Social Work as a Democratic Tool

The inclusion of socially marginalized groups in the electoral process.
Abstract
The democratic deficit in the U.S. becomes strikingly evident as statistics show that only half of the population actually votes in elections. Seeing that many who do not participate in the electoral processes are also generally members of socially marginalized groups then this is an increasing social issue. The effects of this become deepening socio-economic inequalities, greater marginalization and a weakened democracy. This study argues that social workers can contribute to solve this democratic deficit by using social work to reach and include socially marginalized groups in the democratic process of electoral participation. Focusing specifically on San Francisco and the greater Bay Area, I have used qualitative method to interview representatives from non-profit organizations that provide different kind of social service and academic professors from the disciplines of Social Work and Political Science in order to investigate how social work can include marginalized non-voting groups in the electoral process. The result is analyzed together with a theoretical framework built from research on democracy, welfare research, empowerment theory and theories on community practice. The findings show that social work has an important role in creating belonging among these marginalized groups and to bring them into the political process by using social mobilizing and advocacy social work with an empowerment perspective.

Key words: Democratic deficit, Socially marginalized groups, Electoral participation, Economic inequalities, Inclusion, Social mobilizing, Advocacy, Empowerment
This project focuses on social work and politics in an American context. The United States of America, hereafter referred to as the U.S., is one of the largest democracies in the world but only half of the population is voting (U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008). The social and economic inequalities are increasing and it’s getting more and more evident that marginalized groups is getting more excluded from the society and the democratic process of voting (Schlozman et al: 2012). I spent one month in San Francisco with the aim to find out whether social work can contribute to solve the democratic deficit.

This is a qualitative study based on interviews with representatives from non-profit organizations and academics specialized on these issues. I chose qualitative method with semi-structured interviews because I wanted to get a deeper understanding about the field in the area of San Francisco as a complement to earlier research and the theory that centers around these issues. I did interviews with several non-profit organizations that provide different kinds of social service and asked them if and how they work with including socially marginalized groups into the society. I also asked if and how they are working with involving these groups in the democratic and political process of electoral participation and if they think it is a task for the profession of social work to get people to vote. Further I interviewed professors from the Universities of California Berkeley and Maryland specialized in the fields of Social Work, Public Policy and Political Science to find out about their reflections and experiences about using social work as a democratic tool. I use the term stakeholders when talking about the academic professors because of their position of importance in developing social work policies and because of their great knowledge about the social work field.

In the theoretical background I have started with a brief discussion about Dahl’s definition about what defines a democracy because the democratic deficit in the U.S. is one of my core problem statements. I continue with discussing Piven and Cloward’s work with voter registration and social work because their projects are among the biggest efforts ever done in the U.S. on register marginalized groups for voting. Further I will discuss the link between economic inequality and political participation based on research from Solt and talk about attitudes towards the welfare state based on attitudinal research. I will also discuss theories on empowerment to get a more individualistic perspective and theories about community practice and social mobilizing for a practical dimension.
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1. Introduction

A major trend in the U.S. has been growing levels of socio-economic inequality (Grusky: 2011). These trends are also increasingly visible in the form of a democratic deficit with low voter turnouts (Durant: 1995). The magnitude of this pattern is further developed by the fact that refusal to vote are often strong within already socially marginalized groups, specifically women, non-whites and low educated (U.S. Census Bureau; ASPA: 2011). It’s often heard that the government and the political institutions are only tools for the power elite and the already rich and that electoral participation is not a solution to the daily problems of socially marginalized people (Mills: 1984 in Grusky: 2011). This situation seems to be a vicious circle in which those without power become further marginalized when they don’t use their political resources – their votes.

The limitations of the American welfare system become strikingly evident when we recognize how rapidly economic and social inequality has grown and manifested itself over the last couple of decades (Scholzman et al: 2012). Couple this with recurring low voter turnouts in both state and federal election and we realize that one must ask how great the divide between the state and the socially marginalized groups are. Therefore it is highly interesting and relevant to set this study in the American context and look into whether those in vulnerable social positions are turning their backs on the system and what their view of the social contract is.

I believe that social work has an important role in this alarming situation. In this study I will explore how professionals from different organizations and academic professors see how social work can reach and include those socially marginalized groups who either do not want to take part or lack trust to take part, in processes of the state and the welfare system. This study’s core is how social work can be used as a democratic tool.

1.1 Problem Statement

Social marginalization and alienation because of poverty, segregation and socioeconomic or racial aspects is increasing in the U.S. (Grusky: 2011). Further, these individuals belonging to socially marginalized groups tend not to vote nor take part in the welfare state, which causes a democratic deficit (Durant: 1995).

The effect is that increasing marginalization and decreasing voter turnouts result in a weakened democracy (ibid). Lack of thrust towards the state can cause spill over effects such as lack of thrust towards the civil society and the inner community. That is a vicious circle.
1.2 Purpose

My thesis is about how social work can contribute to solve the democratic deficit and reach non-voting marginalized groups. The project is relevant on both a practical and a structural level. On the practical level I would like to examine how social work functions as a link between the welfare state and the civil society whereas the structural level relates to questioning whether the welfare state, especially the liberal American one, is available to all of the citizens.

My project ties into development and international social work as it focuses on socially marginalized groups, their feelings of exclusion from the society and how one is able to develop social, economic and political community among them.

Finally I would like to state that understanding how social inclusion and social work can be performed within groups who lack of trust in the welfare system is a primary responsibility in the profession of social work.

1.3 Research Question

How do key organizations and stakeholders see social work as a tool to reach and include those marginalized social groups, who either do not want to take part or lack trust to take part, in political processes of the state and the welfare system?

1.4 Motivation of My Field Study

This thesis work is about how social work can include marginalized groups in the democratic process of electoral participation in the U.S. The American welfare system differs from the Swedish welfare system on several levels and the democratic deficit in the U.S. is far more developed compared to in Sweden (IDEA: 2011). Because of this, social workers in the U.S. has different tasks and different work strategies than social workers in Sweden and I argue, especially after this field study that we can learn a lot from each other in the way we work with socially marginalized groups and politics.

I chose to go to San Francisco to collect my material because it is a progressive urban area. This is partly due to the University of California Berkeley, which is renowned for it’s

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1 By using the term “stakeholder” I have tried to distinguish individuals that have the possibility to strongly influence and shape social work in the U.S. My selection of individuals were motivated by the fact that these individuals are prominent academics whose work and actions have great influence on social work and public discourse about social work and community participation. This is why I label them as stakeholders.
innovation in the field of Social Science and partly because of the work with social mobilizing that I heard about and that I hoped to find.

2. Background

In order to gain knowledge and understanding about why certain marginalized groups don’t take part in the electoral process it is important to understand the political context. The political system in the U.S. is however a large field of knowledge and I will not attempt to explore it fully but instead briefly summarize the political situation of today because it’s necessary to understand the background context of this project.

