What's Wrong With Partisan Deference?[*]

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Abstract

Deference in politics is often necessary. To answer questions like, "Should the government increase the federal minimum wage?" and "Should the state introduce a vaccine mandate?", we need to know relevant scientific and economic facts, make complex value judgments, and answer questions about incentives and implementation. Lay citizens typically lack the time, resources, and competence to answer these questions on their own. Hence, they must defer to others. But to whom should they defer? A common answer is that they should—or are at least permitted to—defer to co-partisans. This view initially seems attractive on both normative and empirical grounds. Against this, I argue that deference to co-partisans has overlooked moral and epistemic problems. In light of them, I propose several new ways to revise our expectations of citizens in a democracy both individually and institutionally.

1   INTRODUCTION

How should citizens form their political opinions? For example, how should they form their attitudes about questions like, "Should the government increase the federal minimum wage?" and "Should the state introduce a vaccine mandate?" In response, it is often suggested that deference will frequently be necessary. That is, we'll need to rely on the judgment of others when forming our political beliefs. Political issues are highly complex, and it is too demanding to expect citizens to responsibly investigate every issue themselves. At the same time, citizens are expected to have views on a wide range of issues for democracy to flourish. Deference appears to offer a humane and practicable way for citizens to heed calls to have informed opinions—to hold "responsible beliefs" and "act reflectively."[1]

However, any defense of deference must address two challenges. First, political issues are partly *normative*, yet many have found deference to others on normative matters suspicious. More precisely, there seems to be something problematic about treating

1. See Beitz (1989, 114) and Goodin (2003, 14) respectively.

someone as having more *normative* or *moral* expertise than you. Second, it is often difficult to know from whom we should take our cues. Indeed, the empirical literature suggests that we already need to have a great deal of knowledge in order to reliably identify people to whom we should defer (Gilens and Murakawa 2002). Call the first challenge the *Challenge from Normative Deference* and the second the *Challenge from Action-Guidance*. The first suggests the deference is not normatively respectable; the second that it is not practicable or action-guiding.

Recently, several philosophers have defended deference to *co-partisans* as an epistemically and morally responsible way to form one's political beliefs. On this picture, partisan affiliation is not a random or epistemically irrelevant social identity; rather, it provides relevant information regarding which opinions to form by reflecting common values. At a first pass, this suggestion seems well-equipped to meet both challenges. First, normatively, deference to co-partisans seems unproblematic insofar as we simply use their judgment as a proxy for our own, given our shared values. Second, empirically, it is often easy to identify co-partisans. Hence, norms recommending deference to co-partisans are appropriately action-guiding. Finally, partisanship is already the most used cue for forming our political beliefs. Defenses of co-partisan deference thus promise to vindicate our widespread practices.

Although these arguments for partisan deference are motivated by non-ideal concerns, I'll argue that they ultimately rely on overly idealized and Panglossian understandings of how partisan identity typically functions. If, as many have argued, partisan identity functions as an an affective in-group emotional attachment, then the partisan deference we actually see is often both morally and epistemically problematic. First, deference to co-partisans will often involve normative deference of a very deep kind. This is because our value-positions are more often an effect of partisanship than its cause. Second, there are epistemic problems with how most people rely on co-partisans. Partisan deference risks being epistemically irrational, unreliable, and epistemically vicious. Despite being motivated by non-ideal concerns, recent defenses of partisan deference ultimately fall victim to them. Although *some* partisans may be deferring in ways that are morally and epistemically respectable, many currently are not.

The plan for this paper is as follows. In §2, I spell out the familiar yet often implicit argument that deference is necessary within a democracy. In §3, I reconstruct recent defenses of deference to co-partisans. In §4, I raise two sets of objections to this picture, the first normative and the second more specifically epistemic. Informed by these concerns, §5 sketches two avenues forward, one focused on the individual ethics of political belief and the other on institutional changes. §6 concludes.

2 THE NECESSITY OF DEFERENCE

Citizens participating in a democracy are expected to have informed opinions. Being informed is important for holding leaders accountable, voting responsibly, and advancing one's own interests. On one way of articulating this demand, they are "expected to be well informed about political affairs... to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant acts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, [and] what the likely consequences are" (Berelson et al. 1986, 308). By this imposing standard, most voters fall far short.

Fortunately, voters have another option besides thinking for themselves: they can defer to others. That is, they can learn what others think and believe that. Roughly, I defer to you about the question *whether p* if I believe that *p* because you do. Deference offers a promising way to bridge the gap between the ideal of informed citizenry and the reality of the political landscape, given our cognitive limitations. By relying on others, we can arrive at meaningful policy preferences. Or, so the thought goes.

To illustrate, suppose that I want to figure out whether I should support a federal minimum wage increase. This issue is far too complicated for me to investigate on my own. However, if I can find someone else—perhaps someone is who is better informed than me and shares my values—then I can arrive at an enlightened opinion. In the best case, I'll end up with the same view I would have had if I had thoroughly and competently investigated the issue on my own. By relying on others, we can at least approximate informed opinions.

A simple but recurrent argument for deference proceeds as follows. Citizens ought to be informed. However, they cannot reasonably investigate every issue by themselves. Political issues are complex and multitudinous. Answering political questions can require knowing complex scientific and economic facts and theories, knowing legal, social, and historical facts, and making complex value judgments, including judgments about trade-offs. As Anthony Downs notes, the average citizen "cannot be expert in all the fields of policy that are relevant to his decision. Therefore, he will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he does, and have good judgment" (Downs 1957, 233). In other words, he will often need to defer to the better informed views of others. The complexity of politics and the importance of informed opinions thus motivates the need for deference.

This conclusion is echoed by a variety of political scientists and philosophers. For example, political scientists Gilens and Murakawa describe cue-taking as an "unavoidable necessity," without which meaningful democratic participation would be impossible (Gilens and Murakawa 2002, 37). I understand cue-taking as a form of deference: it often involves learning what others think and taking up their judgment. Where political scientists speak of cues, philosophers speak of deference, which they describe as "ubiq-

uitous" and "inevitable."[2] Lillehammer claims that "we often have no realistic option but to place our trust in people or institutions the political judgments of which transcend our epistemic reach" (Lillehammer 2021, 466). Even if it were *better* for citizens to think for themselves, this ideal is too lofty and demanding to be realizable (Gilens and Murakawa 2002, 42). Indeed, as Althaus highlights, "The institutions of representative as opposed to direct democracy are designed precisely to avoid encumbering citizens with such an onerous responsibility" (Althaus 2006, 83). Hence, deference is viewed as a reasonable and practicable way for citizens to form meaningful policy preferences.

