An Ideal of Non-factionalism for Party Politics

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Abstract:

This article joins a growing body of scholarship on political parties in arguing that democratic party politics should be concerned with avoiding the problem of factionalism. But existing responses to this problem have relied too heavily on conceptual distinctions between parties and factions. The dangers of factionalism cannot, in practice, be separated from the celebrated benefits of party politics. Both are rooted in the same aspects of social psychology. Consequently, I argue that we should understand the ideal of non-factionalism as the management of a set of chronic and ineradicable concerns about how group conflict can undermine the specific forms of political unity appropriate for a liberal democracy. This ideal is negative: focused on avoiding pathological forms of party politics rather than conforming to a particular positive model. It is also plural, encompassing several related normative concerns. And it is systemic - assessed at the level of party systems.

Keywords:

Partisanship, Polarization, Factionalism, Democratic Theory, Political Parties

"A fire not to be quenched; it [party spirit] demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming it should consume."
-   George Washington, "Farewell Address," 1796

One of the foundational ideas of liberal democracy is that political conflict need not be inimical to justice or political order. In fact, some conflicts may be beneficial to both. There are limits to liberal democracy's tolerance for political division though. Factionalism is a condition characterized by specific forms of disunity that threaten the value of a democratic polity, even a liberal one. When conflicts undermine the good faith and mutual respect among citizens that a liberal order calls for, when divisions weaken the collective capacity of the community to pursue legitimate ends, or when political groups hijack the power of the political community in the service of illegitimate ends, then political divisions can be characterized as factionalism.

The most salient and consequential form of political division and conflict in modern liberal democracies is party politics. Party politics, including its conflictual aspects, plays a vital role in both the deliberative and aggregative processes of modern democracy. But because party politics is a form of group conflict, it must be governed by an ideal of non-factionalism if it is to be part of a healthy, liberal democracy.

Conceptual distinctions between parties and factions (or between healthy partisanship and factionalism) have featured prominently in normative work defending party politics against critics who suspect that partisan conflicts are inherently destructive. The most common way of distinguishing between parties and factions emphasizes the substance of partisan conflicts. Parties are distinct from factions insofar as they aim at the common good of the polity. And partisan conflicts are non-factional insofar as they turn on competing conceptions of this common good (Herman 2017, 738; Muirhead 2014, 19; Rosenblum 2008, 356–60; Rosenbluth and Shapiro 2018,

158–59; see also Burke 1999; Ball 1989, 174). Additional distinctions between parties and factions that scholars have identified include the size of political parties (Muirhead 2014, 86–91; Rosenblum 2008, 357; Schattschneider 1942, 38), the comprehensiveness and coherence of party platforms or rhetoric (Herman 2017, 742; Rosenblum 2008, 358; Schattschneider 1942, 50; White and Ypi 2016, 21), and adherence to constitutional constraints (Muirhead 2014, 55; Rosenblum 2008, 119–23).

These conceptual distinctions, while illuminating, are not sufficient to construct an ideal of non-factionalism that we can use to evaluate institutions and practices of party politics as we encounter them. Even if healthy partisanship is *conceptually* distinct from factionalism, the distinction is not stable in practice. The habits, practices, and structural conditions that foster the virtues of partisanship often risk fomenting the vices of factionalism through similar psychological and social processes. An ideal of non-factionalism that can provide guidance for how we ought to design our institutions and live our lives, must, therefore, be sensitive not only to the conceptual distinctions between partisanship and factionalism, but also to their practical entanglement.

This article advances an ideal of non-factionalism to meet this need. The starting point for my formulation of this ideal is a recognition that party politics' vital contributions to democracy depend on psychological mechanisms that can produce pathological forms of disunity. The aim of an ideal of non-factionalism, then, should not be to eliminate the threat of factionalism, but rather to mitigate and manage it. The account of non-factionalism that I offer is broader than the ideal(s) that might be derived from the conceptual distinctions I canvassed above in two respects. First, it attends to a more diverse set of dangers that can arise when party politics degrades into factionalism. Second, it is not specific about the institutional or organizational responses to these dangers. The ideal of non-factionalism that I propose here does not include a singular vision of

what non-factional party politics will look like. What unifies the ideal instead is the identification of a common source of these dangers in the same psychological and social processes that produce parties' distinctive benefits. The ideal of non-factionalism I offer here is also unified by a corollary presumption that appropriate safeguards against or remedies for factionalism will be informed by an understanding of the social and psychological mechanisms from which it stems.

The ideal of non-factionalism that I offer is a negative, plural, and systemic ideal. It is a negative ideal because it is not oriented toward fostering specific desirable forms of party politics; rather, it is oriented toward avoiding a set of *un*desirable features. It is plural because it both responds to multiple normative concerns related to disunity and recommends context-dependent responses to these concerns. Finally, the ideal of non-factionalism is systemic because it is ultimately assessed at the level of party systems, rather than individual parties or practices of partisanship. The ideal may have guidance for how parties should organize themselves or for how party leaders and partisans ought to behave. But extracting this guidance requires understanding how these elements interact with others within the system to produce non-factional forms of party politics.

The key point I want to emphasize is that the ideal of non-factionalism demands a defensive posture. Non-factionalism calls for mitigating a set of normative concerns arising from aspects of group psychology that cannot be eradicated from party politics without also undermining parties' celebrated contributions to democracy. It is not possible to realize a system of party politics free of the elements that – under some circumstances – lead to or constitute factionalism. It *is* possible, though, in many circumstances, to minimize or channel the potentially factional aspects of group psychology, or to limit their effects. The upshot is an old insight: democratic party politics always

contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The regulative ideal of non-factionalism aims at ensuring that these seeds do not bear fruit.