In this section I will start by discussing the American welfare and political system, then describe the political situation in the U.S. focusing on San Francisco and the Bay area.

2.1 The American Welfare System

In Esping-Andersen’s well-known model of welfare regimes he refers to the U.S. as a liberal welfare state, which means that the governmental influence over the redistribution of resources is small and that the governmental social security system is not highly developed (1990). Instead of a social democratic welfare regime with a governmental social security system, the U.S. has a well-developed civil society and a lot of the provided social services come from non-governmental, non-profit organizations (Whittington: 1998). The American society is based on the community and voluntary participation (Putnam: 2001; Rotolo: 1999).

There are four main features that are significant to the American welfare system according to Katz (1996). The division between the social insurance and the public assistance is the first important aspect and it means that the governmental funded social benefits are divided into means-tested relieves and non means-tested relieves. Social insurance is a beneficial system for all citizens and the only requirement is that you have to have a certain age or be in a certain situation, such as being elderly or pregnant, whereas public assistance on the other hand is means-tested and for those in special need (ibid). The second important aspect to have in mind when discussing welfare in the U.S. is the local varieties between different states. Since the American system is a federal system the structure and function of the beneficial system depends on which state and which county you live in. In other words, there is no centralized welfare system in the U.S. (ibid). Another significant fact is that the division between private and public is fluent which means that it is common for governmental institutions to use private agencies to accomplish social services. This relates to the notion of the importance of the well-
developed American civil society (ibid). Katz defines the last relevant aspect as the incompleteness of the American welfare state because of the lack of universal benefits such as health insurance and family allowances (1996). Today, it is rare to be a western democracy without these kinds of universal benefits (ibid).

2.2 Social Work in the United States

Much can be said about the practice of social work in the U.S. but the aim with this study is not to map social work in the United States although it is important to gain some background knowledge about the social work field in order to better understand this study.

To be a licensed social worker in the U.S. you have to have an academic degree in Social Work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program (www.naswde.org). Social workers with a bachelor’s degree in Social Work are considered generalists whereas social workers with a master’s degree often work as some kind of specialists (ibid). The U.S. government provides social work to the citizens in need through social services, which is likened to the Swedish “Socialtjänsten”. In California the social services are gathered under the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) that was first formed in 1903 (www.cdss.ca.gov). Initially the CDSS was responsible for hospitals, jails and charity houses, which basically represented the entire public sector. Today, the CDSS consists of 51 offices and 4200 employees and have expanded to work with providing aid, services and protection to those in need (ibid). As mentioned above, the civil society in the U.S. is far developed and a lot of the social work is provided through different kinds of non-governmental organizations and non-profit-organizations (Corporation for National and Community Service: 2010). As many as 62 million Americans engage yearly as volunteers in a social service organization (ibid). Religious organizations providing social services is common as well as organizations with other purposes and ideologies but all together the non-profit organizations account for a large part of social work in the U.S. (ibid).

After conducting this study it has become clear that social work and social service is often a highly community based phenomenon in the U.S. and for many Americans it can be considered a daily or weekly activity to participate in some kind of social service organization. Community based social work is open to all citizens, regardless of social status or capability, to participate in. This opens up for including democracy work and electoral participation in the social work.
2.3 The Government in the United States

The United States of America is a representative democracy and a constitutional republic and considered the world’s largest federation with 50 states (Bianco, Cannon: 2009). Federal, State and Local is the American constitution’s three different levels and each level can make a certain amount of decisions on their own though there are no decisions that can be made in opposition to the Constitution of the United States, which is the Supreme Law (ibid). The Constitution is the definition of the system of checks and balances, which regulates the U.S. government, and makes sure that the power is separated between the system’s different parts and levels (ibid).

To vote in the elections in the United States you have to be an American citizen and in most states, 18 years old or older. According to the Constitution it’s prohibited to refuse anyone the right to vote based on race or color, sex or age if the citizen is above 18 years old, but despite that it’s up to each state to decide who is eligible to vote (www.usa.gov). It is required in almost all states to register for voting. Some states allow their citizens to register on the Election Day but in most states you have to go to a government office before the election. The general elections, including the presidential elections are held every four years (ibid).

The United States has a two-party system where nearly all votes goes to either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. The Democratic Party is considered more liberal in it's ideology and the Republican Party is a conservative, right wing party (Bianco, Cannon: 2009). In the election of 2012, the nominee of the Democratic Party, Barack Obama was reelected for a second term of four years as president of the United States (www.whitehouse.gov).

2.3 California and the Bay Area

California is the most populated state in the United States of America with 37,5 million inhabitants and geographically the third largest state (www.ca.gov). Governor Jerry Brown is currently the governor in California and the state has generally elected democratic candidates for federal, state and local offices (ibid). I collected most of the material for this thesis work in San Francisco and the Bay Area, which is one of the largest populated regions in California and consists of nine counties. The Bay Area and specifically San Francisco is considered one of the most liberal areas in the United States, for example, in the election of 2012, 45% voted for the Democratic Party and only 16% for the Republic party (www.presidency.ucsb.edu)
2.4 Socially Marginalized Groups

Table 1. Summary Statistics over Poverty Status in California, 2007-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>In Poverty (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22 438 949</td>
<td>12,68</td>
<td>45,98</td>
<td>54,02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>2 139 568</td>
<td>21,43</td>
<td>44,49</td>
<td>55,51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native</td>
<td>277 564</td>
<td>21,88</td>
<td>44,79</td>
<td>55,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4 758 104</td>
<td>10,96</td>
<td>45,30</td>
<td>54,70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific.</td>
<td>138 273</td>
<td>13,18</td>
<td>48,06</td>
<td>51,94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Other Race</td>
<td>5 037 819</td>
<td>22,09</td>
<td>46,19</td>
<td>53,81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Or More Races</td>
<td>1 421 517</td>
<td>13,63</td>
<td>46,98</td>
<td>53,02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>13 503 094</td>
<td>20,76</td>
<td>46,06</td>
<td>53,94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49 714 888</td>
<td>16,12</td>
<td>45,93</td>
<td>54,07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In my research question I refer to a category of “socially marginalized groups” which are constituted by those who have a higher tendency of being in poverty and not voting. The table, taken from the U.S. Census bureau (2013), shows above the percentage of individuals in poverty between 2007 to 2011 in California by gender and race. Here we can read out that it’s more common for women to be poor than it is for men. We also see that it is more common for other races than Whites to live in poverty, especially Latinos, Afro-Americans and Native Americans where virtually one in five had been living in poverty during this 5-year period.

Table 2. Gender and Race Differences in Voting in 2008 General Election, Percentage of Voting Age-Population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific</td>
<td>32,5</td>
<td>31,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>64,4</td>
<td>56,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>34,3</td>
<td>29,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61,7</td>
<td>57,3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this figure we can see percentage of voting in the 2008 election. This statistics is for the whole U.S. but it can be applied on the Californian population as well since California is the most populated state in the U.S. (www.ca.gov). Viewing the two tables together clearly establishes a link between those who most often live in poverty and those who are less likely to
vote. This is why I have classified them as socially marginalized and set them as the group of interest for this study.

