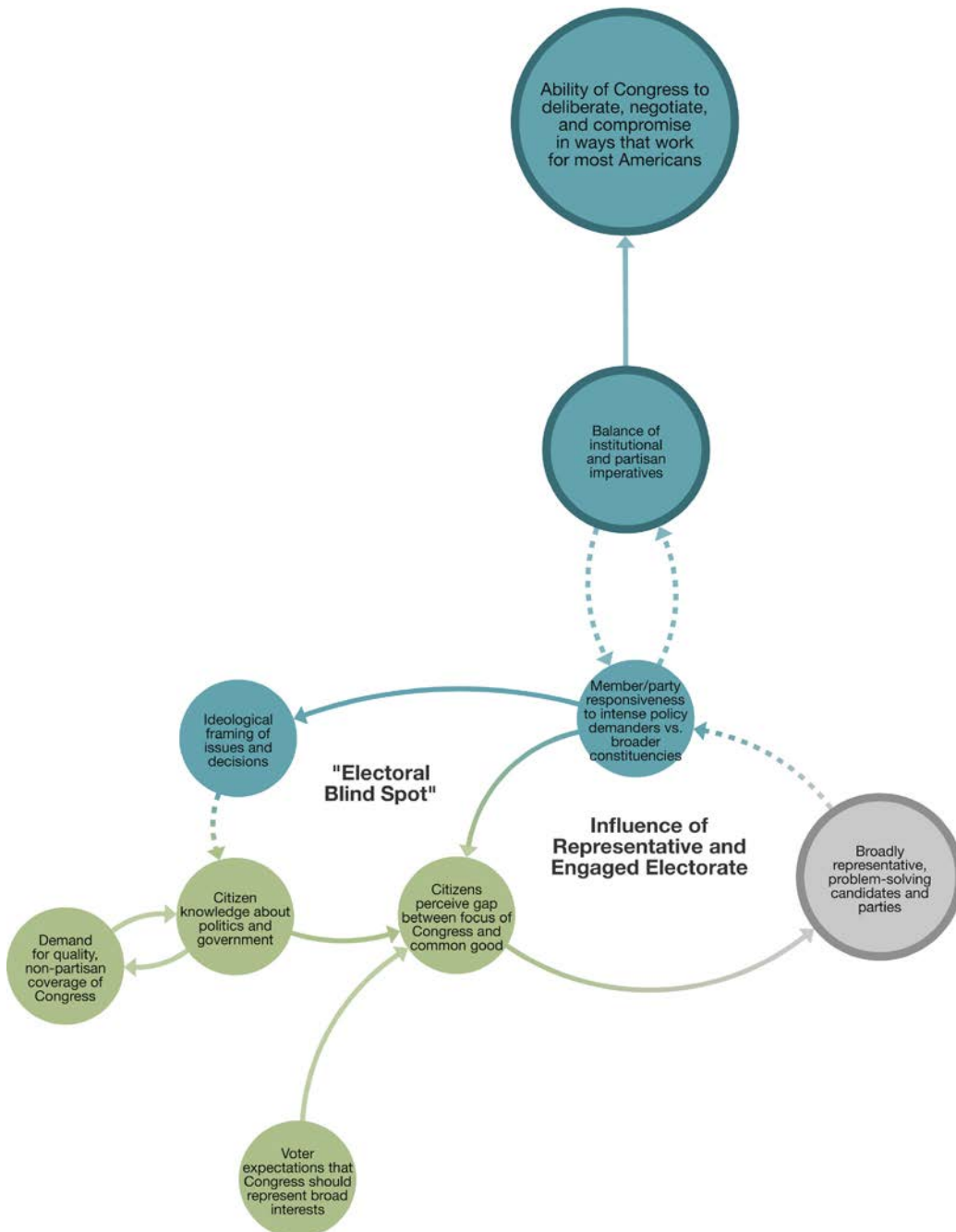


We believe our grantees working to reform campaigns and elections can help foster this alternative dynamic, at least in part, by the following:

- Supporting new formats for candidate selection and other electoral reforms that could reduce the polarizing effects of our present system for selecting candidates.
- Modernizing state systems for voter registration and election administration that will make it easier to vote and decrease partisan conflict over ballot access.
- Understanding and exploring ways to reduce the impact of increasingly large, undisclosed, ideologically-driven campaign contributions.
- Helping to support nonprofit networks that are broadening and improving the pipeline of leaders who are in position to contribute in and would consider running for Congress.

