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Teaching empathy: Examining the relationship between state political environment and social studies curriculum

Norman Morris Ellis III

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Teaching Empathy: Examining the Relationship
between State Political Environment and Social Studies Curriculum

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Norman Morris Ellis III

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS COLLEGE APPROVAL:

Project Advisor: Amanda J. Cleveland Teye, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, Political Science

Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.,
Dean, Honors College

Reader: Liliokanaio Peaslee, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, Political Science

Reader: Chris R. Colocousis, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor, Sociology

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Abstract

In the age of partisan divide in America, education plays a pivotal role in overcoming social and political barriers—bridging these divides by creating a shared understanding of core values and beliefs that promote the tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of others and the recognition of the inequities that exist in society. Although there are number of factors that have contributed to our nation’s division, this paper specifically investigates how public education might play a role in mitigating social and political tension, and the political factors that might facilitate or hinder the implementation of valuable curriculum goals. The purpose of this paper is to examine state political factors to determine if there are associations between the political division or homogeneity of a state—or the dominant political party in a state—and its statutes and laws pertaining to social studies curriculum that promote civic engagement, civil discourse, and diverse cultural values (multiculturalism and social inequality). Data were gathered from blank sources and collated in a single database, which allowed for nonparametric correlation analyses to determine association. A binomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the effects of political culture, population size, and median household income on statistically significant variables. Despite most states having majority-Democratic populations in terms of voter registration, there are Republican majorities in most state legislatures. All states mention civic engagement in their statutes related to social studies curriculum, but only nine mention ideas regarding social inequality. Majority-Democratic states appeared to be associated with the promotion of diverse cultural values in social studies curriculum. Majority-Democratic state legislatures were associated with a greater likelihood of promoting social inequality. State legislatures that were more divided appeared to have an association with a greater likelihood of promoting civil discourse. Increasing population sizes were associated with an increased likelihood of promoting civil discourse curriculum goals as well. Although the factors that contribute to our nation’s partisanship and lack of understanding extend beyond what we learn in the classrooms, examining certain political and social factors of a state might give us some insight into how party values and political factors might influence curriculum goals.

Keywords: civic engagement; civics; culture; discord; education policy; empathy; partisanship; politics; social studies

Introduction

Political Divide and a Climate of Hate in America

Social and political division in the United States has been on the rise, and more people living within the nation's borders are taking notice. In a major study, the Pew Research Center found that, even before the politically-rancorous 2016 general election campaigns, the American public has grown more partisan. In 2015, 53% of Republicans or Republican-leaning Independents held consistently conservative ideologies and 60% of Democrats or Democratic-leaning Independents held consistently liberal ideologies, and this trend has been steadily increasing (Balz 2016; Kiley 2017; Pew Research Center 2017).

Pew also found that demographic changes in the United States have reshaped both party coalitions. While both political parties are growing more diverse, better-educated, and less religious, Republicans are doing so at a slower rate than the country as a whole. Those within the Democratic Party are becoming less white, less religious, and better-educated at a faster rate than the nation's population in general and at an even faster rate when compared to the those within the Republican Party (Saad, et al. 2018).

These growing demographic trends within the political parties contribute to social and political tensions. A study found that more than half of white evangelicals believe the nation's declining white population is a negative thing—a group that has been one of the most consistently and reliably conservative for decades (Scott 2018). It is certainly likely that many Republican and evangelical voters support President Donald J. Trump because of some of his policy positions on controversial and politically-divisive issues such as abortion, however, many of his supporters seemingly admire the president for his vitriolic, race-baiting, and divisive rhetoric in which he alienates or disunites his political opponents, critical media outlets, and

minorities people from his typical white, conservative, evangelical base (Justice & Stanley 2016; Gjelten, 2018; Vandermaas-Peeler, et al. 2018; Gallup 2019).

We also see similar rhetoric coming from other elected officials and members of the general public, aided in large part by the advancement in technology with the use of social media and the spread of misinformation. This rancorous rhetoric coming from members of the public, and especially from the President of the United States, is destabilizing the founding principles of our nation and is further disunifying social and political harmony in the country (Rushin & Edwards 2018).

Since the inauguration of Donald Trump, Americans have been involved in thousands of protests. These protests have ranged from backlash against the election of Trump, responses to police brutality against unarmed black people, pro white-nationalist and neo-Nazi rhetoric, gun violence protests, protests for science, women's rights, and much more. Data has shown that, from January 20, 2017 to October of 2017, over 4,000 American protests have taken place, with over 5.4 million attendees having been recorded (Caruso 2017). These political protests, regardless of their intentions or messages, might impress upon the American public the idea that we are still bitterly divided and unwilling to compromise.

It is important, however, not to conflate movements by outraged protestors angered by society's poor treatment of minority groups with movements empowered by hate, bigotry, or the suppression of open, civil discussion. Advocating against the marginalization of women, the youth, immigrants, ethnic minorities, or other vulnerable minority groups in order to achieve societal equality should generally be seen as a noble conviction. It is the way protests are perceived by others, regardless of the nobility of the movement, that can heighten social and political tensions.

The messages and actions of those engaged in nonviolent protests can be perceived as attempts to foster discord by those with competing political values and beliefs. They might come across to some as inherently hateful, egregious, or divisive. One can conclude that many of the impassioned protests from groups in society could have been handled in a more respectful and civil manner. The angry, emotionally-charged rhetoric of a crowd can diminish what is typically a righteous and rational message protestors want to get across—more peaceful protests.

Often times, protestors advocating for the rights of minorities are casted aside for being too crass, obnoxious, or even violent. This tone policing can further marginalize and disempower groups that already lack a strong voice in society. However, it is imperative that, rather than ignoring protestors, regardless of their demeanor, we take the time to listen to what is being said on both sides. This responsibility is especially incumbent on those who are part of majority groups that are well-represented in government and society.

Many movements by groups who are not well-represented by public officials are either ignored or criticized for being too radical by politicians and other members of the public. Certainly, just as a minority groups have been ignored and demeaned in society, some minorities might have also failed to adequately listen to the messages of those in the majority. While it is incumbent on all members of society to remain considerate and respectful towards the viewpoints of others, this process is especially incumbent on those in the majority, given they have adequate representation in government and are unable to experience widespread, systematic discrimination. All voices must be heard within society, but some voices, because of the various policies, behaviors, and practices formed by a history of prejudice and ignorance in this country, will continue to carry less power in the foreseeable future.

It is imperative that the American citizenry take into account all the diverse cultural values and experiences that populate the country and help form our ever-changing comprehensive national identity. That being said, it is also important that we recognize the political and social harm done to majority groups by minorities does not equate to the political and social harm done to minority groups by those in the majority. Harm, in any form or fashion should not be condoned. Everyone needs to be listened to, but it is the duty and responsibility of those in the majority groups to listen to other cultural values and experiences—even if the other side may not always show that same sentiment.

Contributions to National Discord in the United States. Scholars have noted that there has been a decline in larger group loyalties that extend beyond personal identity and a growing emphasis on “personalized politics” in which individually expressive personal action frames displace collective action frames in social movements and protests (Bennett 2012). Scholars argue that collectivity, rather, has been based in frames of personal identity. Identity politics is a term that has frequently been thrown around in the socio-political field in recent years. This term has historically been criticized by political liberals and conservatives alike due to its exclusive nature—the criticism being that identity politics enforces exclusion by leaving out those who are not a part of the group from discussion.

Identity Politics. Identity politics is defined in several different ways. It is widely used throughout the social and political sciences and the humanities to address a number of political phenomena including multiculturalism, women’s rights movements, LGBTQ+ movements, civil rights movements, nationalist movements and other forms of activism and exclusive political alliances based on particular social groups (Bernstein 2005). Identity politics is criticized by some scholars. They claim marginalized groups splinter into narrower, exclusive categories that

leave no space for others to participate in discussion and sociopolitical discourse. Some politically-conservative critics use the idea of multiculturalism as a synonym for “identity politics” in their criticisms, citing it as a cause of fragmentation in society. They claim that programs and emphases on particular racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation groups can balkanize America and threaten Western culture and civilization (Von Blum 2013). Even among audiences inclined to favor civil rights and progressive anti-discrimination measures, some people have expressed concern and anxiety about putting greater emphasis on racial or ethnic issues.