2.5 Voter Turnouts

The democratic deficit in the United States is an escalating problem. In the 2008 election two thirds of the eligible voters went to the polling booths to vote yet 15 million registered voters failed to show up and vote whereas a staggering 30 million wasn’t even registered (U.S. Census Bureau). In a survey, made by the U.S. Census Bureau, about reason for not voting answered 26.4% that they didn’t vote because of being uninterested or disliking the candidates. Further 51.6% of those never registered gave the reason of not being interested in political participation or they simply refused to answer. These statistics become even more of a social problem when remembering that those socially marginalized groups without power were the ones who most often did not participate in voting (ibid). Further in comparing these numbers to, for example, the Swedish voter turnout in 2010 of 84% (IDEA 2011) then it is hard to ignore the implications of the democratic deficit in the U.S.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section means to create a theoretical foundation for the study and to link my research questions to existing research on the relevant topics. I start by discussing Dahl’s theory on democracy as it strikes at the core of this study – the democratic deficit. Further I will present Solt and the project were he tests Schattschneider’s hypothesis about the link between economic inequality and electoral participation in order to highlight the reasons to why some people don’t participate in the electoral process. After that follows a short discussion about Svallfors attitudinal research and the importance of studying attitudes towards the welfare state to gain knowledge about issues of trust and support towards governmental systems. I continue with introducing Piven and Cloward and their work with advocacy social work because they are widely considered an authority on the subject. Further comes a discussion about community practice based on Hardcastle’s research and finally I present a short discussion about empowerment theories.
3.1 Theory about Democracy – Robert Dahl

As mentioned earlier, a democracy where nearly half of the population refuses to vote is not a very strong democracy, especially when there is some marginalized non-voting groups that don’t feel included in the political system. This scenario is referred to as a democratic deficit. Dahl is a professor in political science and his work about what categorizes a democracy is far distinguished. Dahl has in several works discussed the American democracy and where the power really lies. In his very influential book, On Democracy (1998) he discusses which criterion categorizes a democracy and why democracy is important and valuable. Democracy isn’t the only way to organize a government, as history proves but several anti-democratic regimes has turned into democracies during the last century and we often take it for granted that democracy is outstanding other regimes. According to Dahl, known for his critical attitude towards democracy, there are certain benefits that only can be attained within a democratic regime. In he’s view; the following ten reasons are what make democracy desirable:

- Democracy helps to prevent government by cruel and vicious autocrats.
- Democracy guarantees its citizens a number of fundamental rights and nondemocratic systems do not, and cannot, grant.
- Democracy insures its citizens a broader range of personal freedom than any feasible alternative to it.
- Democracy helps people to protect their own fundamental interests.
- Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for persons to exercise the freedom of self-determination – that is, to live under laws of their own choosing
- Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for exercising moral responsibility.
- Democracy fosters human development more fully than any feasible alternative.
- Only a democratic government can foster a relatively high degree of political equality.
- Modern representative democracies do not fight wars with one another.
- Countries with democratic governments tend to be more prosperous than countries with nondemocratic governments (Dahl: 1989)

These reasons for a democratic regime speak for themself and explain clearly why this kind of government is worth fighting for. It also becomes evident that a country suffering from a democratic deficit then all these benefits will not be satisfied for the whole population. This is a
problem that needs to be solved which this thesis work will investigate in what way social work can contribute to that.

3.2 Economic Equality – the Key?
In an attempt to make social work a contribution to solving the democratic deficit we have to look deeper into the questions, “Who is not voting?” and “Why don’t they vote?” Frederick Solt has tested the Schattschneider Hypothesis (2010), which points out that the reason behind large differences between high-income and low-income people regarding voting and political participation in the United States is high levels of economic inequality. Further the hypothesis discusses that people with resources grow increasingly rich and thereby are able to gain more knowledge about the political system and what kind of political priorities that will gain them. Low-income people, on the other hand, get even less access to the political agenda which, in the long run, make them withdraw from voting all together thus they fail to use their only political tool (Schattschneider 1960; Solt 2010). If poor people feel that they are unable to relate to issues on the political agenda then they won’t see any use in voting which mean that the electoral process loses more of its value. This comprehensive problem will become increasingly extensive as economic inequality widens (ibid). Solt has tested this hypothesis by studying gubernatorial elections in different states over time and concludes that the hypothesis still is highly relevant. Political inequality depends on economic inequality (Solt: 2010).

The research by Schattschneider and Solt provide evidence that income inequality do matter for voting and political participation. I have chosen to include this kind of research in this study because it helps to identify the main background problem with the democratic deficit.

3.3 Attitudes towards the Welfare State
Stefan Svallfors has done research on public attitudes towards the state and the welfare system. In his chapter in The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State (2010) he discusses the importance of studying public attitudes because they are often harder to change than we think. Svallfors quotes Joseph Schumpeter by saying “attitudes are coins that do not readily melt” (Schumpeter 1942; Svallfors: 2010). This means that public opinions may look like as if they are complex and diffuse and therefore hard to trust but in fact attitudes contribute to make normative view points and values that easily can spread yet are not easy to change (ibid). One important reason to investigate public attitudes is because of the power elites habit of claiming that they are speaking on behalf on majorities and to explore if that represents the truth or not. Svallfors has
looked at several countries and different welfare regimes over time and summarizes the attitude research that has been done and there is no such thing as a clear pattern for a worldwide welfare attitude as Svalfors himself puts it. But he does provide a few conclusions such as public policies has a high impact on how people understand their rights and responsibilities in the political context and that, overall the support for the welfare state are stronger if the welfare state is encompassing. He also lifts the general fear and concerns for bureaucracy, inefficiency and welfare abuse such as cheating.

Research of welfare attitudes is relevant for this thesis work because it adds an important, sociological perspective that helps to understand the phenomenon of why some people don’t feel like they are a part of the welfare system and don’t see any point in voting.

3.4 Piven and Cloward and Political Participation among Marginalized Groups

In order to write about social work and electoral participation in the U.S. it is hard not to mention Piven and Cloward – two professors that can be seen as pioneers on this area with a lot of research done on marginalization and political participation. One of my respondents, Professor Michael Austin from the School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley told me about Piven and Cloward and the work they did with encouraging social workers to help their clients register for voting in New York City in the 1970’s. Professor Austin mentioned it as the biggest effort ever done in American history with the attempt of getting socially marginalized people to vote.