"Electoral Blind Spot"

The potential for a representative and engaged electorate to counterbalance the influence of policy demanders is highest when voters are attentive to what parties and members are doing. However, the political scientists who have described the disproportionate influence that these policy demanders have in our system have also described how an “electoral blind spot” limits the ability of voters to track the discrepancies between their own preferences and the actions of their representatives.

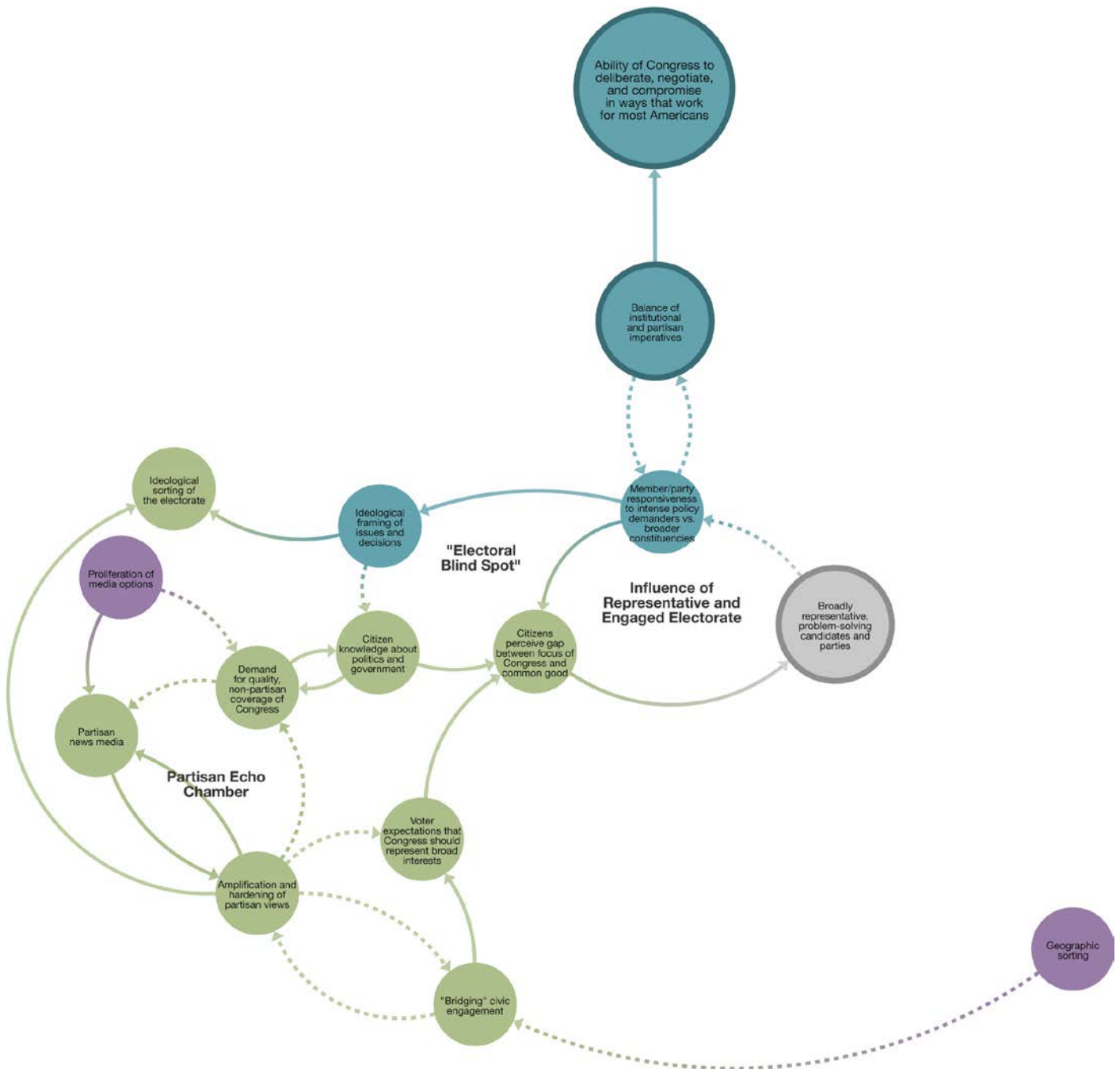


Voters find it hard to assess these discrepancies for a variety of reasons, including:

- The ideological framing of policy decisions by parties and aligned networks of policy demanders so that the often narrow benefits of these decisions are masked in the eyes of average voters.
- The lack of quality news coverage and information about Congressional activity
- Limited demand for this kind of information on the part of citizens relative to other priorities in their lives.
- The increased complexity of policy challenges and solutions.
- The rampant use of "inside the Beltway" procedural maneuvers that obscure the substantive policy issues being debated.

Partisan Echo Chamber

The “partisan echo chamber” describes a condition in which partisan messages and beliefs are repeated and amplified through various (but aligned) voices and channels while opposing views are censored or derided. Amidst a proliferation of entertainment options and decreasing public interest in nonpartisan coverage of Congress, shrinking news outlets compete for viewers with increasingly partisan and vitriolic coverage. Confirmation bias—or the human tendency to seek out information that confirms our existing beliefs—in turn causes those with hardened views to seek out more partisan media in a reinforcing cycle.