It's worth emphasizing that I am focused on deference regarding what to believe or, more broadly, what opinions to form. This is sometimes dubbed 'epistemic deference,' in contrast to 'practical deference.' We practically defer when we accept the results of an election without coming to believe that voters made the right choice.[3] We epistemically defer when we come to believe that the winning candidate was the best choice because someone else said so. More precisely, A epistemically defers to B on the question of whether *p* if A adopts some doxastic attitude *d* toward *p* because B does. The paradigmatic case of deference involves inheriting a *belief* toward *p*, but one might instead inherit another doxastic attitude, including disbelief, suspension, or some degree of confidence (Brinkmann 2022; Joyce 2007). The relationship between epistemic and practical deference is important—especially given the relationship between belief and action in politics—but ultimately a topic for another day.

Epistemic deference comes in degrees. Doxastic attitudes can be more or less based on deference.[4] Importantly, many defenses of deference and cue-taking allow it to be very deferential. For example, one's deference can be *completely* based on the say-so of others and unaccompanied by reasons or explanation. Even if relying less on deference is better, it is supererogatory.

To recap, the importance of informed opinion motivates the need for deference. Now that we have a better understanding of what deference is, we can offer a new way to articulate the argument for its necessity. When confronted with political questions, citizens have three main options, broadly speaking. First, they can defer to others. For

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2. See Levy (2019, 321) and Lillehammer (2021, 466), respectively.

3. Contrast Rousseau (1762), who suggests that such results should also lead one to revise one's *judgment*: "When, therefore, the opinion contrary to mine prevails, this proves merely that I was in error, and that what I took to be the general will was not so" (Book IV, Chapter 2). See Estlund (2009, Ch. 6) for further discussion.

4. There are at least three intersecting dimensions against which a belief may be deferential. The first pertains to how much *weight* one gives to the person to whom she defers: A *completely* defers to B if she simply adopts B's attitude as her own; she *partially* defers to *B* if *A* assigns her doxastic attitude some weight but also factors in her own (Bokros 2020; Elga 2007; Joyce 2007). The second dimension pertains to *reasons*. As Brinkmann (2022) notes, there is a gradual distinction between testifying and arguing or persuading. A belief or attitude can be based on someone else's say-so but also accompanied by reasons; beliefs that are partially based on reasons are typically less deferential. Finally, a belief may be initially formed on the basis of deference but sustained, in part, by one's own inquiry (Brinkmann 2022). An agent may temporarily defer as a placeholder until she can investigate the matter herself. Beliefs that are partially sustained on the basis of one's own inquiry are less deferential than those based fully on deference.

example, they can figure out what their peer group or experts think and believe that. Second, they can think for themselves, either by themselves or alongside others. Third, they can suspend judgment, declining to take up any positive opinion at all. This gives rise to what I'll call the *Process of Elimination Argument* for deference:[5]

P1. Thinking for yourself is often not an option.

P2. Suspending judgment is a bad option.

C. So, you ought to defer to others.

This argument assumes that these three options are exhaustive, an assumption I'll grant for now.[6] According to P1, thinking for yourself is frequently not a viable option. We have already seen reasons for this: given that political issues are both numerous and complex, citizens lack the time and resources to investigate them all. As stated, this argument is compatible with the idea that thinking for yourself is ideal and admirable if you have can do it.

However, there is a way to strengthen P1, on which thinking for yourself is a *bad* option. By thinking for yourself, you might lose out on knowledge, which you could have gained by simply deferring (Levy 2022b). Relatedly, many theorists have emphasized that politics is high stakes; thus we ought to defer if we want any hope of getting things right (Brennan 2012; Brinkmann 2022; Peter 2023; Somin 2016). Thinking for yourself often has adverse epistemic effects, particularly when novice researchers quickly become overly confident, leading them to be more misled than informed (Ballantyne and Dunning 2022). In short, the problem with thinking for yourself isn't just that we have limited time, but that we are also limited in a more robust way: we are often bad at thinking for ourselves. Often, the only way we can get these questions right is by deferring to others.

But why should I try to form beliefs about political issues in the first place? Someone might agree that if one forms political opinions, one ought to do so responsibly. However, they might deny that there is any obligation to form political opinions in the first place.[7] This raises the question: why not simply suspend judgment on political questions? Why take a stance at all? We have already seen one reason against suspension:

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5. This argument is implicit in Lillehammer (2021), among others.

6. One might wonder how group deliberation fits in. There are two points to note. First, insofar as it is a genuine alternative to thinking for yourself, it might lack some of the benefits (Hazlett 2016; Levy 2022b; Mercier and Sperber 2011; Hedden 2017). Second, group deliberation seems to run into similar, if not worse, risks to thinking for yourself. For example, under certain conditions it leads to group polarization, amplifies shared biases, and generates groupthink and information cascades (Sunstein 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006; Solomon 2006; Anderson and Holt 1997). In short, even if it group deliberation is a distinct option from thinking for yourself, it faces similar problems while lacking some potential benefits. That said, deliberating with others can be extremely epistemically fruitful under certain conditions, which I briefly note in §5.

7. In other words, she might think the norm on forming responsible political opinions is wide-scope, rather than narrow-scope.

within a democracy, citizens are expected to hold (informed) opinions.[8] They cannot do this if they suspend on a wide variety of political issues. We might worry that if everyday citizens lacked opinions, then political decisions would lack legitimacy.

From the limited literature on suspension, we can isolate three objections to it. First, when we need to vote or act, suspension is not meaningfully different from deference. Instead, we are simply delegating decision-making authority to others. In Sartrean terms, not choosing is still choosing, and one may end up *de facto* on the wrong side (Lillehammer 2021) or problematically ignorant (Sliwa 2012; Peter 2023). Second, we might worry that people who suspend are excessively risk-averse, even spineless, embodying a "timid mental life" (Beerbohm 2012). Even stronger, Beerbohm suggests that we have moral reasons to form (and ultimately act on) some political beliefs. Here he echoes Locke and Mill. Locke claims that we have moral reason qua citizens to be 'studiers' (Locke 1698, §222), while Mill notes that "[i]f we were never to act on our opinions, because those opinions may be wrong, we should leave all our interests uncared for, and all our duties unperformed" (Mill 1859, 20).

Finally, we might think it's important for people to have opinions from the perspective of public discourse and the epistemic commons: we can only have public debate and scrutinize each other's claims if we have ideas to debate in the first place. Perhaps we can even collectively improve in this way even if our starting beliefs are not particularly well-informed.[9] Strictly speaking, the practice of debating and discussing positions is compatible with privately suspending judgment on the issues. However, suspension may make fruitful exchange more cognitively and motivationally demanding: perhaps we are most able and inclined to argue for our views and offer them for scrutiny when we truly *believe* them.

The practical necessity of deference suggests that we need some way to vindicate it if we want a realistic, humane, and practicable picture of our epistemic obligations as citizens. What could such a vindication look like? When and to whom would it recommend deference for ordinary citizens?