Piven discusses reasons for why marginalized people don’t participate in the electoral process and what to do about it in the chapter “Low-income People and the Political Process” in the book, *The Politics of Turmoil* (1972). She concludes that it is wrong to assume that the low level of participation among poor and marginalized people is because of their lack of interest and will. It is because of their lack of political power and their lack of belief that ever gaining it (Piven, Cloward: 1972). “People that know they cannot win do not often try” as Piven herself puts it. Piven base this conclusion upon a structural perspective, which means that it is necessary to understand the marginalized non-voting groups within the structure they are enclosed in. People with power tend to keep their powerful positions because they got the recourses to do it and they also believe in their ability to succeed. Whereas on the other hand, marginalized people will continue to replicate their powerless positions and lack of resources (ibid).
In the article “The weight of the Poor: A Strategy to end Poverty” that was published 1966 in the Nation, Piven and Cloward present the strategy that they are most known for. The strategy is their solution to end poverty and marginalization and the content of it is that poor people should get paid from the government equally even though they don’t have any jobs so they can change the poverty structure and break the structural pattern were some people have power and resources and some do not. The strategy focuses to change the structures in a broad sense by widening the welfare state and includes marginalized people in a radical way. In a certain sense, is their project about encouraging social workers to get their clients to register for vote in the 1970’s, in the same line as this strategy because is also centers around the idea that the welfare state itself has the responsibility to include marginalized groups in the society.

3.5 Community Practice and Social Participation – Where Social Work and Politics Meet

To answer the question if there is a place for social work to engage in the democratic and political process then “Community Practice” is a good start. David A. Hardcastle (2011) has written a book about some different areas of the profession of social work, which have in common, that they work actively with including people into the society. Hardcastle summarize this kind of social mobilizing and community-based social work as community practice. Working with community practice involves helping people use resources in the community, find their abilities as individuals and as groups and help them mobilize and change structures and also contribute to the environment that surrounds them. An important part of community practice is working with advocacy and Hardcastle means that the profession of social work has a responsibility to work with advocacy and politics to achieve equality and social justice for the people in need that social workers meet. This kind of work provides benefits for the individuals as well as for the society in general and social workers can and should work with community practice on both a structural and an individual and grassroots level. Though of course, the perspectives may differ for a macro social worker compared to a social workers that works more directly to help certain clients in terms of where to start, with the community or with the individuals? (Hardcastle 2011).

Social and civic participation is a result of community practice and the relation between social engagement and voter turnouts is a well-researched phenomenon. A groundbreaking study made by Olsen (1972) shows that all forms of social participation promote and develop electoral participation. The conclusion made is that people that engage in their communities and take an active part of the surrounding environment are more motivated to vote (ibid).
Brady, Verba and Schlozman have also undertaken research arguing that people with communicational and organizational resources are much more likely to vote than people without those skills (1995).

To feel included in the society is essential for finding the motivation to participate in the electoral process, as many researchers shows. The idea of community practice is to make marginalized people a part of the community by using social work. That means practically to make the society and the political process available to those who not feel like they have a place in the community. One example of how that can be done is through information meetings about voter registration when providing social services such as giving away clothes or food to those in need. Another example is that non-profit, social service organizations can give their clients information about how to engage in politics and how to engage in other social communities such as the church or become a volunteer. Social mobilizing is another example of how to use social work to include marginalized people. The idea is to gather people in need with the same problems and/or motivations and help them achieve their goals by using their own and public resources (Payne 2005).

This way of using social work to include socially marginalized groups into the society is highly related to the analysis in this thesis work and many of the respondents explained how they are working with advocacy and social work in their interaction with marginalized people. To see the role of the social worker as a link between the society, the state and the people in need and to use that position to make structural changes is an important task for the profession according to Hardcastle (2011). The structural change is in this case to contribute to solve the democratic deficit and as I will explain more later on, to use advocacy in the social work to help people register for voting and inform them about why politics matter to them is a proven method for many non-profit organizations provide social service.

3.6 Empowerment Theory

As one of the respondents will discuss in the result part further down, empowerment is a well used term when talking about social work and it has nearly become more the rule then the exception for social workers and social work organizations to include an empowerment perspective in the daily work. But even though it’s almost a cliché it’s as important now as ever for the profession of social work and highly relevant when talking about advocacy and social mobilizing. Malcolm Payne is known for summarizing social work theories and in his book *Modern Social Work Theory* (2008) he discusses several well-known empowerment theories and how to implement them in practical social work. As Payne says, empowerment is a method
and a perspective that you can apply on both an individualistic level and a structural level as well as on a group centered level. The meaning of empowerment is to give power to a person or a group in a more or less powerless situation and to give the person or the group the feeling of having power to change the situation (ibid). Empowerment is the opposition to being a victim with lack of influence, power and control over the situation and possible changes and empowerment is widely used in different forms of therapy as well as within political mobilizing and advocacy work (ibid).

Judith A. B. Lee has written about different ways of using empowerment in social work and among other areas, she talks about using empowerment in political social work and the importance of giving marginalized people the chance to get themselves involved in the political process (Lee: 2001). In advocacy and political social work is the task for the social worker to know the rules of the game; to have knowledge about how the system and how the political process works and which tools are available for the clients to participate and make a change (ibid). Lee claims that all empowerment work is political in some way but my reflection is that empowerment can have as much impact on a individualistic, psychological level as it can have on a structural, political level which make the main purpose for the empowerment perspective not always political change. To summarize I would like to say that gaining an empowerment attitude is always radical for the individual but how radical the political impact can be is optional.

5. Materials and Method

I collected the material for this thesis work in San Francisco. Since this project is situated in an American context I wanted to go to the U.S. to do my research. In total I did eight interviews. Five of them with representatives for non-profit and non-governmental organizations and three of them with professors at the University of California Berkeley and the University of Maryland. The material was gathered in April 2013. I will start to talk about the method used for collecting the material and then I will present my respondents and discuss the choice of selection.

5.1 Qualitative Method

For this thesis work I used a qualitative method to collect the material. I got in contact with five non-profit, non-governmental organizations and three professors by using a snowball sampling method (Neuman: 2011). Before I went to San Francisco I had an appointment with one
representative for an organization and with one professor at the University of California Berkeley. They recommended me to other organizations and colleagues, which in turn recommended me further, which resulted in eight interviews altogether.

The interviews was semi-structured which means that I had an interview guide but I didn’t follow it strictly but instead was open to what ever might come up during the interview that could be interesting (Esaiasson et al: 2010)

My ambition when collecting this material was to get a picture as good as possible of the non-profit organization sector that provides different kinds of social services in San Francisco and the Bay area and the respondents I have interviewed are representatives from large organizations that reaches a wide group of socially marginalized people.

5.1.1 Reliability

The reliability (Esaiasson et al: 2010) in this study is high because I have sought to be as clear as possible with my method and my analysis to avoid careless mistakes. To use a snowball sampling method (Neuman: 2011) was necessary because I conducted this study in San Francisco where I was unfamiliar with the field. This meant that I had nearly no contacts to start with and therefore relied on starting with one organization and hoping that they could recommend other organizations to me. It was the same procedure with the professors. This material collection turned out well and I am glad and thankful that I got eight interviews altogether but of course; there are some things to consider about using this method. For example, there is a risk when the respondents are recommending each other that the selection only consists of people who know each other and have similar opinions and therefore are not very representable for the whole population and field (Esaiasson et al: 2010). That can affect the ability to generalize from and the reliability of the study but considering that the material was gathered in a large-scale urban area it’s not very likely that the respondents are in a too close relationship to each other.