Some scholars have come to the defense of identity politics—to many, it helps to organize marginalized groups into a coalition that can combat unequal power structures. Some scholars argue that that, as a culture, we need to support identity-based organizing if we are to address the ongoing, dismal realities of racial exclusion and overt and institutional discrimination against historically oppressed populations (Von Blum 2013). Other scholars argue that the problem is not in the actions and desires of marginalized groups but, rather, in the continued ascension of privileged groups consistently reasserting both their interests and their universality (Walters 2018).

Facets of Sociocultural Division. Throughout the literature there appears to be three distinct facets of U.S. sociocultural division that have fragmented society and have been the basis for division and discord in the United States: the notion of perceived race and foreignness, religion, and socioeconomic status. These distinct facets of sociocultural divisions in the U.S. can influence one another and are interconnected— with the intersection between race and socioeconomic status shaping individual experience and public perception (Foster 2008). The lack of understanding between the various labels in each of these three sociocultural groups, and as intersectional subgroups, have helped to shape the social and political divisions we see in the

country today. These groups are not an exhaustive list of the various facets that have shaped tensions between those living in the US. Other factors might involve geography, region, or political culture, but many of these factors are interconnected, and race, religion, and class appeared most in the literature regarding national discord in the US.

The U.S. has had an enduring issue of discrimination based on one's perceived race or foreignness. From the birth of the nation until the mid-20th century, the prevailing societal beliefs and attitudes about non-dominant ethnic groups, their status, and how they should be incorporated into the U.S. was that of the legitimacy of racial domination and a belief in white supremacy (Nkomo & Hoobler 2014). Recently, the country has seen a large amount of publicized tensions between the white European majority in America and minority ethnicities—mainly black Americans and Latino Americans. Disputes between black and Latino Americans and white Americans (typically white law enforcement officers) have been largely publicized due to the increased use of social media (Bonilla 2015). These challenges have led to the activist movement “Black Lives Matter,” which has challenged police officers killing unarmed black people in America but has also been heavily criticized for encouraging violent protests (Rickford 2016). It is quite possible that police brutality and racial bias against black Americans has not necessarily been increasing in recent years, but rather, they might just be covered more frequently by major news outlets and highly publicized, documented, and challenged on social media platforms.

Tension between the white majority and minorities in the U.S. also seem to stem from actions the government takes in order to “make up” for the disparities ethnic minorities experience due to the blatantly racist practices the government and the public participated in before the present day. In contemporary society, blatant racism has, for the most part, been

replaced by disparities in income, housing, education, incarceration, and healthcare—de facto segregation (Gonino 2017). Recent studies have found that white people tended to be less supportive of race-based policies aimed to improve the lives of black Americans than black Americans are. Many scholars have noted the “racialization” of certain welfare programs and policies such as affirmative action (Quadagno 1994; Martin 1999). Americans tend to form opinions about welfare based on negative stereotypes about black Americans and the general discourse surrounding these policies become inseparable from the racial groups and stereotypes associated with them, and there is a growing worry that these negative attitudes could extend to Latino Americans who benefit from welfare programs as well (Hussey & Merkwitz 2013).

Another facet of sociocultural divisions regarding race and perceived foreignness is the conflict surrounding the incorporation of diverse cultures into American society. Multiculturalism, in its essence, is grounded in the cultural-relativist idea that all cultures are essentially equal—no single culture is better or worse than any other and, as a society, we should not try to enforce the cultural norms, values, and attitudes on to others, and we should try to coexist in society (Harrison 2008). This can certainly create issues when a society like the U.S. wants to recognize diverse cultures while also trying to facilitate progress toward democratic governance, social justice, and other prevailing attitudes of Western society that might conflict with other cultural values and beliefs. National policies of multiculturalism are pursued through measures such as supporting diverse communities and cultural activities, monitoring diversity in employment, and tailoring public services to accommodate cultural differences in values, language, and social customs (Nkomo & Hoobler 2014).

The rapidly changing demographic makeup of U.S. citizens can conflict with the desire for cultural homogeneity of society from elites and those in positions of privilege—those with

special rights, immunities, or advantages—who want to maintain the status quo or impose onto others what they believe is the way ideal way to live in a society. Many Americans may fear the loss of a national American identity. Many of the arguments against multiculturalism and the nation's embrace of foreigners emphasize the costs of accommodating immigrants and foreigners, the benefits of having them adopt the prevailing culture of the majority, as well as other economic, security, educational, and environmental concerns (Harrison 2008; Citrin, et al. 2012).

Religion is an area of division in the U.S. that receives less attention in the literature. This is likely because many Americans may not perceive the U.S. as a religiously divided nation. A recent study found that Americans are less likely to perceive divisiveness in the country based on religion than they are to perceive divisions based on race, socioeconomic status, or politics. 93% of Americans believe America is divided along racial lines, 96% see divisions along economic lines, and 97% say the country is divided along political lines, however, only 72% of Americans say the country is divided along religious lines (Campbell & Putnam 2011). While some scholars have argued that the U.S. is a fairly diverse yet tolerant nation in regard to the various religious practices in the country, others have argued a case for theological exclusivism. America, to many, is seen as a Christian nation, and there have been negative attitudes toward the incorporation of non-Christian religions in the US—particularly Islam and Hinduism (Merino 2010). Regardless of the perceptions of divisiveness based on religion in the U.S., it continues to play a large role in national discord and in the nation's policy decisions.

The use of religious rhetoric by politicians in order to appeal to citizens is widespread in the US and has been shown to be a successful political motivator for certain religious groups (Sherkat 2014; Jennings 2016). Religion has also been shown to have a substantial impact on

political polarization in the US—characterized by creating more ideologically similar parties within a two-party system and having increased distrust and disdain for those on the other end of the political spectrum. In an analysis of the recent midterm elections in 2018, the Pew Research Center found that there was considerable continuity in the voting patterns of several religious groups. White evangelicals or born-again Christians tended to support Republican candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives at almost 80%. Religiously unaffiliated voters and Jewish voters backed Democratic candidates for the House at about 70 and 80%, respectively (Sciupac & Smith 2018). There are obvious connections between religion and politics for certain key religious groups in the US, and there is strong reason to believe that religious spheres, in shaping politics, can contribute to polarization and national discord.

Much of the research relating to socioeconomic tensions focuses on the attributions people believe lead to poverty. Socioeconomic tensions can become exacerbated by growing income inequality. Studies have found that Americans tend to believe there are multiple determinants of poverty but most Americans—mainly white Americans—scrutinize the internal, individualistic attributes of a person. Many Americans believe low intelligence, drug addiction, and lack of motivation are a greater determinant of poverty than external or environmental factors, such as systematic discrimination or attending underperforming schools (Cozzarelli, et al. 2001; Hopkins 2009). Many scholars believe that, since Americans generally believe anyone can work their way out of poverty with the help of a strong work ethic and unwavering determination, most Americans also see that the poor as people who have failed to put in the work and are, thus, undeserving of welfare benefits (Alesina, et al. 2001).

There are disputes in the literature as to whether or not Americans' opinions about welfare are a good indicator of their opinions on poor people in general, since Americans

recognize that there can be multiple reasons for a person to become impoverished. Scholars argue that, while negative attitudes towards welfare recipients are apparent, that does not shape attitudes about poor people in general (Prasad 2012) Some scholars have noted that, because the U.S. is generally optimistic in social mobility—moving out of poverty through hard work, we are generally less supportive to redistributive policies such as social transfers (Alesina 2018).

Scholars have also found that Americans' conceptions of the poor tend to be more negative than those of the middle class. Negative conceptions of the poor are shown to be strongly correlated with race. It is well-documented in the literature that it is widely believed by the American public that most black Americans abuse the welfare system. Studies have found that states with large black populations also have adopted less sophisticated, inclusive, and generous welfare programs, replacing them with welfare policies that are very restricted and punitive (Rodgers 2009). Socioeconomic tensions, however, do not just center on prevailing conceptions of those in the poor. Working-class and middle-class families can express grievances based on conceptions of those below the poverty line and of those in the top-one-percent income in net worth. Economic insecurity from those in the working and middle-class can also lead to tensions based on other factors, such as heightened racial and ethnic tensions, especially as it relates to immigration (Helgeson 2016).