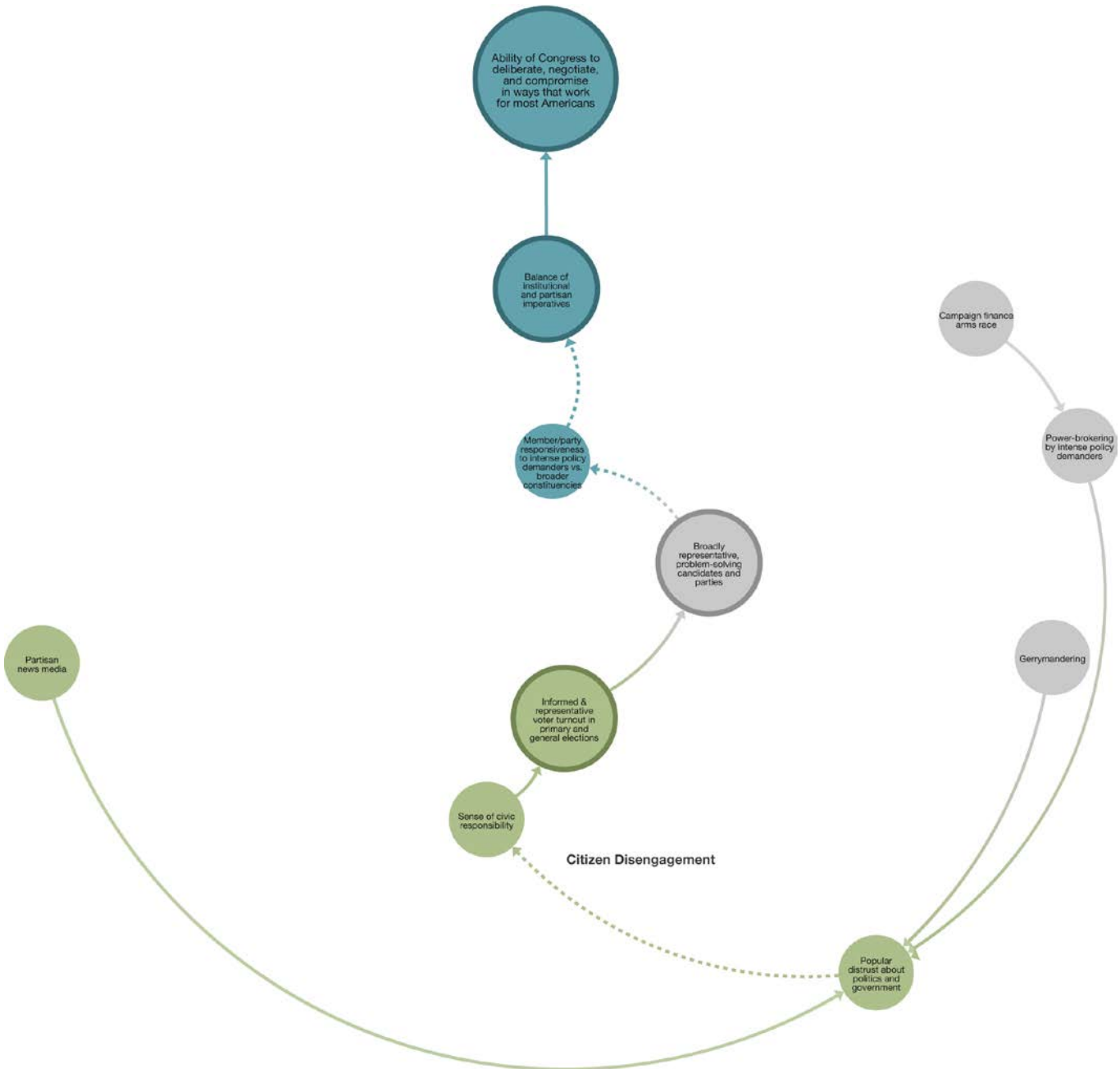


The partisan echo chamber also creates pressure on members of Congress to protect narrow partisan interests rather than to negotiate and compromise, as compromise is derided and complex issues are presented too narrowly and ideologically to support negotiation. As partisan beliefs are echoed within these ‘closed’ systems of information exchange, voter (and member) expectations that Congress should represent broad interests are dampened, and the “electoral blind spot” grows.

The hardening of partisan lines in the electorate could potentially be counterbalanced through “bridging civic engagement,” in which people have the opportunity to interact regularly with others who have differing views. However, the geographic sorting of the population into like-minded regions and diminishing patterns of this form of civic engagement are working to seal citizens further into their echo chambers.