The article proceeds as follows: First, I explain how the distinctive democratic virtues and functions of party politics depend on psychological processes associated with group conflict, but that these processes can also give rise to attitudes and behaviors dangerous to a democracy. Consequently, I argue, any normative account of party politics must include an ideal of non-factionalism aimed at managing pathological aspects of group conflict. Next, I identify three kinds of disunity that can be dangerous for liberal democracies. An ideal of non-factionalism should be concerned with managing patterns of party politics that give rise to these forms of disunity. With this foundation, I explore two sets of phenomena in contemporary party politics that reveal the difficulty of disentangling healthy forms of party politics from its potentially factional elements. This discussion demonstrates that conceptual distinctions between party and faction do not offer sufficient normative guidance for responding to many common phenomena associated with modern party politics. I argue that it illustrates the need for a negative, plural, and systemic ideal of non-factionalism. In the final section, I elaborate on each of these three characteristics of the ideal and provide examples of the sort of guidance this ideal can offer.

Why an ideal of non-factionalism must be part of a normative theory of parties.

At the heart of normative theory about political parties is the insight that parties are social groups. Party politics involves collective action (Bonotti 2017, 15–16; Muirhead 2014, 17–19; Rosenblum 2008, 351–52; White and Ypi 2016, 9) among a group of citizens who are conscious of themselves as a group and of how they act together collectively (Muirhead 2014, 18–19, 90; Rosenblum 2008, 341–46), and who are also conscious of an adversarial relationship to other

groups (Muirhead 2014, 79; Rosenblum 2008, 119–20; White and Ypi 2016, 9). Whatever else might be said about it, democratic theorists seem to agree that the key normative features of party politics derive from the fact that party politics is group politics.

Political parties – and structured competition among them – perform essential functions in modern democracies. Parties organize political conflict. They make participation less cognitively demanding and accessible to more citizens. And they enable the construction of governing coalitions large enough to claim democratic legitimacy (Muirhead 2014, 19). Party competition helps create the preconditions for public deliberation and justification, including "the systematic generation of principled alternatives" (White and Ypi 2011, 385). Political parties also organize governance. They link different political offices in a way that both enables more coherent policies and enables citizens to better understand how electoral outcomes affect governance (Chapman 2022). Political parties mobilize the mass public (Aldrich 2011, 104-105; Rokkan and Valen 1962; Schattschneider 1942, 47), and intra-party fora can create spaces where shared premises and shared purpose enable citizens to develop and practice political skills before testing them in more adversarial political environments (White and Ypi 2011, 388). Finally, parties serve as "organized opposition," uniquely capable of contending against the tremendous capacity of modern states (Kirshner 2022).

These functions of political parties, as well as the democratic values they support and reflect, depend on psychological processes that occur in conditions of group conflict. Though rational calculation no doubt plays a role in the formation of party organizations and party allegiance, political parties amount to more than expedient alliances. Parties take on a life of their own as social groups. Party labels accrue associations and expectations that cannot easily be discarded, and party identity becomes a source of meaning and motivation in the life of party

members and supporters. These processes enable parties to perform the functions attributed to them. Group loyalty – and the social practices that maintain it – helps parties overcome collective action and coordination problems to hold together broad and durable coalitions. Loyalty of politicians also contributes to the reliability of party affiliation as a source of information for voters. For these reasons, party loyalty is among the key virtues of partisanship that democratic theorists have celebrated (e.g. Muirhead 2014, 17). Meanwhile, the widespread embrace of party identification supports mass mobilization. Party identification can provide citizens with a sense of belonging and source of meaning that make it worth bearing the cost of political participation.

These beneficial aspects of attachment to and identification with the party as social group are enhanced by the explicitly conflictual context. Parties and partisans are defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. Loyalty and identification mean more in the face of an ever-present opposition. Political theorists have also argued that the adversarial character of party politics contributes to political deliberation. Competition spurs discursive innovation and helps ensure that political discourse does not become too one-dimensional (Rosenblum 2008, 160; White and Ypi 2011, 385).

Political parties cannot serve the democratic functions that have been ascribed to them unless people identify with them, are loyal to them, desire to remain in good standing with them, and understand them in contrast to other parties. But while these characteristics contribute to the distinctive virtues of party politics, they also contribute to some of its distinctive dangers. When the emotional, cognitive, and ethical baggage of partisan conflict finds its way into contexts where it is maladaptive or crowds out other vital forms of politics, it can give rise to factionalism.

It is because of the two-sidedness of parties qua social groups that factionalism must be a primary subject of concern for normative theorizing about party politics. The term faction can be

generically defined, according to its common usage, as a group within a group, whose members share goals that are in some way at odds with those of other members of the larger group. Factionalism is a condition characterized by the existence of factions. The term factionalism has a negative valence, though, especially in political discourse. In normative theory, then, we use factionalism to describe only undesirable or pathological forms of disunity in the larger group.

This paper begins with the idea that, while party politics always carries the risk of factionalism, it is not inherently factional. The divisions it introduces are not always pathological. In fact, they are often beneficial. This paper thus rejects what Nancy Rosenblum (2008) describes as two "glorious traditions of antipartyism" (25). The first tradition, which Rosenblum calls "holism" holds that all partial groups "threaten the unity and integrity of the political order" (25) and are thereby intolerable. To accept liberal pluralism, and the possibility of tolerable divisions, is to reject holism.

