**PROPOSAL:**

The American political system is under considerable strain, as a combination of affective polarization and supermajoritarian political institutions have led to federal policymaking that is both highly contentious and often gridlocked (Lee 2016, Iyengar et al. 2019, McCarty 2019). Citizens’ levels of disaffection with contemporary American politics are high (Hopkins 2022). While recent research has begun to consider the interplay of polarization and America’s federalist system (e.g., Hopkins 2018, Grumbach 2022), key questions about the role of federalism and geographic representation in reinforcing or reducing contemporary polarization remain unanswered.

At the time of the American founding, the Constitution’s framers were very attentive to questions about the optimal size of well-functioning democratic political communities (Madison 1787, Miller 2018). As of 1780, Virginia was the largest American state with 538,000 residents, many of whom were slaves, women, or otherwise disenfranchised (Davies 2006). That means that when the framers envisioned meaningful subnational political communities, they envisioned communities that had quite small numbers of citizens by contemporary standards. Today, even the smallest states have significantly larger electorates than did the largest states in 1780. This raises an important question: are contemporary American states too large to engender the meaningful attachments that are the bedrock of functional political communities? Are they too large to foster effective relationships between citizens and their representatives or to host meaningful political debates (Rehfeld 2005)?

Relatedly, one of the significant compromises of the U.S. Constitution was a bicameral legislature, with states enjoying equal representation in the Senate regardless of their population (Taylor et al. 2014). Given that the ratio of the population in America’s largest state (California) to its smallest (Wyoming) is 68 to 1, small-state residents enjoy substantially better representation in the U.S. Senate than do large-state residents. But do residents of small states such as Wyoming or Vermont *perceive* themselves to be better represented? Research on partisanship and rural resentment suggests that residents of smaller states such as Wyoming and Vermont may not feel well represented in Washington D.C. (Cramer 2016). Perceived representation may hinge not on population size but on partisan congruence with Congressional majorities or the presidency. If so, the U.S. is paying a substantial cost in terms of institutional frictions and veto points without reaping discernible gains with respect to perceived representation.

The proposed module would explore these questions using a 2,000-respondent sample of Americans. Specifically, we propose to ask respondents about their levels of political efficacy and trust in different Congressional chambers as well as across different levels in the federal system. We will randomly assign respondents to report their levels of political efficacy when asked about the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives, and then to assess whether that relationship is moderated by the (logged) size of the state. We will conduct parallel analyses assessing efficacy and trust at the state versus federal levels.

These results may call into question a fundamental premise of American political institutions—the value of affording small states increased representation in one chamber of Congress. Accordingly, surveying a nationally representative sample of Americans is vital. In recent years, survey response rates have plummeted, and online, opt-in samples are known to over-represent those with high levels of political engagement as well as white citizens (Hopkins and Gorton 2022). Accordingly, we are seeking to participate in the Polarization Research Lab’s weekly tracking panel to survey a nationally representative sample of American adults.

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