3   IN PRAISE OF PARTISAN DEFERENCE

Recently, several philosophers have defended deference to *co-partisans* as a good way to form our political beliefs. They have defended both the *epistemic* and *moral* permissibility of relying on co-partisans. Co-partisans are people who share a political affiliation. More precisely, two individuals are co-partisans if they are both willing to self-identify—

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8. As usual, one person's *modus ponens* is another person's *modus tollens*; for example, Brennan (2012) thinks that many citizens should suspend judgment and delegate to others, precisely because they cannot meet the political and epistemic expectations imposed by democracy. I briefly return to Brennan's view in §5.

9. Cf. Mercier and Sperber (2011)'s argumentative model of reasoning.

strongly or not—as members of the same political party.[10] Co-partisans can include elites (such as public officials) or everyday citizens. In the United States, the most salient and common partisan identities are Democrat and Republican; in the United Kindgom, they are Tory and Labour.

For defenders of partisan deference, partisan identity is treated as a proxy for shared values. Intuitively, you're permitted to defer to people with whom you share—or think you share—values. The argument for partisan deference then runs as follows:

PI. Political affiliation reflects one's normative outlook—e.g. one's values or perspective.

PII. If political affiliation reflects one's normative outlook, then it can be—and often is!—epistemically permissible to defer to others who share that affiliation, i.e. co-partisans.

C*. It can be epistemically permissible to defer to co-partisans.

We can call this the *Shared Values Argument* for partisan deference. Versions of this argument can be found in Rini (2017), Levy (2019, 2022a), and Lepoutre (2020), while Brinkmann (2022) seems to be sympathetic to this argument and offers routes for defending it. Although the details differ, the broad picture is the same: insofar as partisanship is a proxy for one's normative outlook, it can be—and often is—epistemically permissible to defer: in particular, it can be epistemically virtuous, rational, and reliable. These authors also think that such deference is often both morally permissible and prudent.

First, Rini (2017) argues that certain forms of partisanship are individually reasonable, given our non-ideal world and psychologies. This is because our political affiliation reflects our value commitments, at least in broad strokes. Hence, it can make sense to trust a testifier more simply because you share a political affiliation. Rini's model emphasizes that "partisan affiliation is a reasonable proxy for epistemic peerhood in political and moral normative domains" (Rini 2017, 52). Levy (2019, 2022a) offers a similar account of why partisanship is individually rational. He notes that we rely on cues of benevolence and competence to distinguish reliable from unreliable testifiers. He writes, "We are disposed to see those with whom we share a political outlook and/or a religious affiliation as those who are benevolent toward us and our interests" (Levy 2019, 322). Using political affiliation as a proxy for benevolence is adaptive: it helps us promote the things we value and demote the things we disvalue. Hence, relying on

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10. Here I'm relying on standard measures of partisan identity in the social sciences, e.g. the American National Election Studies. In the US, these surveys ask participants whether, generally speaking, they usually think of themselves as: Strong Republican, Not very strong Republican, Independent (and, if so, whether they lean one way), Not very strong Democrat, or Strong Democrat. (See also Osmundsen et al. (2021).)

cues of benevolence is individually rational—even when it trades off with competence. Moreover, it can be prudentially rational to defer to co-partisans: doing so promotes the things we value.

Second, Lepoutre offers a similar albeit more sophisticated defense of partisan deference, framed in terms of *perspectives* rather than *values*. He argues that social group membership—including political affiliation—can be an epistemically useful basis for forming political judgments. On his view, members of social groups typically share a 'social perspective,' which encodes both descriptive and normative information. For example, women are more likely to know about sexual harassment and care about it. Such perspectives are epistemically valuable in virtue of encoding a rich array of information, and thus it can be individually epistemically rational to form judgments in accordance with them. Moreover, this perspective provides a strong reason for voters to be represented by members of their social groups and to support a particular party, if one's group is disproportionately represented by one party. He writes, "the fact that members of one's social group disproportionately belong to or support party X might well constitute a *pro tanto* epistemic reason to support X" (Lepoutre 2020, 50).

Finally, Brinkmann has recently provided a comprehensive defense of deference in politics. He argues that acting on the basis of political beliefs formed solely via deference is typically not morally deficient (Brinkmann 2022, 4). Although Brinkmann is explicitly focused on the moral status of acting on beliefs, he appears sympathetic to—and even to presuppose—the view that forming such *beliefs* in the first place is not *epistemically* deficient. Indeed, his primary arguments for deference are epistemic, rather than moral, in nature, focusing on the division of epistemic labor and the value of epistemic solidarity. Further, his arguments can easily be extended to defend the epistemic permissibility of specifically *partisan* deference. He notes that political deference—and corresponding voting behavior—is often driven by group identification; this makes it less, rather than more, problematic, he claims, for we can assume that our groups share our background values and interests. Hence, he appears to agree with Rini and Levy that insofar as partisan affiliation reflects one's value commitments, then deference to co-partisans should be less problematic. Indeed, he is most explicitly concerned with responding to the Challenge from Normative Deference, which I return to below.

To summarize, each of these four thinkers promises to vindicate the epistemic, moral, and prudential permissibility of deference to co-partisans. On this picture, deference to co-partisans is permissible because partisan affiliation reflects one's value commitments or normative perspective.

Importantly, these authors are not just trying to give a model that would render deference permissible if many further conditions are met. Rather, they're trying to justify the widespread deference that we already see. As political scientists have pointed out for decades, co-partisanship is the most well-used cue for forming political attitudes

(Achen and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al. 1960; Druckman 2014; Gilens and Murakawa 2002; Goren et al. 2009; Lavine et al. 2012; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012). Indeed, we might think that relying on partisan cues is the best that citizens can do given the institutional realities and informational limits discussed in §2 (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012). As Lavine et al. (2012) highlight, "partisanship as a heuristic cue stands out in terms of its breadth, inferential power, and cognitive efficiency" (p. 200).

This defense of partisan deference is attractive. In addition to vindicating our existing practices, it promises to meet both of the challenges presented in §1: the Challenge from Action-Guidance and the Challenge from Normative Deference. First, it is often easy to identify co-partisans to whom to defer; public officials wear their affiliation on their sleeve, but so do many of our colleagues and neighbors. Hence, a norm recommending deference to co-partisans is action-guiding and easily implementable.

Second, given that partisanship is treated as a proxy for shared values, we seem to avoid positing any deep normative deference. By normative deference, I am focused primarily on deference regarding value-judgments, including how to trade different moral and political values—such as liberty and welfare—off each other. Importantly, purely normative deference is *prima facie* problematic or suspect.[11] That is, it seems problematic to treat someone as having better access to the right normative facts, values, or norms than you do—and hence as being a fundamental moral authority (Gibbard 1990). There are different accounts of what *makes* it problematic—including that it's epistemically,[12] morally,[13] or politically[14] defective. My interest here is more in the datum than the explanation.