Political Division. Much of the way political division plays a role in shaping public discord is addressed in the beginning of the chapter. Stark polarization has been a defining characteristic of U.S. political culture in recent years. In contemporary political culture, Democrats and Republicans are incredibly divided on many societal issues and are unable to find any sort of common ground. Studies have shown that, more than any other social characteristics—including race and religion—the largest partisan gaps between different groups

in America are between party affiliations, and these gaps are only growing larger (Doherty 2017; Pew Research Center 2017).

Not only are Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. unable or unwilling to compromise, but partisan antipathy also remains extensive in American culture. A 2017 study by the Pew Research Center found that, in recent years, 44% of Democrats and those who lean Democratic have a very unfavorable opinion of the Republican Party, and 45% of Republicans and those who lean Republican have a very unfavorable view of the Democratic Party. The same study found that, while conservatives have remained largely the same in terms of policy positions over the past few years, Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents have moved more to the left on issues regarding race and the role of government. Across 10 political values the Pew Research Center has tracked since 1994, there is now an average gap of 36 percentage points between Republicans and those who lean Republican and Democrats and those who lean Democrats. In 1994, it was only 15 points (Doherty 2017; Pew Research Center 2017).

Much of this disconnect between political parties in the U.S. may also be a matter of the basic tenets and philosophies of the major two political parties as they pertain to multiculturalism and diversity. It is generally understood that, while multiculturalism and cultural pluralism is fundamental to the principles of American society, those on the ideological left of the political spectrum tend to be more culturally sensitive or, at least, are more likely to embrace other cultures than those on the ideological right (Deckman 2006; Han 2015; Lee and Coulehan 2006; Rodden 2010; Sprague-Jones 2011). Some scholars have argued that political conservatism and the promotion and support of various distinct political, regional, social, religious, economic, racial, and ethnic cultures are mutually exclusive.

In recent years, politicians primarily on the conservative right have argued that the embrace of diverse cultures constitutes a concerted effort to undermine the national character of democratic countries and to institutionalize the public status of non-Western groups (Johnson 2017). To add to this contrast and reaffirm the divide between the political left and right as it pertains to cultural diversity, much of the literature agrees that those on the left tend to be motivated more by creativity, curiosity, and a diversity of experience, whereas those on the right tend to be motivated more by orderly, parsimonious, rigid structures, as well as self-control, norm attainment, and rule-following (Carney, Jost, Gosling, and Potter 2008).

It is important, however, to recognize that even some on the ideological left reject cultures that do not recognize certain western values and principles such as democracy and equality. Though left-leaning liberals tend to emphasize their belief in cultural pluralism and the ability to express one's culture, they still express views guided by norm-attainment and assimilation. There are certain cultural practices and beliefs that those on the left reject because of their ideas cultivated by a Western-democratic upbringing. Scholars have argued that those on the ideological left generally do not give equal recognition to cultural groups that reject social progressivism and embrace political conservatism and Christian traditionalism (Liu 2006). These values of conservatism and Christian traditionalism are fundamental to the modern Republican Party in the U.S., so, just as the apprehension or outright denial of the embrace of various cultures by right-wing Republicans worsens the political divide in the country, so too does the denial of orthodox conservatism and Christian fundamentalism by left-wing Democrats.

With an understanding that much of the disharmony in society can be attributed to ignorance or outright disdain for other cultural and ethnic groups within society, it is imperative that we find a way to break through these cultural barriers and negative attitudes regarding

redistribution of rights and power by ensuring those within the country are adequately educated about issues surrounding civil rights, social and economic inequality, civic engagement, and other concepts promoting equity, equality, and engaging in empathic behaviors.

Teaching in a Time of Discord

Unfortunately, in contemporary society, educating the public about many of these concepts may likely be seen as liberal indoctrination—as the discussion of sociopolitical concepts such as social justice, civil rights, and economic inequality are typically encouraged in politically-liberal environments and carry negative connotation in politically-conservative ones (Green 2008; Cochran Smith, et al. 2009). It is important that we as a nation reclaim the notions of civil rights and social justice to work to mend the divide between those people in society with and without social, cultural, and economic advantages, and racial privilege. These concepts should not be politically-charged. Engaging with the realities of many of these topics do no harm to society; they can help students become more civically-engaged and teach them about the opportunities awarded to some in society and not to others, and how that might impact their society conception and experience.

These concepts have regrettably succumbed to politicization. In contemporary American society, it has become all too common for acts of civility to be demeaned or mocked for being too “politically correct,” acknowledgment of one’s political positions based on some social or cultural background is readily criticized, and voices from the less-educated or the poor are promptly silenced or ridiculed. These practices must be stopped if we want to walk down a path of social harmony and political civility.

It is might be difficult to drastically change the worldviews and conceptions of various ethnocultural groups within the nation. Many aged adults in society can no longer be swayed

through logical arguments, facts and figures, or even heartfelt, empathetic pleas. From a policy perspective, attempting to address the issue of ignorance of or disregard for other cultural or political groups within the nation by those who have gone through socialization and have been inculcated with various ideas, beliefs, and conceptions of the world is far too unrealistic and idealistic. There is still hope for having a harmonious and united America, however.

Research in social science has found that older people are generally less open to new ideas and exploration than their younger counterparts (Gopnick, et al., 2015). As we grow older, we presumably become more opinionated and biased, having already formed our conceptions of the world. We may find ourselves having less opportunities to grow in a diverse and exploratory environment dedicated to learning about the world around us. Children, however, are much more impressionable and open to new thoughts and ideas, and studies have found that young people have proven to be more tolerant towards minority groups and are less likely to hold traditional, orthodox values about (Smith, et al. 2016; Janmaat & Keating 2019). Thus, the most effective way we can educate the public about various concepts surrounding equity and equality in order to instill and increase empathetic behavior is through the public-school system, and social studies and civics classes in secondary schools within these school systems are the ideal settings for such teachings.

Public education has always been an optimal setting to prepare students to become active and engaged citizens in a democratic society. The role of social studies currently and historically has been to help students understand the history and social mores of the country, teach them about the virtues exemplified in various stories of the past and present, and ultimately to help students meet the educational needs of society—emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century as a holistic approach to citizenship education using various social science techniques

(Mindes 2005). Scholars have found numerous indications from research that some educational practices and contexts promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that support a democratic society, and that schools could be doing more. Scholars agree that civic education can be utilized to promote norms of participation in U.S. government and social trust (Kahne, et al. 2006).

Specific, pedagogical approaches to teaching about diverse cultural value and experiences in schools are beyond the scope of this paper. The following section of this paper, however, examines studies and cases in which the aforementioned curriculum goals are incorporated into social studies classrooms and what students and society can take away from these goals.

Benefits of the Promotion of Diverse Cultural Values and Experiences in Schools

Benefits of Teaching about Inequality. Through an extensive review of literature surrounding the instruction of social and economic inequality in a social studies classroom, many scholars seem to agree that it is important to connect students from various backgrounds and with various experiences. When students learn about suffering and discrimination in society, they may learn to better empathize with the victims, coming to believe that the victims do not deserve the mistreatment they are receiving (Di Meo 2007).

Students are not only better able to empathize with one another, they are able to better understand their emotions and develop personal growth. They can also learn to gain a better understanding of obstacles to social mobility others face and can increase their general knowledge and awareness about inequality. Overall, they can learn to become more accepting and inclusive (Coghlan & Huggins 2004; Blumenfeld 2010; Garoutte & Bobbit-Zeher 2010; Steck, et al. 2011). Many students may develop negative attitudes and feelings towards certain groups of people because of their experiences growing up or the prejudices learned from family

members. If students see others as undeserving of the unjust treatment they are experiencing in society, then students may believe it is no longer tenable to hold those negative attitudes toward other groups.