5.1.2 Validity

In this study my aim was to investigate how key organizations and stakeholders understand how social work can contribute to solve the democratic deficit and include socially marginalized groups in the electoral process. To do that I have interviewed representatives from non-profit organizations that provides different kind of social services and academic professors that are specialized in Social Work and Political Science. The validity (Esaiasson et al: 2010) in
this study is high because of my strategic selection and because I have created my interview guide based on the chosen theoretical framework and the interview guide is also the frame for the analysis. Since this is a small study, the generalizability isn’t very high but I have tried to make it as generalizable as possible by choosing to interview large organizations that reach many people and academic professors that can contribute with a macro perspective. My aim with this study was to explore how non-profit organizations and stakeholders understand how social work can include marginalized people in the electoral process. I have answered my research question since my result is based on interviews with representatives for non-profit organizations and academic professors but I have only interviewed eight people and that is not a representative selection, which makes the generalizability low. Though it is important to have in mind that this is a small-scale study with limited recourses and the material is collected based on that fact.

5.2 The Respondents
I talked to five different non-governmental, non-profit organizations and did interviews with a representative from each one of them.

The five organizations I talked to:

- **Habitat for Humanity**
  Habitat for Humanity is a world wide non-governmental, non-profit organization that builds houses for homeless people and mostly working-pore families that can’t afford housing. The organization is built on the idea that if you get a house from them you have to contribute and work in the organization and help building houses for other people in need. Habitat for humanity is a community based organization that works actively with getting their clients to get involved into the society. I interviewed the Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity of Toulumne County.

- **Interfaith Community Social Services**
  Interfaith Community Social Services is a non-governmental, non-profit organization based in Sonora in California. The organization is a Christian organization where 16 different churches are members and they are the ones who are financing the organization. Interfaith helps people in need with providing food, clothing, household items and showers and hair care. I interviewed one of the volunteers at Interfaith.

- **Equal Rights Advocates**
  Equal Rights Advocates is a non-profit, public interest law firm, a civil rights advocacy organization. They are based in San Francisco and their mission is to protect and
expand equality for women and girls in education and employment. Primarily, they focus on issues and cases that hopefully will have an impact for many women, such as sexual harassment cases at workplaces. Women who are facing intersectional marginalization are their main priority even though they welcome all women and girls in need and they also have a hotline where they give legal advice. I talked to the Legal Director.

- **San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium**
  SF DVC is a non-profit organization that gathers seventeen different domestic violence agencies in San Francisco. Their primarily mission is to be the agencies voice at City Hall and the State Capital but they also handle budget issues for the agencies, legislation issues and the contact with the press. They also work a lot with the issues of child protection and families with domestic violence homicide. I interviewed their only employee.

- **St. Anthony’s**
  St. Anthony’s is a non-profit organization situated in the Tenderloin district in San Francisco. They help marginalized, homeless people with food, clothing, shelter and rehabilitation and they also work a lot with getting their clients involved in advocacy. St. Anthony’s is mostly known for it’s dining room, which is one of the largest soup kitchens in San Francisco and they serve nearly a million hot meals each year. I interviewed the Advocacy Coordinator.

The three professors and stakeholders I talked to:

- **Professor Henry Brady**, professor of Political Science and Public Policy, University of California Berkeley
- **Professor Michael Austin**, Professor of Non-Profit Management, University of California Berkeley
- **Professor Michael Reisch**, Professor of Social Justice, Maryland University

5.3 Ethical Consideration
With regard to the interview situations and the respondent’s rights - I explained carefully to all of my respondents that their participation in this study is highly voluntarily and that they only should answer the questions they want to answer and that they are free to end the interview whenever they wish. During the interviews I recorded and took notes but made sure that the
respondents was comfortable with being recorded. I also presented my study and the role of the respondent’s participation first through email contact and then again before the interview in order to make sure that all of the respondents knew what their participation would mean. I think this has allowed me to fulfill the ethical considerations regarding performing qualitative interviews. Finally I would like to say that I don’t see any other ethical concerns with this project since no one of my respondents was in an unbalanced power relation to me and even if I do write about socially marginalized people I do refer to them as groups and do not point out anyone in particular.

5.4 Discussion About the Selection
I have interviewed representatives from non-governmental, non-profit organizations and three different professors from the fields of Social Work and Political Science. I wanted to interview social workers or people that provides some kind of social service and, if possible, advocacy to discuss their opinions about using social work to include marginalized groups into the political process of voting. A relevant consideration about the chosen selection is why I didn’t interview the ones that don’t vote, the socially marginalized non-voting groups, to find out about their perspective and their opinions about how they could feel more included in the society and electoral process. To answer that question I would like to say that the aim with this thesis work was to get an idea about how social workers are working with these issues. The main purpose was to investigate how key organizations and stakeholders understand how social work could contribute to solve the democratic deficit and create inclusion among these marginalized groups and therefore it felt more relevant to interview to social workers and professors. It had of course been interesting to talk to the ones that do not participate in the political process, mainly because they are the ones that know best about how they feel about these questions. It had also helped to avoid the top-down perspective that appears when people with academic knowledge and recourses are talking about marginalized people. To include people that don’t vote and are marginalized in the selection in this thesis work would have given them a chance to speak for themselves and probably to get a more nuanced result. Though to the fact that I wasn’t so familiar with the field in the area of San Francisco and therefore didn’t had the knowledge about were to find non-voting people as respondents and in consideration of the size of this thesis work I chose to interview only representatives from non-profit organizations and academic professors.
5.4.1 Why Non-Profit Organizations?

The choice of interviewing representatives from non-profit organizations was made upon the idea that social workers at non-profit organizations has a more balanced power relation towards their clients then social workers, working for the social service. For a socially marginalized person in need of help and service, to meet a social worker from a governmental social service institution and ask for help puts the person in need in a powerless situation towards the social worker. This unbalanced power relation is hard to solve because the client is always the one, begging for help and the social worker is always the one who provides it. When it comes to the issues of advocacy and how to include marginalized people into the community and the political process I do believe that it is better if the power relation between client and social worker is more balanced. This, because it is wrong if the person in need feel forced to participate in something simply because they need help. Power relations between marginalized people and social workers at non-profits are of course also unbalanced but non-profit organizations often have a stronger grass root perspective and they are also known for being more community based, which equalizes the power relation between the people in need and those who provides help.

Another aspect to why I chose to interview representatives from non-profit organizations is that social service and other institutions where social workers work, being tied to the government can often be seen, as they are the welfare state themselves. Since I wanted to discuss marginalized group’s relation to the welfare state it could have been a problem to do this with someone representing the welfare states provided services. The choice to interview people from non-profit organizations was to get a clearer outside perspective.