When we defer to co-partisans on this picture, we don't defer to their values or normative judgments in any deep sense. Rather, we are simply using them as a normative calculator or proxy for our own judgment. To borrow terminology from debates about moral deference, insofar as we have normative deference, it is *impure* rather than *pure* (McGrath 2009); only the latter is even *prima facie* troubling. Political issues virtually always involve both normative and empirical elements, often in ways that are too intertwined to disentangle. However, when we defer to co-partisans about these issues, we don't normatively defer in any deep or problematic sense.

For concreteness, we might distinguish between two cases:[15]

a. Bernie Sanders says there should be a $15 minimum wage, and so I believe that, too.

b. Bernie Sanders says a $15 minimum wage will drive down poverty and income

11. See, for instance, Hills (2009, 2013); Howell (2014); McGrath (2009) and McGrath (2011).
12. McGrath (2008); Hopkins (2007).
13. Hills (2009); Fletcher (2016).
14. Hazlett (2016).
15. Thanks very much to Allan Hazlett for encouraging me to spell out the Challenge of Normative Deference in more detail and offering these examples.

inequality, without affecting unemployment, and so I believe that, too. I thereby believe that there should be a $15 minimum wage.

Only the first is a case of normative deference. Whether it further counts as pure depends on how we fill in the details. If one defers because they believe that Bernie has better access to the relevant moral facts, then the deference is pure and arguably suspect. However, if they defer because they believe that they share all the same values, including judgments about trade-offs, but think that Bernie has more empirical information or has thought longer about what policy their shared values support, then the deference is arguably impure. Like deference itself, the distinction between *purity* and *impurity* of deference has several dimensions and may be one of degree rather than kind.[16] What makes arguments for partisan deference so attractive is that they can vindicate political deference in a way that renders it quite impure.

Proponents of partisan deference might even argue that partisan deference fares better than expert deference with respect to the two challenges. First, a norm recommending deference to experts will not necessarily be as action-guiding. On some conceptions of experts, it can be quite difficult to identify them. Indeed, Levy (2022a) is explicitly pessimistic about laypeoples' ability to pick out expert in epistemically polluted environments, such as our own.[17] Insofar as it is easy to identify experts, norms recommending deference to them will not necessarily follow (Worsnip forthcoming). Finally, most political issues are not the kind that health or climate change experts can or should settle. Hence, norms recommending partisan may be more helpful and widely applicable. Second, it's less clear if a norm recommending deference to experts can meet the Challenge from Normative Deference as easily and frequently. As noted, political issues are typically both normative and empirical. While climate scientists may be experts about climate issues, they are not necessarily *moral* experts.[18] (Indeed, the very existence of moral experts is controversial; but even if they did exist, it's unclear how we would identify them (McGrath 2011).)

It is thus unsurprising that defenders of partisan deference tend to claim that partisan affiliation is relevant for assessing purely descriptive claims, including those within the purview of scientific experts. Lepoutre and Levy suggest that it can be rational to use partisan affiliation when assessing technical or scientific claims, at least for politicized issues such as climate change. Levy claims that it is individually epistemically rational for conservatives to not defer to experts on climate change because such experts fail cues for benevolence, while Lepoutre argues that it is epistemically permissible to discount scientific testimony if one thinks the scientists don't share one's values; for example, scientists might discount the economic risk posed by policies designed to address cli-

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16. Brinkmann (2022).

17. See Levy (2022a, 117ff).

18. Cf. Worsnip (forthcoming)'s concern about scientists epistemically trespassing into normative domains.

mate change. Rini further allows using partisan affiliation to assess testimony about non-technical, descriptive claims, such as the stories conveyed by fake news. This is "because the act of transmitting political news implicates normative decisions on the part of the testifier," e.g. decisions about what's politically important (Rini 2017, 52).[19] Hence, perhaps surprisingly, partisan cues may not only fare better than standard expert cues on these pictures but may also need to be incorporated in them.

4   Worries about Partisan Deference

These proposals appear attractive. They vindicate our reliance on partisan cues while showing how norms permitting deference to co-partisans can be both normatively respectable and tractable. Unfortunately, though, I'll argue that the Shared Values argument in favor of partisan deference faces both normative and epistemic problems. First, given the way that partisanship actually tends to function, we don't avoid the need for normative deference. Second, even if we did, partisanship is still often not epistemically permissible. On the contrary, it is often epistemically irrational, vicious, and unreliable.

Roughly, these objections can be viewed as targeting premises I and II respectively. First, regarding PI, I deny that partisan deference in fact reflects one's normative outlook in a way that is independent enough to avoid the Challenge from Normative Deference. Regarding PII, while I agree that it *can* be epistemically permissible to defer to co-partisans, I deny that it often is. There are further conditions on epistemic permissibility that are often unmet when everyday citizens defer to co-partisans.

It is important to emphasize that my objection to the Shared Values Argument is not about the spirit of the argument so much as the empirical reality it is supposed to do justice to. I agree that *if* partisans independently shared values, recognized this, and deferred on that basis, then it could often be epistemically permissible. The problem is that partisanship typically does not function this way. Although the argument for partisan deference is designed to be sensitive to our limitations as non-ideal agents, it ultimately fails to fully grapple with the realities of political opinion- and identity-formation.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize the limits of my arguments. Given that I am relying on recent empirical research on partisan identity-formation, my arguments are constrained by it. First, since most of this research is focused on partisanship in the United States, we should be careful before generalizing to other contexts. Second, partisanship has not always functioned so starkly as social identity. Factors like the rise of social sorting, political polarization, and the media landscape have contributed to partisan affiliation becoming a core part of individuals' identities, influencing their social interactions, values, and worldview. Indeed, as Mason argues, partisan identity

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19. However, as Worsnip (2019) notes, even if the source is better at identifying what's *important*, it's unclear why this would make them better at identifying what's *true*.

increasingly functions as a *mega-identity*, encompassing not only one's partisan preference but also one's religion, race, neighborhood, and even favorite grocery store (Mason 2018, 14). Since my worries are focused on modern-day realities of partisanship, they may not apply to partisans at other times or places. At the same time, one of the reasons that partisanship serves as such an attractive cue worthy of defense is precisely *because* it has become so salient and all-encompassing.

4.1 Normative Deference Redux

First, I want to challenge premise I, the claim that political affiliation reflects one's normative outlook. I'll focus first on Rini's, Levy's, and Brinkmann's formulation in terms of *values*; as we'll see, Lepoutre's account in terms of *perspectives* is designed to avoid one version of the objection, though it faces another.

For people to serve as genuine proxies for me, it must be that we independently share the same values. To avoid pure normative deference, it cannot be the case that your values are influencing me in any deep sense. However, we can ask: do people defer to co-partisans because they share the same values antecedently? Or, do they share values because they defer to partisans? For the defense of partisan deference to succeed on its own terms, the answer must be the former. Otherwise, we have pure normative deference again—indeed, of a very deep kind—and the Challenge from Normative Deference is unmet.