Regarding teaching about victims of discrimination and inequality in classes, and those who have been the discriminators and oppressors in the classroom, there is not a clear consensus. Scholars like Di Meo have a more “cynical” view of American history and argue that the past has a direct impact on the racial discrimination and prejudice that are prevalent in contemporary American society, and that this continued discrimination is signified by increases in hate crimes and civil disturbances. Teaching about systematic and historical inequality in a more frank and cynical manner can come with its consequences. Linda Christensen, a social justice educator, has argued that coming at the issue of historical inequality straight in the classroom can be considered to be “too harsh,” leading students to respond very negatively to the topic (Golden & Christensen 2008). Teachers must find a way to teach about the harsh reality of discrimination while also being mindful of how the material they teach can impact the students.

Students in a classroom can become resistant, debilitated, or enraged depending on their social circumstances (Davis 1992). The way teachers teach about inequality needs to be deliberate and intentional. Students must learn to first empathize with victims of injustice in order to inhibit more adverse reactions to the darker side of American history. Some scholars have argued that it is important we talk about “heavier” and “touchier” topics in American history in social studies classrooms so that we are not overlooking grievances voiced by those who have been systematically oppressed, including minorities, women, and the poor, however, it is important teachers do this in a way that adequately balances carefulness and truth (Rogers & Westheimer 2017).

Critics have suggested that teaching about social justice issues is meant to boost a student's self-esteem or to spread "liberal" political ideologies rather than placing an emphasis on learning and education (Cochran Smith, et al. 2009). Most scholars, however, understand that teaching about inequality in the United States is a just thing to do. If taught in a holistic and inclusive manner, inequality education can allow students to reflect on societal norms and values and teach students to support and advocate for the well-being of one another. Students need to be prepared to live and work in a diverse society.

In a recent study by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), only eight percent of high school seniors were found to have chosen "slavery" as the reason for southern recession from the United States, and almost one half of these students selected "taxes on imported goods," seemingly confusing the U.S. Civil War with the Revolutionary War between America and Great Britain (SPLC 2018; Turner 2018). Many scholars believe schools are failing to teach "hard history," which could potentially lead to students not having an adequate understanding about many of the harsh realities in our nation in the past and the present, and could to students not being able to empathize with the struggles various marginalized groups have gone through and are going through in society.

Some scholars have noted that exploring social justice issues is especially important at a young age is because, at this time in their lives, youth are developing their identities and are less jaded and cynical than their adult co-learners (Taylor & Otinsky 2007). Younger learners are able to examine issues more honestly and can pose and examine questions without being as heavily influenced by society.

The goal of teaching about inequality is for students to better recognize injustices in society and for them to want to take action to do something about it, but it can be difficult for

teachers to address societal oppression given the unequal distribution of economic, social, and political capital in the country (Zajda, et al. 2007). There is an unfortunate dilemma when it comes to teaching about inequality. In our current socio-political environment, while it is more imperative than ever that students learn to understand the many facets of discrimination many have faced based on their various identities, it may be quite difficult for teachers to successfully teach about inequality in the classrooms because we do not have a clear, apolitical understanding of social justice and inequality and because our environment is currently encompassed by rancorous partisanship.

Benefits of Teaching about Multiculturalism. The literature has shown that multicultural education and pedagogical practices can be very effective in teaching students to be more understanding of the background of others within and the outside the classroom. Multicultural education is important, and distinct from teaching about social justice and inequality in that, rather than addressing the egalitarian doctrine that social justice emphasizes or the issues regarding this distribution of justice among different groups, it examines the various social and cultural factors that might lead to unequal or unjust treatment in society and the importance of the embrace of cultural differences. One pedagogical writer, in the context of an art class concluded that by having students draw from their collective culture, they are able to find common ground with their peers and accept each other's ideas with ease (Bradshaw 2016). In this art class study, students were encouraged to share their varying perspectives of the world to develop a more holistic concept of the terms and ideas they discussed in class, and there is no reason these practices should not be found in a social studies classroom, a class that examines various perspectives of historical and contemporary American society.

There have been compelling arguments for the education of empathy in classrooms that combines caring, relational pedagogy with cognitive growth and a greater sense of a sociocultural awareness. In classrooms, students have the opportunity to interact with others who may view American society differently than they do. When students are encouraged to engage in discussion in the classroom, they are likely to become more tolerant of other students' political views or perceived issues, more informed, and more interested in politics and civil discourse in general (McAvoy & Hess 2013).

It is clear that a diversity of culture and ideology in schools can be highly beneficial to learning, especially in a social studies context. If pedagogical methods like this can be practiced in art class when students are interpreting the meaning behind art pieces, social studies curriculum could certainly implement these methods in reflecting on the actions, beliefs, sentiments, or zeitgeist of Americans at various points in history and in the present day. Teachers can also draw on various students' perspectives by encouraging open dialogue and civil discourse. Students could potentially gain a more holistic, all-encompassing concept of the historical and modern topics discussed in the classroom.

Along with gaining a more holistic view of varying social studies topics, the literature has found that it is also important that social studies curriculum include more modern, multicultural perspectives in American history—this has been the subject of considerable backlash. Some scholars were especially critical of modern social studies emphasizing multiculturalism. They believe that such a curriculum may have more to do with anthropology or ethnology than history (Ravitch 1998). Many other “traditional” scholars in the field believe that social studies should not necessarily be concerned with how the natural and social world came to be altered and transformed. They believe that cultural understanding can be a noble pursuit, but that it should

have no bearing on teaching students how to think historically (Diggins 1996). This sentiment was seen largely during the national history standards movement of the 1990s. The National History Standards have been harshly criticized by some scholars for seemingly wanting to prioritize the appreciation for multiple cultures rather than having students deliberate on the dynamics of American progress and valuing third-world countries over white American history (Nash 1995).

Other authors see the encouragement of multiple cultures in social studies curriculum as a necessity for schools. Some argue that the ever-changing demographics of the nation combined with the undoubtedly high levels of prejudice and discrimination in the country necessitate the need for greater ethnocultural understanding (Di Meo 2007). Many historians and scholars view the increasing variety of cultures in modern American society as a call for greater cultural engagement in the classrooms (Di Meo 2007; Louie 2005; Nye 2007).

Changing demographics have heightened tensions among racially-defined minority groups, as well as between these groups and the dominant white majority (Di Meo 2007). The heightened tensions in the nation highlight the importance of researching influences of prejudice, discrimination, and ethnic conflict, as well as learning how to improve these intercultural relations and attitudes. Some speculate that increased learning about various cultures and communities should decrease the amount of prejudice and discrimination by improving intercultural relations within the United States.

It is imperative that teachers in secondary-school education across all states work to develop empathy within students in order to help them cross what is described as the “cultural gap” to understand the perspectives, actions, and attitudes of those they encounter (Louie 2005). This “cultural gap” is defined in the context of multicultural literature. Any authentic American

history textbook is innately multicultural. Leaders of the multicultural education movement are concerned with empowering oppressed people, giving them a voice in a society that has historically suppressed it, by integrating the history and culture of dominated groups into public school curricula and textbooks, not diminish European history (Spring 2012).

Despite the establishment of multicultural education in the language of social studies curricula across various states in the U.S., educators and scholars are seeking the ultimate goals of reducing oppressive actions and ideas such as prejudice, racism, and sexism, as well as equalizing educational opportunity. The large majority of scholars supporting multicultural education emphasize the benefits of perspective-taking in order to become more interconnected and culturally understanding.

Benefits of Teaching about Civil Discourse and Civic Engagement. Having a wide a variety of opinions is necessary for practically any fruitful discussions, especially discussions centered on social and political issues, and the literature is largely in agreement with this idea. Civic engagement encompasses action in which individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community (Panke & Stephens 2018). Civic engagement is an umbrella term used to describe strategies that connect schools with the public good, including service-learning, volunteerism, community service and engagement, public scholarship, and more (Boyd & Brackmann 2012). Many scholars have also recognized the importance of teaching civic engagement not only for student learning, but also for civic agency—the capacity of individuals to enact positive change in society (Forestiére 2015).