Citizen Disengagement

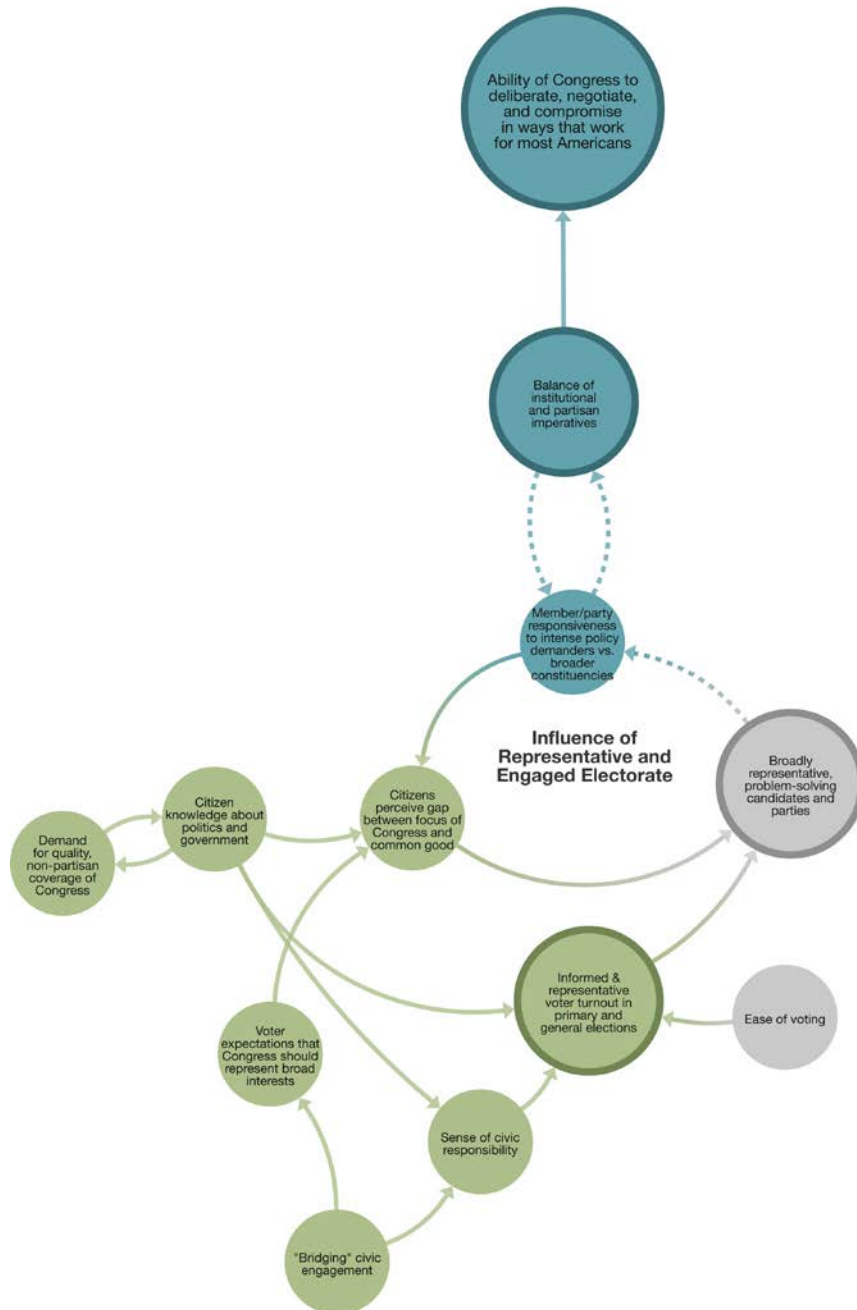
In a vicious cycle that extends over a longer time horizon, Congress's poor performance, combined with the outsized influence of policy demanders, the finger pointing of partisan media, and pervasive cynicism about the role of money in politics, decrease citizen's trust in government and politics.



This in turn undermines citizens' sense of civic responsibility and makes them less likely to participate, thereby increasing the relative influence of well-organized interests and ideological groups on Congress and worsening the institution's performance in an accelerating downward spiral.

Informed and representative voter turnout in primary and general elections

We have worked through a cumulative set of negative dynamics involving the “electoral blind spot,” the partisan echo chamber, and citizen disengagement. In doing so we have anticipated a countervailing set of dynamics: a larger segment of citizens who are more knowledgeable about politics and government, who are regularly rubbing elbows with others with whom they don’t always see eye-to-eye, who collectively have a sense of civic responsibility, and who find it easy to vote (and are not in any substantial way restricted from doing so). Taken together, this would lead to more informed and representative voter turnout in both primary and general elections.



We believe that spurring civic engagement that improves the quality of representation requires:

- Increasing the ease of voting (and reducing barriers to ballot access) by modernizing systems for voter registration and election administration.
- Identifying and supporting cost effective and nonpartisan ways of increasing voter turnout in both primary and general elections.
- Finding ways to support media and nonpartisan information that will better inform citizens about legislators and candidates, and about the need, options, and paths forward for achieving political reform.
- Experimenting with “bridging civic engagement” opportunities that build citizens' sense of civic responsibility and instill expectations that Congress and its members should engage in problem solving and represent diverse interests.