Unfortunately, there is good reason to think that most partisan identities are not formed on the basis of shared values, especially not political values which are definitive of partisanship. Rather, partisanship often *shapes* values, but not vice versa. As Achen and Bartels write, ideological commitments, including values, are "more often an effect of partisanship than its cause" (Achen and Bartels 2016, 234). For many of us, partisan identity is closer to an emotional attachment to one's social group, rather than their issue positions (Campbell et al. 1960; Greene 1999; Green et al. 2002; Mason 2018; Miller and Shanks 1996). This emotional, in-group attachment is typically acquired early in life, from one's parents, peers, and social groups (Campbell et al. 1960). On this picture of partisanship, "Identifying with a party is only minimally, and then often coincidentally, related to identifying with policies that the party stands for" (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012, 23–4).

The emotional attachment or expressive view of partisanship is bolstered by social identity theory (Greene 1999; Huddy et al. 2015; Huddy and Bankert 2017; Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2018; Tajfel et al. 1979). Social identity theory starts with the premise that we are drawn to being in social groups; they help us understand ourselves, others, and the world. As Mason writes, "Once we are part of a group, we know how to identify ourselves in relation to the other people in our society, and we derive an emotional connection and a sense of well-being from being group members" (Mason 2018, 9). We

define groups in terms of their inclusive and exclusive dimensions; there is an in-group attachment and a corresponding out-group animus. Social identity theory is empirically well-supported and has been deployed to explain a wide variety of phenomena involving inter-group relation and conflict, including polarization and the nature of partisanship.

Further evidence for the expressive view of partisan identity comes directly from research on the relationship between values and partisan identity. Most relevantly, Goren (2005) shows that partisan identity influences core political values—such as limited government and equal opportunity—but not vice versa. Similarly, McCann (1997) showed that U.S. Presidential candidate support asymmetrically influenced values, such as equality and moral traditionalism, which in turn influenced policy preferences. In addition, partisan identity is more temporally stable than values (Goren 2005); indeed, even the absolute, rather than merely comparative, stability of values is disputed (Feldman 2003; Seligman and Katz 1996). For the Shared Values Argument to work, it must be the case that values precede partisan identity, rather than are deeply influenced by it. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of evidence for the latter. As Goren et al. (2009) conclude, there is strong reason to suspect that "partisan identities precede political belief in the developmental sequence" (Goren et al. 2009, 806).

More indirect evidence for the claim that partisanship influences values comes from the literature on how partisanship influences policy positions. Consider, for instance, Levendusky's finding that people change policy views more readily than they change parties. In cases where issue position and party no longer aligned, 53% involved changing issue position to match those of party, while only 28% involved changing party to match issue position (Levendusky 2009, 113).[20] It would be unsurprising if partisanship thereby indirectly influenced their values, especially given pressure to reconcile their policy positions with their values.

Partisan identity also influences values in a deep way over time. This is especially true for the most ideologically pure partisans (Goren et al. 2009). First, as Goren et al. (2009) demonstrate, party cues affect the degree to which people *express* support for specific values, such as self-reliance, equality of opportunity, and moral tolerance. Remarkably, cues from out-partisans influence value expression more than those from co-partisans. For example, upon learning that Democrats support equality of opportunity, Republicans decrease their support for this value more than Democrats increase it. We might call this a form of *anti-deference*, a topic worthy of greater philosophical exploration: although philosophers have focused on deference to *co-partisans*, it may turn out that cues from *out-partisans* have more pronounced effects on one's beliefs and reasoning. Second, and more importantly, party cues then affect not just the expression of

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20. See also Lenz (2013) and Cohen (2003). Lenz observes, "voters first decide they like a politician for other reasons, then adopt his or her policy views" (p. 3).

value but also their deeper structure: party cues promote ideological consistency among core political values. Especially over time, there is good reason to think that partisan cues affect not only value *expression* but also values themselves, leading to long-term and stable changes in one's values. Even when "partisan identification does not determine value positions," it *does* appear to "shape them" (Goren et al. 2009, 894).

Of course, some partisans are genuinely 'programmatic': they independently "share the political preferences and political outlook of the party that they identify with" (Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012, 24). For these voters, partisan identity is not merely an emotional group attachment; rather, it is closer to a utility calculation. For them, the proxy model of deference may work as envisaged. However, there are two things to emphasize here. First, this is only a small portion of the electorate. This significantly limits the applicability of the value-based defense of partisanship. Second, precisely because these voters are more informed, deference is less necessary. Indeed, politically sophisticated citizens use partisan cues less than the politically unsophisticated (Kam 2005; Lau and Redlawsk 2006).[21]

One way for a proponent of partisan deference to reply is to claim that normative deference is not, in fact, all that troubling. After all, our values have to come from somewhere! In response, we should first distinguish between *core human values* and *core political values* (Goren 2020). Human values—such as openness to change and conservation—need not be acquired from the broader sociopolitical environment; they may even be hard-wired (Knafo and Spinath 2010).[22] Our partisan identities are typically not formed on the basis of such values, but rather on the basis of our affective attachments to our social groups. Even if we need to tolerate some degree of arbitrariness in our value development, there is no obvious moral or epistemic reason to prefer values derived from one's partisan affiliation. (Indeed, as I argue below, there are epistemic reasons to *disprefer* it.) Partisanship is just one social identity among many. There are many other identities that plausibly correlate with shared values. Why rely on partisanship rather than one's gender, race, or religion?[23]

Moreover, there are positive reasons to be troubled by partisanship influencing our values. Whatever we want to say about the status of normative deference in general, there are special worries about normative deference in politics. Democratic decisions

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21. It's worth briefly noting that even when partisan deference does not involve normative deference about *values*, it will still typically involve normative deference about their relative weights. In particular, it will often involve deference about trade-offs, including values of very different types – e.g. political, moral, religious. As Druckman notes, "the essence of politics is value conflict between different values" (Druckman 2014, 474). It also requires deferring, in some cases, to their risk assessments and strategic calculations. For example, whether you should think that carbon capture is a viable way to address climate change depends on your risk profile. On my view, this should still trouble us, as you're still deferring to someone's all things considered value judgments.

22. Note that there is little evidence these human values correlate with political affiliation (Goren 2020).

23. Thanks to Allan Hazlett for posing this challenge. One response might appeal to the fact that partisanship function as a mega-identity. To my mind, this should make it all the more troubling.

are supposed to express the will of the people; that presumably includes reflecting their values and preferences. However, if they normatively defer about what values they should have, in an important sense, their values are not really *theirs*.[24] Purely normative political deference may thus conflict with democratic values such as non-domination and equal opportunity for political influence (van Wietmarschen 2019). As Lavine et. al. note, when voters are driven more by party identification than by values, this "provides elites with an opportunity to subvert the public's will" (Lavine et al. 2012, 119). Druckman echoes this, noting that "elected party elites may instill the very opinions [and preferences] to which they then respond" (Druckman 2014, 477). While voters may think that they are expressing their will, they are merely reflectively mirroring those of elites. Perhaps for this reason, Beerbohm advises that "[t]he epistemically virtuous citizen guards her belief-forming process against pernicious effects," maintaining "a certain distance from her cultural inheritance and community to preserve her cognitive life from being objectionably dependent on others" (Beerbohm 2012, 156). Given the risks of pernicious elite influence and imposing our values on others, there may be distinctive reasons to avoid normative deference in politics. Instead, we ought to heed Beerbom's call for epistemic virtue, taking special care to ensure our values are truly our own and reflectively endorsed.