5.4.2 Why Academic Professors?

In order to get a more macro perspective on the issues of social work and politics, I chose to interview three professors, who in different ways are familiar with these subjects. My selection of individuals were motivated by the fact that these individuals are prominent academics whose work and actions have great influence on social work and public discourse about social work and community participation. This is why I label them as stakeholders. Professor Austin from UC Berkeley and Professor Reisch from University of Maryland are professors in the field of Social Work and Professor Brady from UC Berkeley who is a professor of Political Science. I felt that is was important to talk to professors from both the academic disciplines of Social
Work and Political Science because the aim of this thesis work is to explore an area where hopefully, social work and politics can meet.

5.4.3 Considerations about the Interview Situations
Another consideration about the interviews is that it became clear that some of the respondents adjusted their answers according to the interviewer. The fact that I am Swedish seemed to affect the responses from all three of the professors; they often made comparisons between Sweden and the U.S. even though it wasn’t relevant to the question. Further more they sometimes also had an apologetic tone about the welfare system in the U.S. compared to that in Sweden. I got the impression that if I had been from another country, I might have received different answers to my questions.

6. Results
I will now present the results from the interview study. The results are divided into three themes. “Faith and Trust”, “Reaching and Including” and “Social Work and Politics”. The themes are based on my interview guide that is divided into the same categories with a couple of questions under each headline.

6.1 The First Theme: Faith and Trust
This is the first part of the results and it is based on answers from my respondents on the following questions.
For the non-profit organizations:
• The people in need that you meet trough this organization, what is your idea about their relation to the welfare state?
• Do you know anything about their opinions regarding voting in elections?
For the academic professors:
• Several socially marginalized groups don’t vote in elections, what is the reason do you think?
• What is your idea about their opinions towards the welfare state?
• What kind of effects can it cause that some groups don’t vote?
The first theme is about the respondents understanding about socially marginalized group’s relation to the welfare state and their opinions regarding voting in elections. I started with this theme because it felt important to start with trying to create a picture about the respondent’s
ideas about these issues to figure out whether they had thought about this at all or if they are even working with these questions.

I will start with the answers from the non-profit organizations. Starting each of them told me that they didn’t have very much knowledge about their client’s attitudes towards the welfare state and especially not in terms of faith and trust. Tough the respondents from SF DVC, Habitat for Humanity and St. Anthony’s did answer that many of their clients had been interacting with the welfare state in terms of getting financial aid and food stamps for example. Many of them felt that it wasn’t worth the struggle and the hassle because social service and the other institutions always wanted them to prove that they were poor and asked for their I.D and their fingerprints etc. So it just wasn’t worth it compared to the little you got in the end. The Advocacy Coordinator at St. Anthony’s said:

Some of the people have tried to interact with the welfare state by cash benefits or by staying at a shelter or by any of that kind of institutional things that the welfare state offer but you know… They will just walk away from all of that. It’s just too much hassle and demanding and too dehumanizing and for the amount of hassle it means they don’t feel they get so much back so it makes it worth it so they won’t even try to be a part of the welfare system because it’s not worth the headache.

The Legal Director at Equal Rights Advocates explained that many of their clients are immigrants who often don’t have documents so for them; the welfare state doesn’t really exist. She said:

On paper, many of our clients have rights to certain benefits from the welfare state but there are so many structural and economical barriers so it doesn’t mean so much. So “The state that provides” doesn’t mean much to much people here.

The other question was about if the respondents knew anything about their clients opinions regarding voting in elections and the respondents from Equal Rights Advocates, Interfaith and SF DVC said that they knew very little about it and that the issue of voting wasn’t anything that they discussed with their clients. The respondent from Interfaith said that “That was outside the room of what Interfaith was designed to do”. Both SF DVC and Equal Rights Advocates said that they could see the need of empowerment and further discussions in these areas but that their clients usually was in too much of a state of crises to talk about something like this. The respondents from Habitat for Humanity and St. Anthony’s said that their clients and the people
they meet through their organizations often were interested in the issues of voting and that they used to discuss matters of participation in the community, the democratic process and other political issues with their clients. The respondent from St. Anthony’s told me that there where something special about the presidential election of 2008 were Obama and McCain where the two presidential candidates:

- There where way more people that was interested that year comparing to earlier elections. That was something about that election that was inspiring to people, especially to people of color.
- For the first time, they could vote for someone that didn’t only looked like them but also in some ways had the same background as them, for president.

All three of the professors said that the reasons; “no impact on my day-to-day life” and “why should my vote count?” was two of the main reasons to why some, marginalized people don’t want to get involved with the voting process. Another thing that all of them brought up where the issue of access. They thought that many people experience that politics is a matter of access to the system and if you don’t have it – you can’t or don’t see the point in voting. Professor Austin explained it like this:

- I also think a reason is that they feel that voting is an issue of access. If you don’t feel you have access, for example, if don’t even know where to vote, why should you do it? So I think that issues of access are very important. I think you need a preparation and a support system to be a voter and if you don’t feel you have that, then why vote?

Professor Brady also talked about more macro level reasons and the importance of having a strong labor party or unions that goes together and mobilize. He said:

- But there is another important reason in America and that is that we don’t have a labor party or a socialist party. Because in Europe it’s very clear that having a labor party or a socialist party helps to mobilize lower class people and in America, labor unions have become less important so it’s clear that labor unions mobilize people in America but unfortunately there are not so many union members anymore.

On the second question about socially marginalized peoples relation towards the welfare state, they all three compared the U.S. to Sweden and explained that matters of trust towards the
government are extremely different between these two countries. Professor Reisch said that the values of the culture penetrates all levels of society and that this values first comes from media and politics and then influence the whole population and that America do need info and education about what the welfare system really means.

On the final question in this theme, all of the professors answered that lack of power for these marginalized groups was one of the main effects. Professor Austin summarizes it:

Well I think one of the most interesting impacts on that is that you have underrepresented minority populations and poor populations for whom the government is unresponsive to who is voting for them so I think they become increasingly marginalized, because there is no voice for this population. There is advocacy organizations attempting to speak for them, which are very important, but I think there is a significant loss of power among pore people whose voices are not being heard.

6.2 The Second Theme: Reaching and Including

This is the second part of the results, which is based on answers from my respondents on the following questions.

For the non-profit organizations:

• How do your organization try to reach and include socially marginalized groups?
• Is it a task for your organization to work as a link between the government and the people in need?

For the academic professors:

• What, do you think, is the best way to include these groups in the democratic process?

The second theme is about how and if the non-profit organizations are working with reaching and including the socially marginalized groups that they meet. It is also about what the professors think is the best way to include marginalized groups into the society and the democratic process of electoral participation. This theme is important because it widens the research question and includes issues of inclusion and reaching which stresses that the voting aspect is not the only important thing in this situation. It is most essential that these socially marginalized groups feel like a part of society and of their community.