An important component of civic engagement is civil discourse. In order for anyone in society to become a competent civically-engaged citizen, they must learn to effectively

participate in civil discourse and dialogue that shares diverse perspectives and brainstorm possible responses (Boyd and Brackmann 2012). Teaching about civic engagement and providing students with information and resources on how to become more civically-engaged can potentially help to combat political apathy in young people, promote the goals of personal and social responsibility, and teach youth the skills necessary to advocate for social political change in a respectful and effective manner.

The primary way schools implement civic engagement is through their curricula. Schools can incorporate community-based service activities by connecting them to learning objectives. This practice is called “service-learning.” There have also been more creative strategies to promote civic engagement in the classroom. Some scholars have studied problem-based activities, in which students work to solve complex public policy issues such as balancing the budget and school lunch programs so that they can learn to participate in the policymaking process, evaluate alternatives, have respectful discussions surrounding their ideas, and have an increased commitment for the community rather than themselves (Wukich, et al. 2014).

Civil discourse in the classrooms can be implemented through structured forums focusing on social, political, or economic topics that are impacting students personally or the community as a whole. Civic conversations can also be introduced informally by teachers encouraging discussions and the formulation of logical arguments and by teachers introducing diverse opinions and perspectives (Boyd & Brackmann 2012).

There have been questions posed as to whether not teachers should have an obligation to promote or enhance civic engagement—whether civic engagement should be a goal of schools, but most scholars are in agreement that schools play an important role in the overall development of students as members of society. Many understand that schools have a central purpose in

educating youth to take on the mantle of “citizen” and assume roles as contributing members of society (Erickson 2011).

For geographic, cultural, political, and historical reasons, school systems are isolated from one another, not just in terms of location, but in terms of curriculum, especially in social studies education. Public school systems, regulated by the states, can have vastly different goals and curricula for their social studies classes. In order to break down these barriers to understanding diverse cultural values and experiences, school systems must learn to break away from their socially- and politically-homogenous communities.

Alongside opening the minds of students in these social studies courses in terms of cultural awareness, schools also carry the unique responsibility of promoting strong civic engagement practices. A study found that only 26% of Americans can name all three branches of government and voter participation has reached its lowest point since 1996 (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2016; Brown & Shapiro 2018). It is widely-known that young people tend to have the lowest voter turnout when compared to all other age groups. Only about 46% of Millennials (ages 18-35) voted in the 2016 presidential election—compared to 72% of the Silent Generation—people born between the 1920s and 1940s (Khalid 2016). This occurrence should not be accepted if we truly care about the institution of democracy, especially considering that a lack of civic engagement could lead to continued apathy in society as it pertains to the issues experienced by diverse groups across the country.

That said, it might be beneficial to look into the relationship between a state’s social and political environment in order to determine if there are, in fact, associations between more progressive social studies curriculum and statutes and the political environment of a state. These findings could provide some insight into what states can do to mitigate social and political

tensions in the future through the public education system. By examining what different variables regarding social studies and civics curriculum in different states, taking into account their political environment, we can draw inferences about what can be done in the classrooms to help mitigate social and political tension. Although the factors that contribute to our nation's partisanship and lack of understanding extend beyond what we learn in the classrooms, examining certain political and social factors of a state might give us some insight into what we must teach our children in order to promote diverse values and the factors that might allow us the political opportunity to do so.

Methodology

Rationale

This chapter presents the methods that have been used in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a relationship between political divide and the promotion of diverse cultural values in their respective social studies and civics curricula.

My research question is as follows: are there associations between a state's political environment and its statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks pertaining to social studies curriculum guidelines that promote the tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of others and the recognition of inequities that exist in society? If so, to what degree might curricula advance certain political ideas, or vice-versa?

It is important to note that there are a large number of factors that can influence the political or social rancor within a state. Time, historical and present circumstances, specific events, and other external environmental factors can all help to shape a politically- or socially-rancorous citizenry or legislature within a state.

Hypotheses

I hypothesize that those states with less political divisiveness and more liberal legislatures and populations will be associated with the promotion of diverse cultural values in their education policy regarding guidelines for social studies and civics.

Given the various sociocultural factors that might impede our ability to empathize with or understand one another, and that might impact national discord, it is predicted:

H₁: The degree to which the population a state is politically divided is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in that state's statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics.

H₂: The to which a state legislature is politically divided is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in that state's statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics.

Given that, as it pertains to diversity and multiculturalism, those on the political left tend to be motivated more by creativity, curiosity, and diversity of experience, and those on the right tend to be motivated more by orderly, rigid structures and norm attainment, it is predicted:

H₃: A more Democratic state populace is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in their statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics.

H₄: A more Democratic state legislature is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in their statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics.

Research Design and Data

This project is a quantitative study which makes use of nonparametric tests to analyze the association between state-level political environments and the promotion of civic engagement and diverse cultural values in social studies and civics curriculum. Chi-Square tests and Fisher's Exact tests will be used to examine tabular association. To control for a third set of variables, a binomial logistic regression will be used.

Voter registration data in each state is obtained from Gallup, based on 2017 state averages of party affiliation from Gallup Daily tracking. Data for party makeup of state legislatures is obtained from 2017 state and legislative composition measured by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Civic education requirement data is obtained from civic education measures in 2018 from the Center for American Progress. A content analysis of a

2016 report from the Education Commission of the States was performed to gather data about the promotion of civic engagement and diverse cultural values in social studies and civics curriculum in K-12 public schools.

Unit of Analysis. Analyzation in the study will take place at the state level. Social studies curriculum is a set by the state—there are no national social studies standards that states have to follow or are recommended to follow, and by examining polarization and partisanship at the state level, we can potentially find good examples of settings in which less partisanship and political polarization correlates with the promotion of civic engagement and diverse cultural values in social studies curriculum.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables in this study are variables I believe highlight a state’s promotion of civic engagement and diverse cultural values in their social studies and civics curricula. The dependent variables include data obtained from a content analysis used to measure intentional mentions of four curriculum goals that represent positive potential outcomes of a holistic and successful social studies curriculum. Following this paragraph is a detailed overview the content analysis and each variable derived from the research technique.

Promotion of Civic Engagement and Diverse Cultural Values in Social Studies and Civics Curricula. The first set of variables that are defined are the potential elements of a strong social studies curriculum. These curricular elements are mentioned within state education policy that aim to teach students to be compassionate and informed citizens that recognize and understand diverse cultural values and experiences. A content analysis of state statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks was conducted in order to systematically evaluate whether a state makes intentional mentions of five learning outcomes

determined to be critical for a social studies curriculum to successfully teach students to become informed and active citizens that recognize and understand diverse cultural values and experiences.

The curriculum goals are as followed: civic engagement, social inequality, multiculturalism, and civil discourse. There were 51 cases of statutes, administrative codes, or curriculum and standards frameworks—all 50 states and the District of Columbia and state education policies were assigned as either containing a learning outcome or not.

Civic engagement, in the context of a social studies curriculum, encompasses the intentional encouragement of actions in which individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern and that have a social benefit to the community. This may include learning about the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, volunteering, and voting, or the importance of informed decision making and collaboration in a society—allowing students to practice and make a habit of citizenship. Many states mentioned the importance of civics education in order to “enable students to become informed, responsible participants” in their communities and to function as competent and knowledgeable citizens who fulfill their proper duties.

Social inequality includes intentional mentions of the importance of informing students about the reality that certain people or groups in the country have privileges and advantages that others do not based on qualities that they cannot control, any mention of the idea of social justice—advocating for the just treatment of people based on certain social or cultural traits, or both. Examples of content that highlighted this goal of social studies education in state laws include an emphasis on concepts such as “equal rights,” “privilege,” or “advantage.”

Multiculturalism and diversity include intentional mentions of the importance of acknowledging various cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, and

examining how these various groups exist or should exist within a dominant social and political culture. Examples of content that highlights this goal in state laws include phrases such as recognizing the “contributions of minority and ethnic groups,” recognizing the benefits of diversity for a community, “including the increased range of viewpoints, ideas, customs, and choices available,” or the idea that societies are shaped by “beliefs, ideas, and diversity” and the consideration of others groups and experiences when making decisions.