Lepoutre seeks to avoid worries about the nature and arbitrariness of partisan identity by focusing on *perspectives*, rather than reasoned or independent judgments about values. Even if the emotional attachment view of partisanship is correct, it can still be appropriate to rely on one's group perspective on his view. Recall that for Lepoutre, social group membership can be an epistemically useful basis for forming political judgments because it encodes valuable descriptive and normative information regarding, for instance, one's group interests and empirical reality. Hence, social group membership is still an epistemically reliable basis for forming political judgments. So, perhaps normative deference is unproblematic precisely because it is reliable: one is really using others as a proxy for one's judgment. Unfortunately, though, we'll see reasons to question the epistemic value of partisan deference, including its reliability, below.

4.2 *Epistemic Worries*

Deference to co-partisans faces epistemic challenges in addition to worries about normative deference. Even if we share a normative profile with co-partisans, this alone does not render the partisan deference that we actually see as epistemically permissible. As noted, the proponents of the Shared Values Argument generally do not want to show that it's merely *possible* for partisan deference to be epistemically permissible; rather,

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24. Cf. Achen and Bartels (2016).

they want to vindicate the epistemic standing of the deference that we actually see.[25] However, I want to show that—given both non-ideal conditions and how partisan identity is formed—it very often is not epistemically permissible, no matter how we flesh epistemic permissibility out.[26] As noted, I'm focused on the *epistemic* status of partisan deference, but these arguments should make us question the moral and prudential status of it as well.

The idea that partisanship can be epistemically corrupting is not new. For decades, political scientists have noted that it comes with a host of epistemic problems. For example, it often agents to engage in motivated reasoning and selective exposure and to discount argument strength by one's own lights (Druckman 2014; Lavine et al. 2012). When partisan cues are available, people ignore more valuable information and fail to learn more about candidates' partisan stances (Cohen 2003; Druckman 2001; Lavine et al. 2012; Kam 2005; Rahn 1993). In short, partisan beliefs are often characterized by "shallowness, bias, and early decision foreclosure" (Lavine et al. 2012, 17). Building on this work while using the tools of analytic epistemology, I'll show that partisan deference often inherits these flaws. In particular, I'll argue that partisan deference is often not epistemically rational, reliable, or virtuous, respectively.

4.2.1 Is Partisan Deference Epistemically Rational?

First, philosophers such as Rini, Levy, and Lepoutre have argued that partisan deference is epistemically rational or reasonable. They seek to establish this by trying to show that people end up deferring in ways that are conducive to what they value. Importantly, though, this is not enough to show that deference is *rational*; at best, it shows that it's *reliable*. For deference to be rational, co-partisans can't defer for reasons that have nothing to do with its reliability or perceived epistemic value. For an analogy, suppose that James defers to everything that his parents say, because he wants his parents to love him. Lucky for him, his parents are always right, so James ends up with all and only true beliefs. Although James's beliefs are reliable, they are intuitively not rational: he has these beliefs only because he wants his parents to love him.

Similarly, if partisans defer only for reasons that have to do with group loyalty, then their beliefs are not thereby epistemically rational. This is true *even if* they share a normative profile and recognize this; what matters is the actual basis of their deference. As Hannon has recently emphasized in response to Lepoutre, "To be epistemically rational, individual voters must not only engage in group cognition and derive epistemic

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25. Lepoutre (2020) may be a possible exception. He emphasizes at multiple points that his arguments do not show that 'group cognition' is always *all things considered* epistemically rational. However, he seems to think that these conditions are met far more often than his interlocutors do.

26. Each of the authors I discussed in §3 use different epistemic vocabulary. Rini focuses on epistemic virtue and reasonableness, a term often used synonymously with rationality. Lepoutre and Levy talk in terms of reliability and rationality. Brinkman focuses on moral deficiency, but we can extend his arguments to *epistemic* deficiency.

benefits from this process; they must engage in it *because* they believe it is epistemically valuable" (Hannon 2022, 9). However, we've already seen reasons to think that people engage in partisan deference not because they have the epistemic benefits in view, but rather because they simply want to support their team, no matter their beliefs. Even if partisans are in a position to have epistemically rational beliefs on the basis of deference, many of their beliefs are not, in fact, all things considered rational insofar as they are based solely on reasons pertaining to group loyalty and emotional attachments.

As Worsnip (2022, 2019) highlights, Rini and Levy seem to presuppose a contentious and radical form of epistemic subjectivism when defending the rationality of partisan deference. That is, they assume that "the fact that I trust someone suffices to make it rational to defer to them (and the fact that I distrust someone suffices to make it rational to dismiss them), and my trusting as I do is not itself open to rational assessment" (Worsnip 2022). As Worsnip notes, this is highly implausible and yields problematic implications: no matter how unreasonable my patterns of trust, the views I end up with will be rationally unimpeachable. This would not only be a problematic form of bootstrapping but also license dogmatism and justify epistemic injustice (Worsnip 2019).

Of course, some partisans probably do defer because they recognize the epistemic value or reliability of doing so, without simply relying on brute facts about whom they are disposed to trust. If so, then their beliefs could be epistemically rational. The point here is that it is an overly idealized reconstruction of how most partisans reason and hence does not vindicate widespread partisan deference, precisely given our non-ideal worlds and psychologies. With Lavine et. al., we should conclude that "partisan loyalty *per se* is not a sufficient condition for responsible democratic citizenship" (Lavine et al. 2012, 200). Further conditions must be met for responsibility and rationality.

4.2.2 Is Partisan Deference Reliable?

Perhaps the standard for epistemic responsibility just sketched is too demanding. Instead, perhaps all that matters is that citizens reliably arrive at beliefs they should have, given their values, interests, and the relevant facts.[27] In other words, what matters is if they can be modeled *as if* they were rational, even if they defer for apparently arational or even irrational reasons. Contrary to the cliché, it's the destination, not the journey, that ultimately matters.

Unfortunately, there is reason to think that deference to co-partisans often makes one *less*, not *more*, likely to arrive at beliefs that are supported by one's values. If what we ultimately care about is alignment between pre-existing values and judgments, deference often creates a gap between these; one is often better off *not* deferring.