That some instances of group conflict are healthy for a liberal democracy does not necessarily mean that party politics is. The second tradition of anti-partyism views party politics as "fatally divisive" because parties instigate and exploit animosity (Rosenblum 2008, 60–61). I reject this tradition, too. The divisiveness of party politics is chronic and can be dangerous, but, with proper management, it need not be fatal.

In rejecting these two traditions of anti-partyism, I join a growing chorus of political theorists who argue that party politics is not inherently factional. But the aim of this paper is not merely to defend parties and partisans against charges of inevitably ruinous factionalism. It is to develop an ideal that can be used to improve politics on the ground. Predominant approaches to defending party politics against anti-partyism cannot be straightforwardly extended to evaluate and reform patterns of party politics that we encounter in the world. Understanding the many

benefits of partisan competition is not sufficient because these benefits rely on social and psychological processes that can also give rise to factionalism. And while political theorists have identified several conceptual distinctions between parties and factions, these are not sufficient to diagnose and remedy the myriad forms of factionalism that can arise in party democracy.

In the third section of this paper, I will return to and further illustrate the points I have made in this section. There I discuss the phenomena of affective polarization and identity alignment. These two phenomena, I argue, illustrate the impossibility of disentangling the causes of factionalism from the beneficial aspects of partisanship. In the same discussion, I also show that these two phenomena evade diagnosis by standard conceptual distinctions between parties and factions. The final section builds on the lessons from this discussion to argue for an ideal of non-factionalism that is negative, plural, and systemic.

Because my argument involves identifying specific risks or instances of factionalism in real political practice, it requires a way of distinguishing between factionalism and innocuous aspects of party conflict. Specifying which kinds of divisions are truly dangerous to a polity and why is necessary to avoid the trap of holism. In the next section, therefore, I provide an account of three kinds of disunity that threaten to undermine the values or functioning of liberal democracy. The ideal of non-factionalism that I describe is concerned with limiting these three undesirable forms of disunity.

What kinds of disunity threaten liberal democracy?

In this section, I briefly discuss three ways that group conflict can threaten the kinds of unity needed in a liberal democratic polity. The first two concerns are about the consequences of

such conflict.[1] First, group conflict can lead to the use of public power for illegitimate ends. A core commitment of liberal democracy is that there are constraints on the ways that public power should be exercised and the goals it should be deployed to pursue. Standardly, the legitimate purposes to which public power can be put are those that either bear on goods or interests common to the entire political community or that represent a fair compromise among competing interests. Political divisions threaten this unity of common concern when they lead to the use of public power in a way that unfairly promotes the interest of one group within society at the expense of another. Unjust abuse of power is one form of factionalism.

The second concern arises when political division and conflict undermine the capacity of the community to act collectively for legitimate ends. Unwillingness to compromise because of ideological intransigence or zero-sum status competition can prevent the passage or execution of legislation. Conflictual intergroup relations can generate distrust and erode the social rewards of cooperation, limiting the available solutions to collective action problems. Conflict that threatens the foundations of collective empowerment is a second form of factionalism.

A third concern with factionalism is not about the consequences of conflict, but about the quality of the division itself. Many theories of liberal democracy locate its value in the relations of equal respect among citizens that it entails (e.g. Gutmann and Thompson 1996). These relations are formalized in institutional arrangements and maintained by citizens' behavior toward one another and by internalized attitudes of respect. To the extent that the value of liberal democracy

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[1] These two consequentialist concerns roughly map onto concerns about "injustice" and "disorder" associated with partisanship identified by Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2016, 33).

is constituted by these valuable attitudes, then, forms of political division are corrosive of democratic unity – are factional – when they are incompatible with mutual respect among citizens.

We should not expect or aim to achieve perfect unity on any of these three dimensions. Measures that we might take to limit any of these three forms of disunity will undoubtedly involve trade-offs with the others of these desirable forms of unity, and with other cherished values. Moreover, as I argue in this paper, there is no bright line between healthy and corrosive forms of conflict. Enjoying the many benefits of partisan conflict means accepting some of the downsides of disunity. The point of this discussion has been to clarify some of the trade-offs that a normative account of party politics must balance. The ideal of non-factionalism prompts us to ask how we can contain or mitigate undesirable forms of disunity that partisan conflict might give rise to, focusing, especially on those that are most pervasive or severe.

The psychology of party politics and the plural dangers of factionalism.

The three problematic varieties of disunity that I canvassed in the previous section represent ever present risks of party politics. These are the concerns that an ideal of non-factionalism is oriented against. They are also the concerns that democratic theorists have had in mind when identifying conceptual distinctions between healthy parties and factions. One such distinction, for example, holds that healthy parties aim to achieve an inclusive vision of the common good or public interest, while factions aim to promote exclusive, sectional interests (e.g Bonotti 2017, 5; 105; White and Ypi 2016, 15-17;46-48). Legitimate partisan conflict, on this account, can arise because of disagreement about what will serve the public interest without threatening the unity of common concern. Another common distinction holds that healthy parties respect constitutional norms and constraints on party competition – serving as "loyal opposition"

– in contrast to factions, which admit no such constraints (see Muirhead and Rosenblum 2020, 99–101). Respect for constitutional constraints, on this model, limits the ability of parties to hijack public power for illegitimate purposes. It also preserves the polity's constituted capacity for collective action.

It is tempting to use distinctions like this to construct a positive vision of what non-factional party politics should look like. With such an approach, we might say, for example, that a party conforms to the ideal of non-factionalism so long as it frames its appeals in terms of the common good and/or acquiesces to formal and informal norms that constrain its competitive activities.