Civil discourse includes intentional mentions of goals for conflict resolution within society, the importance of unity or compromise, or both. Examples of this content in state social studies and civics laws include highlighting ways in which students can “participate effectively in community affairs and the political process” or recognizing processes used to mitigate tensions such as “persuasion, compromise, consensus building and negotiation” in order to allows students to contribute to the resolution of conflicts and differences among their community.

Independent Variables. The independent variables in this study are measurements of state-level party affiliations. I will analyze the differences in party affiliation between citizens in the state and the differences in party affiliation between the elected officials in the state—both groups are a reflection of the dominant political ideology of the state, with distinctions in voter registration in state populations representing the overall political differences of the state and distinctions in party in state legislatures representing political differences in the policymaking arena.

Political Party Representation in State Populations. The first variable is a measure of state party affiliation—the proportion of voters registered as either, Democratic or Republican in

each state and the District of Columbia. The data is a five-level grade—“1” represents a solidly conservative state population and “5” represents a solidly liberal state population.

Political Party Representation in State Legislatures. The next independent variable is a measure of the ratio of party member lawmakers within the state legislature. The data is a five-level grade—“1” represents a Republican supermajority in the state legislature (at least two-thirds of the state legislators are registered Republicans) and “5” represents a Democratic supermajority in the state legislature.

Control Variables. There could be some other confounding variables at work that might prove that there is a spurious correlation between the political makeup of state and diverse cultural values being promoted in a states’ social studies and civics curriculum. To ascertain the effects of these variables, a binomial logistic regression analysis will be used. The variables I take into account are the population size of the state, which might correlate with heightened social and political tension, the region that state falls into that might affect its political culture, and the income of state, which might impact a state's ability to attain a higher quality social studies and civics education. In the following paragraphs, I go into more detail about each variable that is controlled for.

State Population Size. The larger the state, the more diverse its population is and, thus, the more likely it is that the state will experience political tensions, social tensions, or both. States with smallest populations might contain more like-minded individuals and, regardless of social studies curriculum, may experience less tension and division.

Population data was obtained from the Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016 report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Political Culture. The history and location in which a state is situated in can affect its political culture—the attitudes and beliefs broadly shared by a polity about the role and responsibilities of government (Smith & Greenblatt 2015). Three distinct types of migration patterns created three types of state political cultures: moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic. Moralistic culture views politics and government as the means of achieving the collective good—includes New England, Upper Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. Individualistic culture views politics and government as just another way to achieve individual goals—includes Mid-Atlantic region of Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. Traditionalistic culture views politics and government as the means of maintaining the existing social order—includes the Deep South. For this study, I use the three cultural classifications defined by Daniel Elazar, who posited that the U.S. can be divided geographically into these three types of political cultures—which spread with the migratory patterns of immigrants across the country.

State Median Household Income. The median household income of a state could have an impact on or help us understand the educational upbringing of a child in the state. We can assume that states with wealthier average household incomes will be more likely to have a population that had access to better educational opportunities. It is widely understood that the wealthy tend to be more politically engaged than those with less wealth (Hines 2014). Not only do wealthier Americans tend to vote more, but they are more likely to participate in political meetings, volunteer for political organizations, and have more political influence than people with less wealth.

A study done by the Pew Research Center also found wealthier Americans to be more civically participative. Americans with incomes \$75,000 and above and with college degrees

were more likely than Americans with less wealth and without college degrees to report higher activity in civic participation, and as wealth and education decrease, so, too, do reports of activity in civic participation (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015; Pew Research Center 2016).

Wealth also correlates with a number of other social and demographic features including race, political affiliation, religious participation, age, and gender—which all can affect the values and beliefs of a household. So, the median household income of a state could play a large role in both the development and education of children within the state and the curriculum being advanced by the state.

Wealth data was obtained from the Median Household Income by State: 1984 to 2017 report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Results

Data Analysis Plan

This section starts with summary statistics and frequencies of the states regarding their political makeup in their populations and legislatures, political culture, population sizes, and median household income. Next, a series of correlation tests were run to examine the association between the political makeup of a state and the promotion of diverse cultural values in state statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics curriculum and whether states require students to take a civics course in order to graduate high school. Finally, a binomial logistic regression analysis was run to ascertain the effects of political culture, population size, and median household income on the aforementioned curriculum goals to determine if these variables might confound the relationship between the political environment of a state and its curriculum goals in social studies and civics. Since the population size of the data is so small (50 or 51), a wider confidence interval (90%) is accepted as statistically significant.

Descriptive Statistics

About 34% of states report are reported to have populations with majority-registered Republicans.. 29% of states have a politically-moderate or evenly divided populations, and almost 40% of states are reported to have a population that is mostly registered Democrat. Despite most states having majority-registered Democratic populations in terms of voter registration, there are Republican majorities in most state legislatures (Republicans have a majority in 60% of all state legislative seats—Democrats have majority in 26% of these legislatures).

In terms of political culture, there is even divide. 17 states fall under the category of having an individualistic political culture, 17 fall under the category of having a moralistic political culture, and 16 states fall under the category of having a traditionalistic political culture.

Table 1 details the frequencies of state population sizes. Sizes are grouped on a four-point scale ranging from population sizes less than 1,000,000 to population sizes that are greater than 10,000,000. The District of Columbia is included in this table. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 are cross-tabulation tables indicating the correlation between state population size and party affiliation in the states' population as well as the party affiliation in the states' legislatures, respectively.

Table 1: Frequencies of State Population Size

	Frequency	Valid%	Cumulative%
Less Than 1,000,000	7	0.14	0.14
1,000,000-5,000,000	22	0.43	0.57
5,000,000-10,000,000	13	0.25	0.82
Greater Than 10,000,000	9	0.18	100.00
Total	51	100.00	

Table 1.1: State Population Size and Party Affiliation of State Populous

	Mostly Republican	Evenly Divided	Mostly Democratic	Frequency
Less Than 1,000,000	0.57	0	0.43	7
1,000,000-5,000,000	0.45	0.27	0.27	22
5,000,000-10,000,000	0.15	0.23	0.62	13
Greater Than 10,000,000	0	0.67	0.33	9

Table 1.2: State Population Size and Party Affiliation of State Legislature

	Mostly Republican	Evenly Divided	Mostly Democratic	Frequency
Less Than 1,000,000	0.67	0	0.33	6
1,000,000-5,000,000	0.64	0.14	0.23	22
5,000,000-10,000,000	0.46	0.31	0.23	13
Greater Than 10,000,000	0.67	0	0.33	9

Wyoming, Vermont, Alaska, North and South Dakota, and Delaware have the smallest population sizes (Wyoming has the smallest population—estimated to be around 578,000). California has the largest population size, with over 39,000,000 citizens reported. There appears to be a slight association between larger population sizes and more registered Democrats. Only two of the 22 states (including D.C.) with populations above 5,000,000 had voters who mostly registered as Republicans. Only 9 of the 29 states with populations below 5,000,000 had voters who mostly registered as Democrats. Most states with populations above 10,000,000 had evenly divided populations. States with populations below 1,000,000 were either mostly Republican or mostly Democratic in terms of voter registration.

Republicans have a greater number of majorities in the state legislatures than Democrats in all four population groups and comprise most of the majority legislatures in all groups but one (in which they are one state away from having a majority).

Table 2 details the frequencies of state median household incomes. Median household incomes are grouped on a four-point scale ranging from median incomes less than \$50,000 per year and median incomes greater than \$70,000 per year. The District of Columbia is included in this table. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 are cross-tabulation tables indicating the correlation between state

median household incomes and party affiliation in the states' population and party affiliation in the states' legislatures, respectively.