First, there is evidence that learning candidates' party affiliations does little to in-

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27. We might even follow some political scientists, such as Lavine et al. (2012, 199), in suggesting that this is enough for epistemic *rationality*.

crease the likelihood of "voting correctly," i.e. in accordance with what their fully informed preferences would be, given voters' values and the facts (Lau and Redlawsk 1997, 2001). Rather, the opposite can occur. This is especially true for low-sophistication voters: when relying on partisan cues, they are less likely to vote correctly than if they did not so rely. Sophisticated voters are, unsurprisingly, generally helped by heuristics, except in cases where the out-party is nonstereotypic, where their probability of voting correctly decreases from .77 to .58. Hence, Lau and Redlawk conclude, "heavy reliance on political heuristics actually made decision making less accurate among those low in political sophistication. Only relative experts appear to be generally helped in their decision making using heuristics" (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 966). But for relative experts, deference is less necessary. Again, we see that widespread deference is not vindicated, particularly among the less sophisticated who need it most.

Second, when given the choice between party versus values, partisans will often choose party. Lavine et al. (2012) showed that partisans will often select policies endorsed by members of their own party, even when it was clear that an alternative policy option was closer to their own values. For example, Democrats will prefer a conservative policy and Republicans the more liberal one when told that it is endorsed by their own party. In the absence of partisan cues, however, Democrats and Republicans both select the policy that is closer aligned with their stated values: Democrats choose the liberal policy and Republicans the conservative one. The likelihood of choosing "correctly"—i.e. in line with their own stated preferences and values—dropped by over .3 points when moving participants were presented with partisan cues rather than the policies alone. This echoes Cohen (2003), Carsey and Layman (2006), and Levendusky (2009)'s findings that voters more often alter their policy positions in line with their party identification, rather than vice versa, and reinforces concerns about normative deference, including in one–off cases. Deference can generate gaps, not alignment, with one's values; one does not arrive where one wanted to go, but rather heads in the completely opposite direction. Importantly, this result was only observed for univalent partisans but not ambivalent partisans, who are less attached to their party; I return to the significance of this point in §5.

Let's review the dialectic. Earlier I argued that deference is irrational if people defer for reasons that have nothing to do with epistemic value. My opponent responds: it's the destination, not the journey, that matters for epistemic permissibility. Rome is Rome, whether you get there by efficient train travel or as a space cadet. But what if deference to co-partisans leads one to Damascus? The partisan convinces herself that Damascus is, in fact, where she always wanted to go! If it's the destination that matters, then we're owed an explanation for why moving away from your destination is rational, or why it's rational and normatively unobjectionable to change your destination so arbitrarily.

There is a further way in which deference to co-partisans may be unreliable, perhaps

even irrational. If you defer to co-partisans across the board, you will end up taking the party line on a wide range of issues, ranging from gun control to abortion and climate change to gay marriage (Joshi 2020).[28] However, these issues are rationally orthogonal: what you should think about abortion has little to do with what you should think about gun control, for example. Yet, if I know your view about abortion, I can reliably predict your view about gun control. Doxastic attitudes toward these orthogonal issues cluster together in a partisan way: Republicans carry one package of beliefs, Democrats another.

This raises an epistemological red flag. Suppose I am a Democrat and find myself with a partisan cluster of views. For many issues, where I believe that p, my Republican counterpart believes $\neg p$. But then my Republican counterpart is not just *wrong* about a wide range of issues but *anti-reliable*. Charges of anti-reliability require some explanation: how is my Republican counterpart so consistently wrong? Unfortunately, no plausible explanation is in the offing. Rather, you should think something has gone wrong on your end: either your belief has been subject to problematic irrelevant influences, or you have only been exposed to a biased subset of the relevant evidence.

The fact that partisan deference leads to this clustering should make us suspicious that it is in fact a reliable way to get at the truth, even by one's own lights. (For those who balk at the idea of truth in politics, observe that it is also is not likely a way to arrive at beliefs that align cleanly with one's values: there is no one set of values that would support e.g. the Democratic stance on nine orthogonal issues (Joshi 2020; Goren 2020).) Hence, deferring to co-partisans across the board is not plausibly an epistemically reliable way to form one's political beliefs. What explains one's beliefs is, again, not plausibly their epistemic credentials. Hence, one cannot rationally believe that her side is consistently getting it right in the absence of an explanation of the other side's anti-reliability.

4.2.3 Is Partisan Deference Epistemically Virtuous?

Finally, Rini claims that partisanship is consistent with epistemic virtue. However, she acknowledges that partisanship can be an epistemic vice if we extend too much credibility to others because they are partisan or allow our trust in co-partisans to extend to non-political domains. Unfortunately, the ease with which we overextend trust in partisans is striking. Recently, Marks et al. (2019) have shown that learning someone's political views affects our judgment of their competence on non-political tasks. Even for a task as mundane and apolitical as recognizing new shapes (charmingly called 'blaps'), participants preferred to defer to those who were like-minded but less accurate than those who are dissimilar but more accurate, even when they could easily assess accuracy based on track record alone. The researchers describe this phenomenon as *epistemic spillovers*.

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28. I follow Joshi (2020)'s treatment of the issue here.

This finding is remarkable and disturbing: it reveals the astounding ease with which we overextend partisan cues into completely irrelevant domains. It's as if we think someone is a worse mechanic simply because he is on the opposite side of the political spectrum. If epistemic spillovers occur for something as mundane as shape-recognition, we should be suspicious of our ability to prevent them in more politically-adjacent domains. Furthermore, we face a delineation problem: while shape-recognition is clearly apolitical (at least for now!), topics ranging from food to fashion choices are increasingly politicized. The boundaries for when partisan deference is inappropriate are unclear. It's unclear where to draw the line in a way to prevent over-generation worries from arising.

Hence, *even if* it is rational and reliable to use partisan cues when circumscribed to political issues, it is often risky to do so. We easily overextend partisan cues into domains and tasks where they have no place, such as shape-recognition. Given our non-ideal psychologies, it'd be hubristic to think one can pre-empt this over-extension, especially given that people are typically bad at identifying their biases even when rendered salient to them (Pronin et al. 2002). Hence, partisanship can all too easily be a vice.

5   Solutions: Individual & Institutional

Let's recap. Our starting question was: how should citizens responsibly form political opinions? In contemporary electoral democracies, it is exceedingly hard to. Issues are multitudinous and complex, yet citizens are expected to have informed opinions on a wide range of them. While partisan affiliation seemed like a promising way to navigate this complex terrain, we've seen that it is more likely to lead us epistemically astray.