That approach to building an ideal of non-factionalism is misguided, though. In this section, I discuss two sets of phenomena that demonstrate the limited prescriptive and diagnostic utility of conceptual distinctions between parties and factions. Analysis of these two issues reveals several shortcomings of such an approach. First, observable distinctions between parties and factions overlook more insidious forms of factionalism arising from predictable psychological responses to otherwise innocent party activity. Second, the basis for distinctions between party and faction – including many constitutional norms – are often themselves the subject of partisan disagreement. Third, party activities or rhetoric that initially appear to fall on the wrong side of these distinctions may, given the political context or behavior of other parties, be an appropriate response that limits the harms of factionalism overall. These problems cannot be designed away. A conceptual distinction between parties and factions that focuses only on easily observable characteristics and uncontroversial standards that are not context-dependent will lack critical teeth. These problems and other issues discussed in this section point to the need for a more flexible ideal of non-factionalism that I characterize in the final section.

Affective polarization

In the past decade or so, political behaviorists have become increasingly interested in a set of phenomena often labeled "affective polarization."[2] Affective polarization refers to an increasing social distance or animosity between supporters of different parties (Iyengar et al. 2019). One standard measure of affective polarization is the "feeling thermometer" that compares how warmly respondents report feeling toward members of their own party versus members of an out-party. But the term "affective polarization" captures a collection of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to partisan triggers that are associated with dislike of, even disgust toward, affiliates of an opposing party (Druckman and Levendusky 2019). Affective polarization has been most studied in the context of American politics, but researchers have explored its operation and consequences in many other democracies (Michelitch 2015; Westwood et al. 2018).

While theorists of partisanship have addressed concerns related to polarization, they have focused primarily on ideological polarization (see, e.g. Muirhead 2014). But affective polarization is a distinct phenomenon from ideological polarization. Ideological polarization characterizes increased distance between the issue positions of partisans, described in terms of ideological sorting or of ideological extremity. Affective polarization, by contrast, characterizes partisans' attitudes toward other partisans, rather than toward issues. Ideological polarization may causally contribute to affective polarization, but the two are conceptually and practically distinct (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012).

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[2] Some of these phenomena have alternately been labelled "social polarization" (Mason 2016) and "political sectarianism" (Finkel et al. 2020).

Affective polarization has consequences for partisans' behavior in traditional domains of politics (i.e. voting, campaigning, and activism) as well as "spillover" effects in social and economic relationships that raise multiple concerns about factionalism. In the traditional domains of politics, affective polarization shifts the stakes of political conflict from policy disagreements to zero-sum status competition (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). It can even prompt partisans to sacrifice substantive achievements for the sake of a party victory (Mason 2016, 53–54). Affective polarization is also associated with increased partisan motivated reasoning (Druckman et al. 2021), perhaps because negative feelings toward opposing partisans make it especially painful to find oneself more aligned with the opposing side on any issue or matter of fact (see Druckman et al. 2021, 29). Both of these behavioral patterns reduce the space for mutually beneficial compromise and diminish the community's capacity for collective action. Moreover, because negative attitudes toward the opposing party tend to be moralized, parties may use public power to unjustly punish supporters of the out-party. Likewise, they may be more likely to view the opposing party as an extraordinary threat, justifying similarly extraordinary transgressions of constitutional norms.

Conceptual distinctions between parties and factions can only go so far in diagnosing and responding to these political behaviors associated with affective polarization. Certainly, we might observe that affective polarization can lead parties to relinquish their commitment to the common good that ideally distinguishes them from factions. But, in practice, it is hard to pinpoint when this boundary between partisanship and factionalism has been crossed. Even in an affectively polarized environment, party rhetoric may deploy inclusive and universal language. Partisans may even sincerely endorse the values they appeal to. Affective polarization can simply render such substantive commitments less motivating than group status concerns. Motivations, though, are not observable. Affective polarization thus evades potential diagnoses drawn from conceptual

distinctions between partisanship and factionalism that focus on the parties' substantive commitments or goals.

Focusing instead on transgression of constitutional norms or constraints on party competition presents a different proble. Partisans of different stripes can sincerely disagree about what those norms are, and about what counts as a transgression. Such disagreement may be especially widespread in contexts of affective polarization because affectively polarized partisans are particularly likely to use cues from their own party leaders when identifying constitutional norms and transgressions (Kingzette et al. 2021). When the norms regulating party competition are themselves a subject of partisan disagreement, a conceptual distinction between party and faction based on adherence to those norms will be of limited use for evaluating and responding to partisan activity. As I will argue in the next section, a systemic ideal of non-factionalism can be of more use in the context of such disagreement.

Political consequences don't exhaust the concerns that affective polarization might raise about factionalism. In fact, the "spillover" effects of affective polarization in other domains of life have garnered as much if not more attention from political scientists (Iyengar et al. 2019). But conceptual distinctions between parties and factions prove even less useful for responding to affective polarization's effects outside the traditional domain of party politics.

Affective polarization can lead to discrimination based on partisanship in social, civil, and economic relations. Perhaps most seriously, it can lead to bias in economic decisions, when partisans are less inclined to purchase goods or services from members of the out-party (Michelitch 2015). And affective polarization can prompt discrimination in the distribution of benefits, such as scholarships (Iyengar et al. 2019). These forms of partisan discrimination may amount to

injustice, regardless of how parties behave in public office or the nature of partisans' public commitments.