The respondents from ERA, Habitat for Humanity, SF DVC and St. Anthony’s answered the first question by explaining about how they work with community outreach to marginalized
groups, cooperating with other similar and additional organizations, talking and working with community leaders and holding workshops and presentations out in the community. The respondent from Interfaith answered that they reach nearly all of their clients through the different member churches.

On the second question in this theme, which was about if the organizations consider themselves working as a link between the state and the people in need, the respondents from Habitat for Humanity and Interfaith said no. They saw their organizations as much more community based and that they didn’t have and didn’t want to have any responsibilities towards the government. The respondents from ERA, SF DVC and St. Anthony’s was on the other hand much more positive to be that link. The respondent from SF DVC said:

I think it’s an important role to have somebody who can be the advocate between all this different non-profit organizations and the state and the governmental organizations and, yes, sometimes we can be that link and I’m glad to do that.

The Advocacy Coordinator from St. Anthony’s stressed their advocacy role and said:

We are able to be a voice that can take stands on things where other groups maybe have to be more hesitant and we take that really seriously. We want to be promoting social justice and a community that’s doing the right things among poverty rather than being silent when those issues comes up as a result of not saying what we think.

Professor Austin told me about Piven and Cloward and their project about encouraging social workers to help their clients register to vote in New York in the 1970’s as an answer to the question about the best ways to include marginalized groups in the democratic process. Professor Brady also mentioned Piven and Cloward but he mostly talked about structural solutions such as reducing the inequality and get the elections public financed. He said:

We got tremendous inequality in income that leads to inequality in participation. If we could reduce the inequality in income we could reduce the inequality in participation. But that is very, very hard to do and we are not Sweden or any other European country. We are America and we do not believe much in redistribution.

Both Professor Brady and Professor Reisch said that getting private money out of politics would be a solution for the democratic deficit. Professor Brady summarized it:
If we got money out of politics, then we would reduce the inequality right now. Because right now, rich people have a lot more influence than poor people.

Professor Reisch also talked about that political education; political mobilizing and services in a political context would help the situation.

6.3 The Third Theme: Social Work and Politics

This is the third part of the results and it is based on answers from my respondents on the following questions.

For the non-profit organizations:

- What is your opinion about using social work to include marginalized people in the democratic process of voting?

For the academic professors:

- What is your opinion about using social work to include marginalized people in the democratic process of voting?

The last theme of my results is about how you can mix social work and politics, the very core in this thesis work. My aim with this theme was to investigate the non-profit organizations and the professor’s opinions and possible experiences of using social work to include socially marginalized people in the democratic process of electoral participation.

The respondents from Habitat for Humanity and St. Anthony’s were positive to the idea of using social work and politics together and they both talked about the importance of making their clients a natural part of the community where they would feel included and informed about the society and the political process. The respondent from Habitat for Humanity said:

We want to make our clients an active part of the democracy rather than tie them directly to social services. We educate them about why it matters that you vote in the county, the state and in the federal elections and tell them in what ways it will affect their lives. We do believe that being a community member is to be part of the voting body.

The respondent from St. Anthony’s talked a lot about the role and the responsibilities of the social work profession. She said:

I think it is really important that we social workers, no matter where we work, have a responsibility to make sure that the voices of the people that we are helping are being heard. /.../ I think it is
really important that we take every chance we get to empower people and that is kind of cliché to say and it doesn’t really mean anything any more but it is an important concept because we need to use our role as interacting with people who are poor, who are marginalized, who are unheard, unseen, not just to be able to connect them with whatever help is available but to be part of helping them to really make a change. So I think that getting involved in the democratic process and in the political process is one way and I think that there is a lot that social workers can do to try to help folks not only with the things that they need but also be able to create a community among these people.

The respondent from SF DVC thought that using social work to include socially marginalized people in the political process was a fascinating and interesting perspective. Her organization didn’t do that kind of work though she was positive to the idea. On the other hand, the respondent from Interfaith thought that mixing social work and politics could be risky because it could result in the situation that “people in need feel forced to the polls to get help”. The respondent from ERA didn’t want to comment on this question because she thought that her organization didn’t provide social work in its true sentence and therefore thought this question was meant for a social worker.

All three of the professors agreed that it wouldn’t be impossible to make it more of a task for the profession of social work to educate their clients about the voting process and the importance of voter registration but that it might would cause some problems in the practical reality. Professor Brady was skeptical to set this up in the U.S. because he thought there would be some parties who wouldn’t agree with it. He said:

> I think it depends on the country you are in. I think that in America, if social worker started to do lot of work to get people to the polls and to vote, that could cause a lot of troubles. The Republican Party could be very upset about that and wouldn’t like it very much. /…/ So I think it’s a good idea but maybe hard to implement in this country, easier in other countries.

Professor Reisch was more positive and said that it could be done successfully but that then it can’t be done halfheartedly and sporadically. He stressed that it should be organized and a priority if there would be any good results.
7. Analysis
In this part I will couple the results with the theory to analyses what I concluded in each theme in attempt to answer my research question. I have chose the most interesting parts from each result theme and then discussed it together with the theory.

7.1 The First Theme
In the first theme, Faith and Trust, the answers from the respondents were widely different. It was clear that the respondent’s views about their client’s relation to the welfare state were rather diffuse. Three of the respondents told me about their client’s interaction with the welfare state on a practical level such as getting financial aid and food stamps. Another respondent didn’t know anything about it and the fifth one explained that many of her clients didn’t have documents and for them the welfare state didn’t exist at all.

My aim with the first question and with this theme was to investigate the levels of trust and faith the socially marginalized groups had towards the welfare state but it was hard to get the respondents to answer that kind of questions. When talking in terms of “relation towards the welfare state” most of the respondents assumed that the question was about the practical interaction, in other words, if their clients was getting any form of direct support from the welfare state which led to discussions about that instead of feelings of trust. My conclusion to way I didn’t exactly get the discussions that I wanted is that me and my respondents comes from two different welfare systems and our understandings about what the term “welfare state” means is therefore different. This relates to Esping-Andersen’s model with different welfare regimes that I mentioned in the background part (Esping-Andersen: 1990). The U.S is considered a liberal welfare regime, which means that government’s influence over the redistribution of recourses is rather small whereas Sweden on the other hand is a social democratic welfare regime, which means that we have a broad, governmental social security system (ibid). My reflection is that this fact affects the understanding of the term “welfare state” and that in Sweden more or less everyone can be considered having a relation to the welfare system but in the U.S. you only have that if you are interacting with the welfare state in terms of aid and special support.