Table 2: Frequencies of State Median Household Incomes

	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Less Than \$50,000 N = 5	10%	10%
\$50,000-\$60,000 N = 21	41%	51%
\$60,000-\$70,000 N = 12	24%	75%
Greater Than \$70,000 N = 13	25%	100%
Total	100%	

Table 2.1: State Median Household Income and Party Affiliation of State Populous

	Mostly Republican N (%)	Evenly Divided N (%)	Mostly Democratic N (%)
Less Than \$50,000 N = 5	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)
\$50,000-\$60,000 N = 21	11 (52%)	8 (38%)	2 (10%)
\$60,000-\$70,000 N = 12	1 (8%)	4 (33%)	7 (58%)
Greater Than \$70,000 N = 13	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	10 (77%)

Table 2.2: State Median Household Income and Party Affiliation of State Legislature

	Mostly Republican N (%)	Evenly Divided N (%)	Mostly Democratic N (%)
Less Than \$50,000 N = 5	4 (80%)	0	1 (20%)
\$50,000-\$60,000 N = 21	19 (90%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
\$60,000-\$70,000 N = 12	5 (42%)	0	7 (58%)
Greater Than \$70,000 N = 12	2 (17%)	6 (50%)	4 (33%)

The only states reported to have a median household income of less than \$50,000 are Mississippi, Louisiana, West Virginia, New Mexico, and Arkansas—all southern states and all states with a traditionalistic political culture. Mississippi has the lowest at \$43,441. The lowest three states with median household incomes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 are North Carolina, Alabama, and Kentucky; most other southern, traditionalistic states fall in the bottom half of this category. Of all the areas reported to have a median household income over \$70,000—the highest is Washington, D.C., with a median household income of \$83,382 and Maryland, reporting a median income of \$81,084 in 2017.

States with higher median household incomes are clearly associated with the dominant party affiliation of a state populous. 10 of the 13 states (including D.C.) with median household incomes over \$70,000 have citizens that are mostly registered Democrats. 11 of the 21 states with median household incomes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 have states with citizens that are mostly registered as Republicans—Democrats only have a majority in three in terms voter registration.

Outside of the Northern Virginia, Maryland, D.C. area, the third highest-earning state is Washington, with a reported median household income of \$75,418. Virginia is the only southern

state and state with a traditionalistic culture to fall into this category, but we can assume Northern Virginia's distinct political culture from the rest of the state and its proximity to Washington, D.C. is the reason for this disparity from the rest of the southern, traditionalistic states. Most states with a median household income over \$70,000 have an evenly divided legislature.

Despite a Democratic majority among registered voters, Republicans still maintain a sizable majority in state legislatures. 60% of states have either a majority or supermajority Republican legislatures (32% have a supermajority and 28% have a majority). Most states with a Republican majority are southern and traditionalistic. Democrats only have majorities in 13 state legislatures, and only four states contain legislatures with Democratic supermajorities (Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island). Most states with Democratic majorities are in the Northeast, but they are also spread out to some states in the west and Midwest, as well as Hawaii—all with different political cultures.

Table 3 is a cross-tabulation that provides a summary of the presence of the diverse cultural values in state education policy regarding social studies and civics curriculum by the dominant party affiliation of the states' populations (including Washington D.C.). Table 3.1 provides a similar summary, but for the party makeup in the state legislatures.

Table 3: Presence of Curriculum Goals by Party Affiliation of State Populous

	Civic Engagement	Social Inequality N (%)	Multiculturalism N (%)	Civil Discourse N (%)
Majority Republican N = 16	100%	1 (6%)	7 (44%)	3 (19%)
Even Divide N = 15	100%	2 (13%)	8 (53%)	8 (53%)
Majority Democratic N = 20	100%	6 (30%)	15 (75%)	7 (35%)
Significance		0.170 ^a	0.146 ^a	0.132

a. Cells with expected counts less than 5; exact significance used

*pis statistically significant

Table 3.1: Presence of Curriculum Goals by Party Affiliation of State Legislature

	Civic Engagement	Social Inequality N (%)	Multiculturalism N (%)	Civil Discourse N (%)
Majority Republican N = 30	100%	3 (10%)	15 (50%)	11 (37%)
Even Divide N = 7	100%	0	5 (71%)	3 (42%)
Majority Democratic N = 13	100%	5 (38%)	9 (69%)	3 (23%)
Significance		0.048 ^{a*}	0.372 ^a	0.692 ^a

Tables 4 and 4.1 are cross-tabulations summarizing the presence of curriculum goals based upon the political homogeneity of the state populace or the state legislature, respectively. A more homogenous population means there is an advantage from the Democratic or Republican party by more than five percentage points, a competitive, evenly divided population means there is, or almost is, an even split between registered Democrats and registered Republicans. In Table 4.1, a more homogenous legislature means over 55 percent of the seats in the state legislature belong to either the Democratic or Republican Party. An evenly divided legislature means there

is, or almost is, an even split between Democrats in the legislature and Republicans in the legislature.

Table 4: Presence of Curriculum Goals by Political Homogeneity of State Populace

	Civic Engagement	Social Inequality N (%)	Multiculturalism N (%)	Civil Discourse N (%)
More Homogenous Population N = 36	36 (100%)	7 (24%)	22 (61%)	10 (27%)
Evenly Divided Population N = 15	15 (100%)	2 (13%)	8 (53%)	8 (53%)
Significance		0.709 ^a	0.757 ^a	0.112 ^a

Table 4.1: Presence of Curriculum Goals by Political Homogeneity of State Legislature

	Civic Engagement	Social Inequality N (%)	Multiculturalism N (%)	Civil Discourse N (%)
More Homogenous Legislature N = 43	43 (100%)	8 (19%)	24 (56%)	14 (33%)
Evenly Divided Legislature N = 7	7 (100%)	0	5 (71%)	3 (43%)
Significance		0.580 ^a	0.684 ^a	0.677 ^a

All states and the District of Columbia included some mention of civic engagement in their education statute. Social inequality as a learning outcome is present in one state that has a population in which most people are registered Republicans and it is present in six of the 10 states with solidly Democratic populations. It is only present in two of the 15 evenly divided populations. No states with evenly-divided legislatures make mentions of social inequality in their laws regarding social studies and civics education.

14 states make some mention of multiculturalism in their education policy. Multiculturalism as a learning outcome is present in four states with mostly-Republican

populations, four evenly divided states, and six states with mostly-Democratic populations. 18 states mention civil discourse as learning outcome, most of which (eight) are in states with evenly divided populations. Three states with mostly-Republican populations and seven mostly-Democratic populations mention civil discourse as a learning outcome in their laws. Almost half of the states make some mention about considering others when participating in the civic and political environment, with a clear majority of states with a mostly-Democratic population promoting this curriculum goal.

Findings

To test associations, a two-sided Pearson's Chi-Square test was run to determine if there is evidence contradicting the independence of the variables. If, in any of the cross-tabulations, there are data that are very unequally distributed among the cells of the table, resulting in low numbers of the cell counts predicted on the null hypothesis, a two-sided Fisher's Exact Test of independence is run. civic engagement is not included in the following cross-tabulations since it is promoted in all state statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks.

It was predicted that a more Democratic state populace is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in their statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics (H_3). In Table 3, we found that none of the significance levels for all three curriculum goals were below a p-value of 0.100, however, given the relatively smaller p-values and the adjusted residual values of 1.9 for majority-Democratic states that include social inequality and multiculturalism in their laws regarding social studies education, and given that the adjusted residual value is 1.9 for majority-Republican states that do not have civil discourse in their laws, it appears there might be an association between the dominant political party in a state population and the inclusion of inclusion of diverse cultural

values in that state's statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics.

It was predicted that a more Democratic state legislature is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in their statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics (H₄). In Table 3.1, we found that we must accept the alternative hypothesis that there is an association between a Democratic state legislature and a higher likelihood of promotion of social inequality in social studies curriculum. There were no significant adjusted residual values.

It was predicted that the degree to which the population of a state is politically divided is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in that state's statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics (H₁). In Table 4, we found we must accept the null hypothesis that there is not an association between state population political division and the promotion social inequality and multiculturalism, as curriculum goals. Given the relatively small p-value of 0.112 and the fact that we found the adjusted residual value to be 1.7—indicating that the number of politically divided states that emphasize civil discourse in their curriculum is larger than would be expected if the two variables were independent, it appears there might be an association between the political homogeneity of a state populace and the promotion of civil discourse in its statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks.