The attitudes that characterize affective polarization also seem likely to threaten the political community's capacity to act collectively for legitimate ends. Affectively polarized partisans tend to exhibit suspicion, distrust, and resentment toward opposing partisans (Abramowitz and Webster 2018; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2016; Finkel et al. 2020).[3] These negative attitudes toward the out-party can inhibit beneficial associations and forms of cooperation among ordinary citizens. Many scholars of democracy have argued that some amount of mutual trust and good will among citizens plays an important role in sustaining democratic institutions. Many have also argued that a robust civil society is important to the health of a liberal democracy. To the extent this is true, excessive social distance between partisans of different stripes can become a form of factionalism.

Conceptual distinctions between party and faction do not help us address pathologies that arise from the "spillover" effects of partisanship into areas of civic and social life outside of the domain in which adversarial party politics are understood to perform democratic functions. This is because the standards that characterize non-factional behavior within the domain of adversarial politics – the emphasis on constitutional constraints, for example – may not offer appropriate guidance for interactions in other civil and social domains.

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[3] These attitudes are among the concerns that George Washington raises in the famous critique of "party spirit" in his "Farewell Address." Party spirit, he argues, tends to become animated by a "spirit of revenge…It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms." (Washington 1796).

This discussion so far has focused on behavioral correlates of affective polarization. But the attitudes that partisans hold toward supporters of the opposing party may themselves constitute threaten the value of liberal democracy. Many liberal theories of democracy identify relations of equal respect among citizens as an important source of the value of democracy. These relations are characterized by, among other things, attitudes of respect for the equal worth and equal moral agency of all of one's fellow citizens. Liberal theorists have argued that appropriate attitudes of equal respect are compatible with partisanship (Bonotti 2017; White and Ypi 2011; 2016). In practice, though, affective polarization erodes respect among partisans of different stripes, including good faith partisans. Political theorists disagree about exactly what equal respect requires, but the knee-jerk aversion to, and expressions of contempt for opposing parties' supporters that characterize affective polarization seem, at least *prima facie*, at odds with the idea of respectful relations.

Affective polarization can thus produce all three concerning forms of disunity that I described earlier. What makes affective polarization particularly challenging for a normative theory of parties, though, is that it arises from aspects of social psychology that are essential to parties' democratic functions. To realize the value of party politics, partisans must develop attachments and commitments to the party itself as well as associative obligations to its members. That the party itself becomes emotionally and ethically important to partisans (rather than merely a strategic vehicle for promoting their principled goals) is crucial for enabling large-scale and sustained collective action, parties' chief contribution to democracy. This is partly because attachment to a group often motivates activism more effectively than attachment to an idea alone

(Mason 2018).[4] But it is also because attachment to the party itself, not just the platform, creates space for discursive innovation and makes ideological compromise tolerable.

The democratic virtues of party politics are tied to the emotional and ethical significance of the party qua group. But so are the pathologies of affective polarization, which occur when the in-group/out-group distinctions between the supporters of opposing parties loom too large in the emotional life of partisans, swamping the political principles that justify the parties' existence in the first place. An ideal of non-factionalism that aims to offer normative guidance, then, must be sensitive to how risks of factionalism are linked with the distinctive virtues of party politics.

Before moving on, it is worth observing that the significance of this discussion does not depend on a claim that affective polarization affects all partisans. This is true for two reasons. First, affective polarization can raise concerns about factionalism even if it describes only a minority of partisans – as is likely the case (Druckman et al. 2022) – especially if this minority has disproportionate political influence, disproportionate control of social and economic resources, or a disproportionate effect on public perceptions of politics. Second, the point of this discussion has been to illustrate the limited usefulness of conceptual distinctions between party and faction in helping us diagnose and respond to a well-studied phenomenon in party politics. The implications for constructing a useful ideal of non-factionalism stand even if affective polarization is a minority phenomenon.

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[4] One explanation may be that groups can provide social benefits that are contingent upon action (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 27–29).

Social sorting and identity alignment

A second area of partisan political behavior that illustrates the limitations of conceptual distinctions between parties and factions involves the complex causal links between partisanship and other social identities. As I have mentioned, the most common distinction that democratic theorists have drawn between parties and factions centers on the party's substantive aims. Insofar as parties aim to achieve public power to pursue the common good, rather than the exclusive interests of a subsection of society, they avoid the charge of factionalism. But whatever the content of partisans' beliefs or their public discourse, parties typically draw disproportionate support from different sectors of society and different social groups. There are several concerns about factionalism that might arise regarding the composition of parties' supporters or the causal links between partisanship and other social positions and identities.

Social and sectoral identities – such as race or class identity – affect partisan identity through several mechanisms. Perhaps the most general involves "prototype" association. One factor affecting identity formation is how similar a person feels to the prototypical member of the group (Huddy and Bankert 2017). Stereotypes associating the members of a party with other groups can be self-reinforcing. If the mental image people have of Republicans is one of white men, then white men will tend to feel more similar to Republicans and be more likely to identify as Republican, whereas Black women will feel less similar to Republicans and be less likely to identify as Republican, even controlling for the effect of their substantive beliefs (see Mangum 2013).

Social and partisan identity can also become linked because of the role of family and community in socializing adolescents and young adults into partisan identity (Kroh and Selb 2009; Sapiro 2004). Moreover, parties often rely on the organizational resources of associations tied to

particular social sectors, such as churches and labor unions, to mobilize supporters into partisan activism. These mobilization strategies are likely to affect the partisanship of the members of those associations and to reinforce stereotypes about party composition.

Even if citizens were to form their partisan attachments primarily based on their existing principles or beliefs about the common good, though, sectoral identities could still indirectly affect partisanship insofar as social identities shape our interpretations of the common good. People reasoning in good faith can come to different conclusions about what will serve the common good based on their experiences and the community norms with which they are familiar.