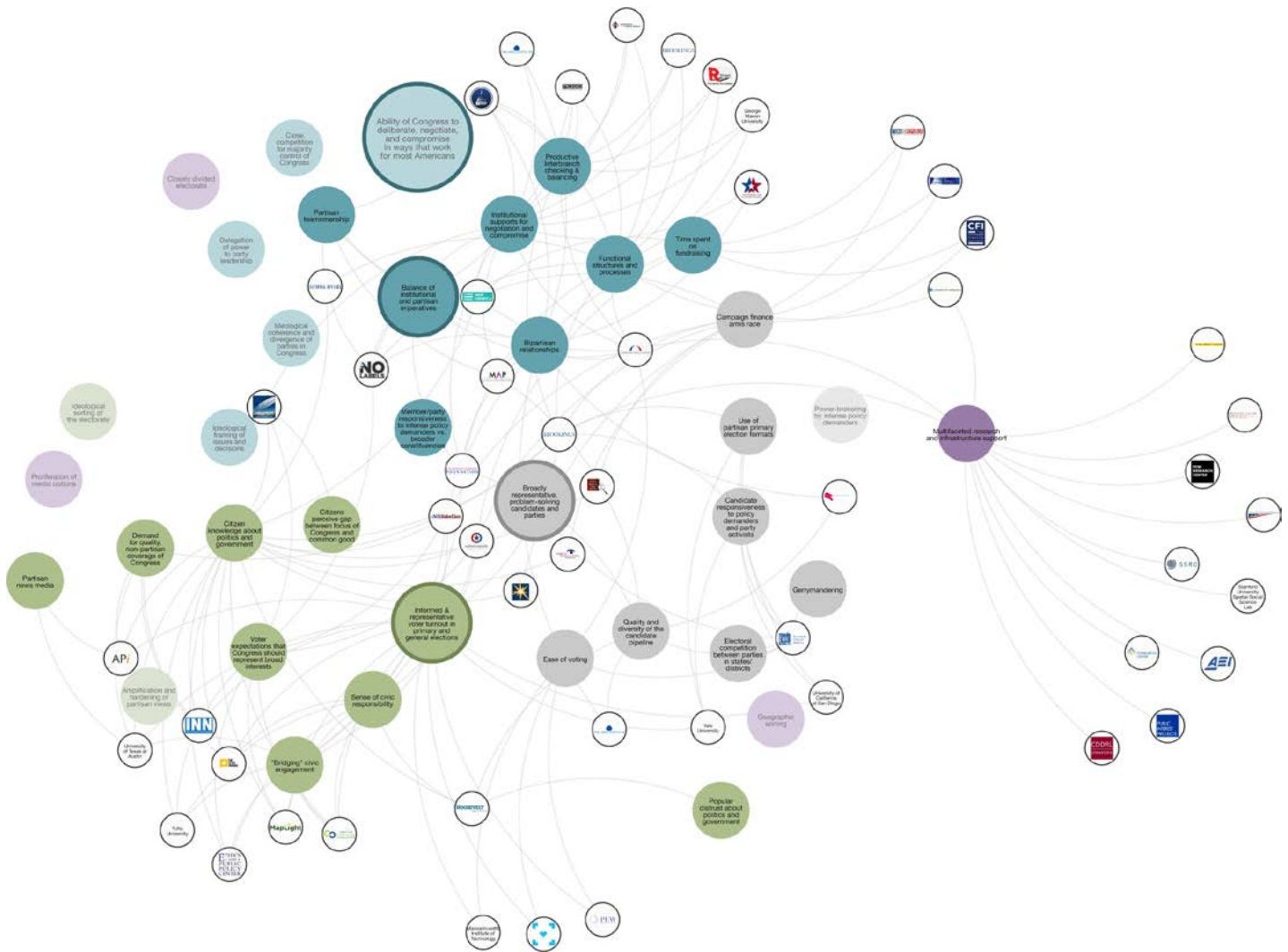
Appendix I: The Madison Initiative Grantees