It was predicted that the degree to which a state legislature is politically divided is associated with the inclusion of diverse cultural values in that state's statute, administrative code, or curriculum and standards frameworks regarding social studies and civics (H₂). In Table 4.1, we found that we must accept the null hypothesis that there is not an association between the

variables. The adjusted residual for more politically homogeneous state legislatures that include social inequality, 1.2, is larger than would be expected if the two variables were independent, but it is not a significant value.

Testing for Confounding Variables

Almost all theories about social and political phenomena are bivariate, they argue a single cause and single effect, but social and political reality is multivariate—there are multiple factors that could potentially act as confounding variables in this analysis. The reasons a state may or may not emphasize the importance civil discourse, civic engagement, and the recognition of cultural diversity and disparities as goals for their social studies and civics curriculum can including a number of factors outside of a state's political nature. three state characteristics that might act as confounding variables in this study are tested.

A binomial logistic regression analysis was used to ascertain the effects of political culture, population size, and median household income on the intentional mentions of multiculturalism, social inequality, and civil discourse in state education policy regarding social studies and civics curriculum to predict the probability of the presence these various social studies and civics outcomes in state education policy based on the aforementioned independent variables.

In the first model, the effects of political culture, population size, and median household income on the likelihood of the promotion of civil discourse as a curriculum goal in a state were examined. The logistic regression model was not statistically significant ($p > 0.100$). The Wald test is used to determine statistical significance for each of the independent variables. From the results of the test, state population size ($p = 0.005$) added significantly to the model, but median household income and political culture did not add significantly to the model. The model

explained 29.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in the promotion of civil discourse as a curriculum goal and correctly classified 70% of cases. Increasing population sizes were associated with increased likelihood of promoting civil discourse as curriculum goals. Table 5 details the results of the regression model.

Table 5: Binomial Regression Model: Civil Discourse and Confounding Variables

Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Significance	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-3.066	0.024*	-
Political Culture (1)	0.803	0.335	2.232
Political Culture (2)	-0.133	0.893	0.876
State Population Size	1.120	0.006*	3.064
Median Household Income	-0.066	0.874	0.936

In the next model, the effects of political culture, population size, and median household income on the likelihood of the promotion of social inequality as a curriculum goal in a state were examined. The logistic regression model was not statistically significant. From the results of the Wald test, state population size, median household income, and political culture did not add significantly to the model. The model explained 12.7% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in the promotion of social inequality as a curriculum goal and correctly classified 84% of cases. Table 5.1 details the results of the regression model.

Table 5.1: Binomial Regression Model: Social Inequality and Confounding Variables

Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Significance	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-3.499	0.070*	-
Political Culture (1)	0.411	0.641	1.508
Political Culture (2)	-0.519	0.698	0.595
State Population Size	-0.004	0.992	0.996
Median Household Income	0.641	0.190	1.898

Discussion

Limitations of the Study

This is a preliminary undergraduate study conducted with limited time and resources, and more research is needed to examine the social and political factors that might lead to the promotion of diverse cultural values and experiences in social studies curriculum.

The way in which data was gathered, due to these constraints, inhibited my ability to conduct a more thorough analysis of the association social studies curriculum might have the political environment of a state. Gathering data from opinion polls regarding the social and political environment of a state, for instance, would have been a tremendous help for this study and terms of identifying more accurate measures of discord and tension within a state.

The nature of the statistical study—looking for associations and trends between state political environments and social studies and civics curriculum—came with inherent difficulties. The sample size of the study was difficult to work with. For example, once states were categorized into increasingly specific subgroups, the number of cases became less and less (many times to single digits or a singular state)—necessitating a more extensive look into the individual characteristics and history of each state.

The study was only done over the span of a year. In the paper, there was no examination of specific cases or studies on how students in classrooms that intentionally mentioned civic engagement, civil discourse, or diverse cultural values in their social studies curriculum engaged or behaved in society after graduating high school. Time was an inherent limitation in this study. Many states might have just adopted laws that mentioned civic engagement, civil discourse, or diverse cultural values in their curriculum, and might not have been enough time in between its implementation and its effects.

Another inherent limitation of the study is the dynamic nature of a state. State education policy could be influenced by a number of factors, and the current political makeup of a state might have had little to do with the adoption of social studies and civics education policies—so, even if they were influenced by the political makeup of a population or legislature, this might have been missed given that the political nature might have been very volatile or may have changed suddenly from one political extreme to another.

We must also take into account the independent nature of schools. Even if there are state laws that emphasize civic engagement, civil discourse, and diverse cultural values, these concepts still must be taught in the classroom, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure how well all schools in a state are implementing these curriculum goals into the classroom, especially given that teachers conduct classes in very different ways and carry with them their own biases.

There is an unfortunate lack of data when attempting to measure discord and political rancor within a state. Partisanship and polarization can factor in to the overall sense of discord, but other roles such as unhappiness from or anger between groups in society can play a role in discord as well. The limited data and lack of research on the topic made it difficult to operationalize discord. It may also be the case that, if a state is more politically-divided and social studies could be a remedy to this issue, it can be more difficult to those divided states to pass legislation that could help to ameliorate tensions within the state.

A clear limitation to examining party affiliation is that, even though citizens and legislatures identify as either Democratic or Republican, this does not necessarily measure their support of a liberal or conservative policy agenda. For example, Republican lawmakers in the state of Rhode Island, a very liberal state, are probably significantly more liberal than Republican

lawmakers in the state of Tennessee, a very conservative state. Party affiliation does not necessarily reflect political ideology or measure ideological differences. Also, many other social variables such as race and socioeconomic status could have been taken into account.

A limitation of this content analysis used to identify the keywords that imply civic engagement, civil discourse, and diverse cultural values is that, rather than sorting through and evaluating all relevant state education policy regarding social studies curriculum, only the Education Commission of the States fifty-state comparison of civic education policies was evaluated. The Education Commission of the States and the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement periodically review state statute, administrative code, standards and curriculum to capture the status of civic learning across the United States (Education Commission of the States 2016).

While the commission made access to civic education data by individual state more readily available, it limits my ability to accurately scrutinize the individual laws and statutes of each state, and prevents me from making judgements on education policy the commission may have left out that may have been relevant to the content I was searching for. The committee, however, seems to have adequately scanned the education policy for any mentions of civics and social studies education.

An assumption that the commission did an adequate job collecting all relevant social studies and civics curriculum was made, so the analysis of the statutes, administrative codes, or curriculum and standards frameworks was subjective. Each states' laws were sorted through to identify intentional mentions of the social studies outcomes. Context and intent behind the curriculum were searched for, but the content analysis certainly could have been hindered by biases and simple human error.

Conclusions

The tests show that there is some level of association between the political environment of a state and its promotion of two diverse cultural values in its social studies curriculum: civil discourse and consideration for others. Whether the level of political division or dominant political persuasion in a state's population or legislature shapes the emphasis of certain curriculum goals, or if those curriculum goals helped to shape a state's political environment is unclear. A larger population size is also correlated to the increased likelihood of the promotion of civil discourse a curriculum goal. The data help to reinforce the idea that much more needs to be understood in trying to determine how we can go about educating the next generation to be more tolerant and understanding of diverse populations—the political factors of a state might have some relevance in promoting these values in social studies education, but there are probably several other factors that might also contribute.

There are more reasons to continue a study examining the nature of social division and social studies curriculum. The social divisions mentioned earlier in the review of the literature include religion, socioeconomic status, and race or ethnicity—all which might also play a role in the social studies curriculum students are learning in public school.

The difficulty of this study and insignificant results remind us that, in order to quell national discord, we must examine the few states that have done something right and apply what we can to the states with populations that are still bitterly divided socially and politically. Much of the success of states in promoting diverse cultural values in their social studies and civics curriculum could have been due to specific situational factors or other social factors that were not covered under this study. The issue of social and political division cannot only be solved through education, and we may not see the results of an improved education system in the social

and political discourse of our generation and previous generations, but, by examining cases in schools in which students are learning to recognize the issues that are causing our division and learning to discuss and engage with them in a civil manner, or by comparing the successes in schools that have prioritized diverse cultural values in their social studies curriculum with schools that have not, there might just be hope for fortified social cohesion in the U.S.

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