These potential causal links between social or sectoral identity and partisanship suggest that the conceptual distinction between parties and factions based on a party's substantive commitment to the common good does not alleviate the concern that parties will use public power to serve the interests of some groups at the expense of others.

There are two reasons to think that even parties with good faith commitment to the common good may serve interests exclusive to the sectors of society from which they draw disproportionate support. First, these interests may inform the reasoning that citizens employ to form their beliefs about the common good. Second, the composition of a party's membership affects the perspectives that shape intra-party deliberation about specific proposals and the party's broader vision. Even if parties' goals are not altogether reducible to sectoral interests, the normative concern about political divisions leading to unjust use of power remains.

Another set of concerns about factionalism arises from the effect that links between social identity and partisanship can have partisan attitudes. Social sorting, or the alignment of partisan identity with other social identities has been hypothesized as an important factor exacerbating affective polarization, likely because the status of the party becomes more important as it becomes

linked with the status of other groups with which its partisans identify (Mason 2016; Mason and Wronski 2018). Beliefs about the social composition of an opposing party have also been shown to affect the strength of negative attitudes toward that party (Ahler and Sood 2018).

One tempting response to these concerns about the links between partisanship and other social identities might be to draw another conceptual distinction between parties and factions based on the social composition of parties' support or membership. This approach would be misguided, though, for two reasons. First, simply, the politicization of sectoral identities is often necessary to promote the interests of previously underserved and marginalized citizens and integrate them into mainstream politics (Huddy 2018). Second, again, many of the mechanisms by which sectoral identities influence partisanship are closely related to the democratic virtues of party politics.

One way that stereotypical associations between parties and particular social groups can come into circulation is through partisan rhetoric that explicitly appeals to those groups. Explicit appeals to the interests or concerns of a particular group can be compatible with parties' orientation toward the common good if they link the group's concerns with a broader set of principles. Efforts to show how the concerns of a social group can be understood in terms of broader political principles represent one aspect of the discursive innovation for which party competition is celebrated.

Parties' reliance on the organizational resources of other associations and social groups likewise contributes to the core democratic virtues of party politics, even as it establishes causal links between sectoral and partisan identity. Using the organizational resources or existing networks of other social groups stretches the mobilization resources at a party's disposal, allowing them to draw more people into political action (Cox 2015; Powell 1986). Leveraging existing

social ties makes it more strategically attractive for parties to mobilize groups that tend to face higher barriers to participation.

Causal links between sectoral identities and partisanship thus raise several concerns about political disunity. But, much as with affective polarization the bases for these concerns are rooted in the same aspects of party politics that contribute unique value to democracy in practice. We cannot, in practice, separate the potentially factional elements of partisanship from its democratic core. The ideal of non-factionalism should, therefore, be understood not as a particular model of democratic partisanship, but rather as the management of a chronic, pressing set of issues within party politics.

A negative, plural, and systemic ideal of non-factionalism

As the preceding section demonstrates, the causes of factionalism can be insidious – difficult to distinguish or excise from the valuable characteristics of party politics. In this section, I draw on the insights produced from the analysis of the previous section to argue for a negative, plural, and systemic ideal of non-factionalism. I then sketch some of the normative guidance it can offer.

Non-factionalism as an ideal for party politics is best understood as an imperative to manage the endemic potential for group conflict to produce specific forms of disunity that, when severe, threaten the value of liberal democracy. Washington's comparison of party spirit to fire remains apt, even for those of us who celebrate the democratic virtues of party politics. The process that enables fire to warm is also what gives it such destructive potential. Harnessing the benefits of fire does not mean eliminating its harmful potential, but rather carefully and vigilantly managing it. Likewise, harnessing the benefits of party politics does not mean eliminating its factional

potential. Rather, non-factionalism requires a defensive posture prepared to prevent or mitigate the eruption of partisanship's dangerous elements.

This intentionally broad formulation of the ideal of non-factionalism includes within its scope a range of concerns that observers have raised about the divisiveness of party politics. Despite its breadth, this ideal of non-factionalism directs our attention to a particular set of concerns about disunity: unjust use of public power by one group against another; erosion of the capacity for collective action; and erosion of mutual respect and concern among citizens. The ideal also directs our attention to potential causes of these forms of disunity present in the psychological mechanisms and social processes needed to produce the benefits of party politics.

This focus on the social psychology of group conflict yields new insights into how we can identify and mitigate pathological forms of disunity. For example, the previous section's discussion of affective polarization suggests that we should be concerned not only with the substance and sincerity of partisans' commitments, but also with whether and how they motivate behavior. And the examination of identity alignment reveals that we should often be as concerned about who speaks for the party as about what they say.

I have described the ideal of non-factionalism as a negative, plural, and systemic ideal. Here I will elaborate on each of these three aspects before sketching the sort of guidance we can get from thinking of non-factionalism in this way. First, the ideal of non-factionalism is best understood as a negative ideal. It entails avoiding certain pathologies, rather than conforming to a particular positive model of politics. Attempts to formulate a positive ideal of non-factionalism invite us to think of non-factionalism as a goal that is achievable in principle even if not in practice. They consequently face a dilemma. Because the benefits of party politics and the risks of factionalism depend on the same psychological and social processes, any model of politics that is

truly free of factionalism will also lack healthy and valuable forms of party conflict. Trying to produce a vision of truly non-factional politics risks collapsing into holism. On the other hand, holding up a particular model of party conflict as a non-factional ideal can cause us to be overly sanguine toward the potential dangers of that conflict that inevitably remain present. A negative formulation of the ideal of non-factionalism avoids these twin traps of holism and naivete by prodding us to think of non-factionalism as a guiding ideal that is never stably or completely achieved.