The list of organizations below reflects the Madison Initiative's grantee portfolio to date:

- American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research
- American Press Institute
- Aspen Institute Congressional Program
- Aspen Rodel Fellowship Program
- Bipartisan Policy Center
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Brookings Institution/Economic Studies
- Brookings Institution/ Governance Studies
- Campaign Finance Institute
- Campaign Legal Center Inc
- Center for American Progress
- Center for Responsive Politics
- City Club
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget
- Democracy Works, Inc
- Essex County Community Foundation/New Hampshire Rebellion
- Ethics and Public Policy Center
- Fair Vote
- Foundation Center
- Fund for the Republic
- George Mason University/Professor Paul Posner
- Guidestar
- Investigative News Network
- Library of Congress/Congressional Research Service
- Maplight/Voter's Edge
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology/Professor Charles Stewart
- Media Impact Funders
- National Affairs
- National Institute on Money in State Politics
- National Council of State Legislators/Women Members project
- New America Foundation
- No Labels Foundation
- Partnership for Public Service
- Partnership for Secure America
- Pew Charitable Trusts/Elections Project
- Pew Research Center
- Project on Government Oversight
- Public Interest Projects
- R Street Institute
- Social Science Research Council
- Stanford University/Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law
- Stanford University/Spatial Social Science Lab
- Sustainable Markets Foundation / Millennial Action Project

- Texas Tribune
- The Roosevelt Institute
- Tufts University / CIRCLE
- United Republic
- University of Arizona Foundation/National Institute for Civil Discourse
- University of California at San Diego/Professors Thad Kousser and Seth Hill
- University of Texas at Austin/Engaging News Project
- Voice of the People
- Yale University/ Professors Alan Gerber and Greg Huber

Appendix II: Grantee Visualization



For project grants, we have linked grantees to specific variables based on the description of the work they are undertaking in the grant proposal; for general support grants we have linked grantees to specific variables based on our knowledge of the work they are undertaking in general to improve democracy in the U.S. This [link](#) will enable you to review an interactive version of the grantee map online.

Appendix III: Note on Key Sources

We have developed the thinking behind this systems map through conversations and exchanges with (by this point) a few hundred advocates, funding partners, observers, political leaders and practitioners. Alongside these discussions, we have also relied on assessments of the problems we are seeking to overcome – their causes, dynamics, consequences, and potential solutions – from a wide range of scholars and commentators.

We are committed to basing the Madison Initiative on the best research and thinking about the problems at hand and what to do about them. Thus we wanted share the key sources we have used in laying our groundwork. To be clear, we are not presuming that we have integrated all the insights that these various authors have developed. Indeed, many of them disagree too sharply with each other to allow for such a synthesis. Furthermore, we expect (and hope!) that at least some of these scholars and observers will let us know where our thinking is off-track and needs to be redirected along the lines they have laid out. In the meantime, we wanted to acknowledge that we are indebted to their work.

We were fortunate to have the benefit of several wide-ranging assessments of political dysfunction and potential ways of mitigating it that were being developed at the outset of our work, including Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin, eds., *Negotiating Agreement in Politics* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2013); Social Science Research Council, *The Democracy Papers: An Anxieties of Democracy Collection* (New York: SSRC, 2013); Steve Teles, Heather Hurlburt, and Mark Schmitt, “Philanthropy in a Time of Polarization,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Summer 2014); Francis Fukuyama, “America in Decay: The Sources of Political Dysfunction,” *Foreign Affairs* (September / October 2014); Bruce E. Cain, *Democracy More or Less: America’s Political Reform Quandary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2014); and Nathaniel Persily, ed., *Solutions to Political Polarization in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2015).