The tree professors answered questions about their reflections and opinions about why there are some marginalized non-voting groups and their relations towards the welfare state and what kind of effects it can cause that some groups don’t participate in the electoral process. Generally, they all answered that the main reasons for poor and socially marginalized people to
not vote is because of lack of access to the political system. There are a lot of people that don’t know how to vote and where to vote and how voting will affect their day-to-day life and then it’s hard to see the point in voting at all. This relates to Piven and Cloward and their structuralist analysis about how people without recourses and power are stuck in a structural system and a belief system where their powerless positions continues to replicate (Piven, Cloward: 1972). Solt and his research about how economic inequality relates to political participation (2010) is also highly relevant to mention when discussing the answers from the professors.

Regarding the effects of marginalized groups that don’t participate in the electoral process, the professors answered that one of the main effects is primarily lack of power for those who do not vote which means further marginalization and alienation towards the political processes and the society. As, Professor Austin said, that will lead to a situation of underrepresented minority and poor populations that don’t have a voice on a political level. Which in turn easily can be related to the increasing democratic deficit (Durant: 1995).

7.2 The Second Theme

Nearly all of the organizations told me about how they are working with reaching and including of marginalized groups by doing out reaches, holding lectures, workshops and giving out information about their organizations out in the community. They also told me how they are cooperating with similar organizations in attempt to complete each other. Two of the organizations were working more with advocacy and social mobilizing even though I would like to say that all of them to some content are working with what Hardcastle is calling Community Practice (2011). St. Anthony’s was the organization that was working hardest with advocacy among the organizations I talked to and the respondent from St. Anthony’s told me about how the organization feel they have a responsibility to be a voice for their clients and fight for social justice and equality. That relates to Hardcastle and his reflections about how the social work profession should take it’s political responsibility and speak up for the ones without power and recourses (2011).

To the professors, I asked what they think is the best way to include marginalized non-voting groups in the electoral process and two of them mentioned Piven and Cloward as I have already discussed but they also talked about structural changes. Especially Professor Brady stressed that low electoral participation is associated with high-income inequalities so he thought that if we could reduce the inequality in income then we could increase the electoral participation.
This kind of large-scale changes is also what Professor Brady is talking about in his book together with Verba and Scholzman (Scholzman et al: 2012), which I referred to in the introduction. The same ideas have of course also Solt and Schattschneider as mentioned (Schattschneider 1960; Solt 2010).

7.3 The Third Theme

In this last theme I asked the respondents from the non-profit organizations what they thought of the idea to use social work to involve marginalized groups in the electoral process and their answers differed even though the majority was positive to the idea. The respondents from Habitat for Humanity and St. Anthony’s were the ones who worked most with advocacy and community practice and they thought it was a suitable task for social workers to include their clients in the electoral process. Habitat for Humanity explained that their view of working with including their clients in the community also means including them in the political process of voting. This again relates to Hardcastle and his research about community practice (2011). The respondent from St. Anthony’s agreed and talked about the importance of having an empowerment perspective when doing social work. She thought it was essential to empower her clients and to let them believe in their own abilities to make changes and she said that including them in the political process was one way of doing that. The thoughts that the respondent from St. Anthony’s had about empowerment relates to the work of Lee (2001) and Payne (2008).

The professors was all positive to the idea about adding a political function to the profession of social work and by that make it a task for social workers to help their clients with voter registration. Though they all had some different kinds of doubts such as worries about if it would be too much to ask of the social workers and that the conservative parties in the U.S might be negative to the idea and that it probably wouldn’t be any good results if it’s done sporadically and not made a priority question.

To summarize the analysis of the last theme I would like to say that the response I got from the respondents on this last question differed widely. The organizations that already worked with this question were eager to discuss it but the ones that didn’t practiced social work in a political and advocacy sentence found it difficult to relate to the question even though they were mildly positive. Not very unexpected outcome.
8. Summary and Conclusion

My research question was “How do key organizations and stakeholders see social work as a tool to reach and include those marginalized social groups, who either do not want to take part or lack trust to take part, in political processes of the state and the welfare system?”

In order to answer this question I have presented a description of the American welfare and political system and described how the democratic deficit looks like in terms of voter turnout. Further I have developed a theoretical framework for the study by discussing important research theories such as Dahl’s theory on Democracy, Solt’s research on economic inequality and political participation, and attitudinal welfare research. I have also linked my study to Hardcastle’s research on community practices, different empowerment theories and also to Piven and Clowards groundbreaking project on inclusion of marginalized groups in the electoral process.

By using a qualitative method I have performed eight semi-structured interviews with representatives from non-profit organizations providing different types of social work and with academic professors from the disciplines of Social Work and Political Science. The result were divided into three parts, “Faith and Trust”, Reaching and Including” and “Social Work and Politics” which were analyzed using the theoretical framework in order to answer my research question and gain proper understanding about the subject at study.

After conducting this thesis work I would like to state that according to the organizations and to the stakeholders I talked to and after analyzing the theories I have included, social work can contribute to a more democratic society. A society in which the socially marginalized can feel like a part of the society and were they see the point in participate in the democratic processes. To understand how marginalized groups can be included in the political process it is essential to look at attitudinal research and to research on inequality and political participation to frame a picture of who those that don’t vote are and why they aren’t voting. Empowerment theory and research about community practice is important because it explains how social work can contribute to solve the democratic deficit. As one of my respondents argued, to really make a change in the electoral participation and make more people vote, then we have to make large structural changes such as reduce the income inequality. But changes have to be done on several levels and social mobilizing, community practice and advocacy social work in order to inform and include marginalized groups in the society and the political process is something that social workers can do. Though this is a small study and the result is based on the views and opinions from eight respondents and the analyzing of relevant theories so the aim with the result is not generalizability. The result is limited to the field for this thesis work and cannot be
applied elsewhere. Even so, I would like to claim that this project could work as an exploring stepping stone for further research on marginalized groups and voting behavior in San Francisco and the Bay area.

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10. References


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10.1. Interviews with the Professors
Professor Henry Brady, professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California Berkeley, interviewed at Campus Berkeley on the 19th of April 2013. http://gspp.berkeley.edu/directories/faculty/henry-brady

Professor Michael Austin, Professor of Non-Profit Management, School of Social Welfare, University of California Berkeley, interviewed at Campus Berkeley on 16th of April 2013. http://www.socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/Faculty/people.php?last=Austin&first=Michael

Professor Michael Reisch, Professor of Social Justice, School of Social Work, University of Maryland, interviewed on the telephone on 23rd of April 2013. http://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/faculty_and_research/bios/reisch/

10.2 Interviews with the Organizations
Habitat for Humanity of Tuolumne County (California), interviewed in Sonora on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of April 2013. \url{http://www.habitattuolumne.org/}

Interfaith Community Social Services, Tuolumne County (California), interviewed in Sonora on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of April 2013. \url{http://tuolumne.networkofcare.org/mh/services/agency.aspx?pid=InterfaithCommunitySocialServices_176_2_0}

San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium, San Francisco (California), interviewed in San Francisco on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of April 2013. \url{http://www.dvcpartners.org/}

St. Anthony’s, San Francisco (California), interviewed in San Francisco on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of April 2013. \url{http://www.stanthonysf.org/}