Because it is negatively formulated, the ideal of non-factionalism is also flexible enough to operate in different contexts and for different purposes. It can, for example, not only provide an evaluative standard for major reforms to electoral systems (as I will show later in this section). It can also identify "second best" solutions and adaptations that can mitigate the harms of factionalism in a non-ideal political environment. Party practices or activities that might seem objectionable against a positive vision of non-factionalism, may nevertheless help to minimize the harms of factionalism overall. The flexibility of a negative ideal also means that it is adaptable to different political contexts. Because it does not anchor on a particular model of non-factional party politics, the negative ideal of non-factionalism encourages attention to the specific forms of factionalism that are most severe within a given political system or at a particular historical moment. It also encourages would-be reformers to look for remedies within the political and institutional constraints of that system, including the problem of disagreement over standards that I discussed in the previous section.

The negative formulation of the ideal of non-factionalism, thus also allows for an ideal that is plural. Non-factionalism as I understand it is a plural ideal in two respects. It is a plural in one respect because it responds to three different ways that disunity may threaten the purposes of a

liberal democratic polity. Trying to specify a narrower core of concern for the ideal of non-factionalism risks neglecting many concerns about the divisiveness of party politics that have traditionally been labelled as factionalism and that remain relevant in contemporary politics. Narrowing the scope of non-factionalism also risks obscuring some important commonalities across these three kinds of disunity, especially their connection to the psychological mechanisms that make parties what they are and enable them to perform unique and vital democratic functions.

Non-factionalism is a plural ideal in another respect because of the kind of guidance it provides. Because non-factionalism is a negative ideal, aimed at avoiding or mitigating a set of normative concerns, it is likely to counsel multiple responses to the divisiveness of party politics. Satisfying the ideal of non-factionalism might in some cases recommend taking steps to prevent the emergence of some partisan attitudes or behaviors, but it might also recommend approaches that focus on containing or mitigating the consequences of partisan behaviors that can lead to factionalism. Understanding non-factionalism as a plural ideal underscores that these are complementary approaches to avoiding the dangers of factionalism, and no single approach is likely to be sufficient.

Finally, the ideal of non-factionalism I offer here is a systemic ideal. Determining whether conflicts are ultimately beneficial or destructive to a democratic polity requires understanding how they interact with each other within a complex party system. This does not mean that the ideal of non-factionalism offers no guidance regarding particular partisan activities or practices. Rather, it means that we cannot adequately assess these individual parts of the system in isolation. Factionalism can arise from features internal to a political party or partisan group, but it can also arise from the interactions among parties and among partisans of different stripes. Conversely, non-factionalism may be best achieved by structuring the interactions among parties so that

potentially factional elements counteract each other within the party system. The key point is that any specific guidance that the ideal of non-factionalism offers for the internal organization of parties, the activities of party agents, or the actions and attitudes of individual partisans, must be compatible with an understanding of the role that individual parties and partisans play in a non-factional party *system*.

One virtue of a systemic ideal is that it can identify factionalism without factions. This means that it can be useful in conditions of disagreement over specific standards, such as the disagreement over constitutional norms that I discussed in the previous section. A systemic ideal of non-factionalism can offer critical leverage in this situation even if we cannot determine which is the correct standard. The systemic ideal invites us to ask about the condition of disagreement itself. Severe disagreements about constitutional norms, even (perhaps especially) when they are sincere can break down safeguards against injustice, undermine the community's capacity for collective action, and prompt partisans to demonize political opponents. A systemic ideal of non-factionalism, then, invites us to assess the severity of the disagreement and consider responses that do not require prior agreement on the substance of the norms.

At the same time, a systemic view of non-factionalism better enables us to identify "second-best" solutions and adaptive responses to non-ideal conditions. Some practices that may look objectionable in isolation may counteract other forms of factionalism and thus contribute to less factionalism at the system level. As I suggested in the previous section, sectoral appeals and targeted efforts to mobilize particular social groups, when viewed in isolation, fall afoul of common distinctions between parties and factions. However, sometimes such tactics may be necessary to counteract the exclusionary efforts of other parties, decreasing the level of injustice overall.

In the remainder of this section, I will illustrate the kind of guidance that a negative, plural, and systemic ideal of non-factionalism can offer by thinking through an argument it might provide for institutions that promote multi-party systems with shifting coalitional politics.

An ideal of non-factionalism built from conceptual distinctions between party and faction might seem to counsel against multi-party systems, which encourage the formation of smaller and more niche parties, and which are often accused of enabling the survival of parties based on sectarian interests or non-pluralist principles (Rosenbluth and Shapiro 2018). The proliferation of small parties and ad hoc formation of coalitions in proportional representation systems sits uneasily with recent normative theories of party politics, especially those that celebrate comprehensive platforms or a broad base of supporters.[5]

Treating non-factionalism as a systemic ideal, though, invites us to look beyond the characteristics of individual parties. Instead, we want to examine the effects of party politics on political unity at the level of the political system. There are two reasons to think that systems of proportional representation may accord well with a systemic ideal of non-factionalism. First, there is at least some evidence that coalition politics may help mitigate pressures toward affective polarization (Huddy, Bankert, and Davies 2018; Westwood et al. 2018). Proportional representation may encourage the formation of more party divisions than majoritarian systems, but the politics of forming coalition governments forces citizens to imagine that the members of other parties might yet become future partners in collective action. This muddles the division between in-group and out-group and diminishes the tendency to view relations among different parties in

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[5] Matteo Bonotti's (2017) defense of proportional representation is a possible exception, but even Bonotti emphasizes the compatibility of PR with large, "big tent" parties (146).

terms of zero-sum status competition. Yet imagining possible future coalitions does not depend on weakening of attachment to one's own party or its ideals. Systems that require the formation of multi-party coalitions, then, may help foster the kind of "party spirit worn lightly" (Muirhead 2014, 17) that democratic theorists celebrate.