Our perspective on how partisan imperatives have come to dominate institutional imperatives in Congress draws on Sara A. Binder, *Stalemate: The Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Frances E. Lee, *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); and Robert G. Kaiser, *Act of Congress: How America’s Essential Institution Works, and How It Doesn’t* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

We continue to believe in the possibility of members of Congress being able to deliberate and compromise on pressing issues facing the country. This conviction has been bolstered by the work of Joseph M. Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason: Deliberative Democracy and American National Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); William F. Connelly, Jr., *James Madison Rules America: The Constitutional Origins of Congressional Partisanship* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); David R. Mayhew, *Partisan Balance: Why Political Parties Don’t Kill the U.S. Constitutional System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

Recent proposals for ways to restore the balance between partisan and institutional considerations in Congress and American politics more broadly that we have found illuminating include Mickey Edwards, *The Parties vs. The People: How To Turn Democrats and Republicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Jonathan Rauch, “Rescuing Compromise,” *National Affairs* (Fall 2013): pp. 115-127; Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Jason Grumet, *City of Rivals: Restoring the Glorious Mess of American Democracy*, (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2014).

We have learned much from scholars affiliated with the UCLA school of thought on political parties who have reconceived them as networks of “intense policy demanders,” including Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics,” *Perspectives on Politics* (September 2012): pp. 571-597; Seth Masket, *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislators* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009); and Hans Noel, *Political Parties and Political Ideologies in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

In understanding how networks of partisans, interests, and advocates have structured political conflict in recent decades, we’ve benefitted from Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer – and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, “After the ‘Master Theory’: Downs, Schattschneider, and the Rebirth of Policy-Focused Analysis,” *Perspective on Politics* (September 2014), pp. 643-662.

We have also come to appreciate how political parties and factions within them can serve as dynamic and responsive political institutions from the work of Daniel DiSalvo, *Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868-2010* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); William A. Galston and Elaine C. Kamarck, “The New Politics of Evasion,” *Democracy Journal* (Fall 2013): pp. 8-24; and Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

We also have gained a better understanding of the political dynamics of congressional party primaries from Robert G. Boatright, *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primary Challenges* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Jill Lawrence and Walter Shapiro, “Phoning it In and Failing to Show: The Story of the 2014 House Primaries,” Center for Effective Public Management White Paper, the Brookings Institution, September 2014; and Elaine C. Kamarck and Alexander R. Podkul, “The 2014 Congressional Primaries: Who Ran and Why,” Center for Effective Public Management White Paper, the Brookings Institution, September 2014.

We have learned about the relative extent of partisan polarization and sorting in the electorate and what it entails for our politics from the work of Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2010); Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); and the Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization in the American Public: How Increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise, and Everyday Life* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014). We also have come to appreciate the political challenges of coping with polarization and sorting in light of human psychology from Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Random House, 2012), and Dan M. Kahan and his colleagues in the Cultural Cognition Project at the Yale Law School.

Our understanding of the causes and consequences of the partisan media echo chamber and what might be done about it has been informed by James T. Hamilton, *All the News That Is Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Markus Prior, *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Participation and Polarizes Elections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Natalie Jomini Stroud, *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Darrel West and Beth Stone, “Nudging News Producers and Consumers Toward More Thoughtful, Less Polarized Discourse,” Center for Effective Public Management White Paper, the Brookings Institution, February 2014; and the Pew Research Center, *Political Polarization and Media Habits: From Fox News to Facebook, How Liberals and Conservatives Keep Up with Politics* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014).

Our perspective on citizen (dis)engagement and what it entails for our politics has been informed by Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Public Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Stephen Macedo, ed., *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005); Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like Minded Americans is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008); and Marc Dunkelman, *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

The above studies paint a troubling picture of citizen participation in our public life. We have drawn some hope from the following assessments: Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008); Erik Liu and Nick Hanauer, *Gardens of Democracy: A New American Story of Citizens, the Economy, and the Role of Government* (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books, 2011); and Peter Levine, *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).