Second, while PR systems likely involve more identity alignment, the structure of coalition politics mediates its effect on various forms of political unity. A systemic ideal of non-factionalism might be best realized not by minimizing the number of factions, but by mitigating their most harmful effects. The classic example of this approach is James Madison's ([1787] 2003) case for multiplying factions, but a similar line of reasoning underlies justifications for consensual democracy which argue that diffusing power leads to a "kinder, gentler" sort of democracy (Lijphart 1999, 274). Systems of proportional representation, then, may be able to reap the benefits of linking social and partisan identity that I described earlier while also avoiding its most serious dangers.

At the same time, treating non-factionalism as a negative ideal encourages us to recognize that multi-party systems and the institutions that encourage them are undoubtedly vulnerable to other concerns about or sources of factionalism. The nature of the trade-offs involved and their tolerability no doubt depend on the context – the background political culture and other institutions in place. Because it does not provide a singular vision of what non-factional politics looks like, a negative ideal of non-factionalism encourages a posture of vigilance. We should assume that potential sources of factionalism will arise in any party system, whatever the institutional arrangement, and we should prepare to contain them as best we can.

Finally, a plural ideal of non-factionalism allows us to consider a myriad of responses to the threat(s) of disunity that accompany party politics. Multi-party systems with unpredictable

coalitions may be one way of minimizing factionalism. But other complementary or alternative guidance may bear no relationship to that end. Consider for example, one proposal for reducing affective polarization in the United States: instant runoff voting (IRV). Proponents have argued that a chief benefit of IRV is that it promotes more civil campaigns because it incentivizes candidates to campaign for support across party lines (see, e.g. Drutman 2020, 189–90). This can, in turn, diminish the psychological pressure to over-burden the boundaries between supporters of different parties. IRV helps minimize the factional threat of affective polarization through a similar mechanism as unpredictable coalition politics. Both make it possible – even necessary – to imagine some members of the out-party as potential partners in collective action. Yet they involve wildly different types of party systems since IRV's structure promotes a system of two large, stable, moderate parties (Blais et al. 2012).

A plural ideal of non-factionalism directs us to cast a wide net in looking for ways to mitigate potential threats to disunity that might arise from party politics. We might, for example, also consider the length of election campaigns. Some scholars of affective polarization have hypothesized that exposure to campaigns may be one driver of affective polarization (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Others have observed that partisans' focus on the competition for group status seems to increase as elections become more proximate (Michelitch 2015), whereas partisans might be expected to turn more attention to their substantive policy goals in the inter-election period (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). The length of electoral campaigns might be expected, then, to affect the salience of group status competition in party politics. Insofar as the ideal of non-factionalism calls for minimizing the pernicious aspects of affective polarization, democratic reforms should give serious consideration to measures that directly and incidentally affect the length and timing of election campaigns.

A plural ideal of non-factionalism can also invite us to look beyond formal political institutions to individual and social practices of partisanship. An understanding of non-factionalism as an endemic threat in party politics adds a new dimension to existing accounts of the ethics of partisanship. My understanding of the ideal of non-factionalism invites a posture of self-examination and personal vigilance, as well as an adoption of habits that aim to halt the most pernicious processes of group conflict psychology. Individuals and organizations may also employ bias-mitigation procedures in hiring and decision-making to prevent partisan biases from causing unjust abuses of power.

In this section, I have provided a new formulation of the regulative ideal of non-factionalism as it bears on party politics. Non-factionalism, I argue, is best understood as a negative, plural, and systemic ideal concerned with mitigating undesirable forms of disunity that can arise from the psychological and social processes characteristic of party politics. I have shown how this formulation of the ideal can offer normative guidance that might be overlooked by a more positive formulation built on conceptual distinctions between party and faction. Let me end, though, with a note of caution: the normative proposals I have discussed in this section should not be seen as *part* of an ideal of non-factionalism. I have argued that they may be useful tools for managing the threats of disunity associated with party politics. But their relationship to the ideal of non-factionalism is empirically contingent and probably context-dependent. The posture of vigilance that I have argued for in this article applies equally to the institutional arrangements and practices recommended here.

Conclusion

Critics of party politics have been leveling charges of factionalism against its practitioners for centuries. Accusations of factionalism have varied greatly in the behaviors or attributes of parties that they target. But the charge of factionalism is not wholly without content. It represents a basic worry about the divisiveness of party politics. Party politics is, at its heart, a form of group conflict. When critics describe party politics as factionalism, they articulate a concern that this group conflict threatens the unity of the democratic polity.

Defending party politics (and especially *partisanship*) from the charge of factionalism has been a central goal of recent normative work on party politics. But this defense cannot rest merely on a conceptual distinction between factionalism and healthy partisanship. Any normative account of party politics must contend with the plurality of concerns about political disunity that it produces as well as their practical entanglement with partisanship's democratic virtues. I have argued that healthy, democratic party politics should be governed by an ideal of non-factionalism – a negative, plural, and systemic ideal concerned with managing chronic threats of disunity associated with group conflict. Understood in this way, the ideal of non-factionalism can orient efforts to improve the practice of democracy with flexible and realistic guidance.

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