Given this, we ought to step back and reconsider some of our starting points. In particular, the failures of partisan deference given non-ideal concerns should prompt us to reassess our initial argument for deference. Recall that the argument for deference assumed that forming beliefs about a wide variety of topics is central to being a good democratic citizen. We have independent reasons to question this starting assumption. Indeed, Frankfurt worried that pressure to have many opinions leads to bullshit. He writes:

> Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about... Closely related instances arise from the widespread conviction that it is the responsibility of a citizen in a democracy to have opinions about everything, or at least everything that pertains to the conduct of his country's affairs. (Frankfurt 2009)

Frankfurt's concern motivates what we might call *Political Minimalism*, which rejects the assumption that citizens should be forming beliefs about so many things. There

are two ways to defend Political Minimalism. First, we might reject the assumption the centrality of *forming beliefs* to responsible citizenship. Rather than focus on *beliefs*, we might instead focus on non-political *activities*, such as volunteering at soup kitchens, as a way of bringing about positive social change (Freiman 2020). In addition, we might think that it's enough for people to accept or treat political claims as true for the purpose of action, without needing to commit to believing them. In short, we might question the centrality of the *doxastic* in politics.[29]

Second, we might grant that we ought to form some beliefs but deny that we ought to form beliefs *about so many things*. Perhaps we should instead increase the quality of our beliefs yet reduce the quantity. For example, we might praise issue specialization and encourage people to dedicate their time to thoroughly investigating the issues that they care most about (Elliott 2020, 2023). This will, of course, involve deference, but the deference could be more intentional and based on a wider variety of cues beyond coarse-grained partisan identity. On other issues, perhaps they can suspend or have moderated opinions. In this way, they can reduce the quantity of their beliefs but increase the quality. This suggestion has a further advantage, namely that once citizens start to form a coherent ideology—something political scientists refer to as attitude constraint—they tend to be at higher risk of motivated reasoning (Druckman 2014). Note further that if most people were to suspend on issues that they knew little about, then the epistemic commons would be less polluted with low quality opinions. As Frankfurt predicts, there would be less bullshit if citizens were not regularly expected to pronounce their hot-takes on the latest political issue.

If we are to defend Political Minimalism, we need to say something to its critics who think there is something problematic about not forming many beliefs. We can start by returning to the arguments against suspension from §2. There we raised concerns about delegation, excessive risk-aversion, and public discourse. We can respond to each in turn. First, even if suspension involves delegation, it is unclear why this is problematic *per se*; what matters is to whom we're delegating. If we're worried about ending up *de facto* on the wrong side, it's worth emphasizing that we can be more confident in what positions are *off the table*. Even if we should suspend on many things, this doesn't mean that we should suspend on everything: we can still rule out particularly heinous or retrogressive positions. Moreover, while both deference and suspension can lead to problematic ignorance, they can each be the most epistemically responsible options in the right circumstances.[30] (And, as we saw, thinking for oneself can be *irresponsible*.) Second, while suspension will *sometimes* be spineless or needlessly risk-averse, at other times it will be epistemically humble or virtuous. Third, we can of course discuss and debate views without fully believing them, even if it's psychologically easier to

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29. Cf. Hannon (2020)'s critique of epistemic democrats' focus on *truth* rather than non-veritistic goals, such as empathetic understanding.

30. Cf. Peter (2023, 187–8) for helpful discussion, focusing on justified deference to the right people.

contribute to public discourse when we fully believe them. Whether we should so contribute is a separate question, to which we may reiterate Frankfurtian misgivings.

Others have defended suspension of judgment on many political issues. Huemer (2005) argues that we ought to defer to experts when there is a clearly identifiable consensus and suspend when there's not. Insofar as the former is rare in politics, Huemer's decision-procedure would recommend blanket suspension.[31] Similarly, Kornblith (2010) argues that we should suspend judgment on many controversial moral and political issues, borrowing assumptions from the literature on peer disagreement. Worsnip suggests that suspension is at least a better alternative to partisan deference regarding conflicting expert claims. In response to Levy (2022a), he writes, "An alternative view—one that is to my mind more compelling, albeit somewhat unsettling—–is that the proper attitude in light of one's inability to arbitrate between conflicting sources of testimony is one of doubt or suspended judgment" (Worsnip 2022). Finally, though they don't talk in terms of suspension, Carter and McKenna (2020) argue that the phenomenon of motivated reasoning raises skeptical challenges and should make us question whether many of our political beliefs are justified. Skeptical conclusions often motivate suspending judgment.

However, it's worth emphasizing that Political Minimalism does not require suspension *per se*. There are options in between what's sometimes called full or outright belief and suspension. While full belief is often viewed as a strong state—one that is close to certainty for practical purposes (Clarke 2013; Weatherson 2016; Wedgwood 2012)—there are also weaker notions of belief. On some versions, merely thinking that p can be sufficient for belief (Hawthorne and Stanley 2008; Goodman and Holguín 2022).[32] Belief on these pictures is more clearly compatible with doubt or tempered confidence.

Given this, one way to respond to epistemic worries about partisan beliefs is not to abandon them but rather to moderate them. There are at least two ways to do this. First, one might retain her belief but become less confident in it. Second, one might revise it to a less extreme belief. For example, if she used to believe that the federal minimum wage should be $15 on the basis of deference to co-partisans, perhaps she should instead hold the less extreme view that it should be $12 (Joshi 2020). Alternatively, she might simply reduce her confidence in the original belief, as the first idea suggests. In short, our ethics of political beliefs should make more room for suspension and weak(er) belief. In addition, we might keep in mind that deference comes in degrees (§2), and thus work to make our beliefs *less* deferential.

The idea that we ought to reduce the strength or number of our beliefs raises important questions about the proper relationship between attitudes and action in politics. Philosophers commonly defend strong views about the relationship between at-

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31. Thanks to Alex Worsnip for noting this implication.

32. Of course, there are still further questions about the relationship between full belief and *credence*, or subjective confidence. See Moss (2019) for a particularly illuminating discussion.

titudes and proper action—such as views on which proper action requires knowledge (Hawthorne and Stanley 2008; Fantl and McGrath 2009; Stanley 2005). For these views to be applicable in politics, we need to be able to rely on knowledge *of probabilities* in cases of uncertainty[33]. Moreover, we would want to understand knowledge as compatible with some forms of doubt. As Guerrero has recently emphasized, it is valuable even—and indeed especially—for the revolutionary to harbor doubt (Guerrero 2021a). The epistemic and moral value of doubt underscores "the importance of gathering evidence, conducting small scale experiments to investigate further, remaining open in various ways, and so on" (Guerrero 2021a, 31). He further notes that the costs of inaction must be factored in along with the costs of action.[34] Hence, when and how we should politically act might depend on the appropriate levels of confidence in our beliefs, given both epistemic and moral considerations. These are themes I hope to explore in future work.

One version of Political Minimalism recommends thinking for yourself about a small number of topics. The initial argument against deliberation was first that it's not practicable. But it is practicable to think about a few issues on your own—as long as one does not need to form views about the whole lot. Of course, responsible deliberation will often require deference; we are not Cartesian cogitos. But we can rely on more fine-grained and carefully chosen cues to do so when our attention is directed towards one or a few subjects. Still, I agree that certain ecological conditions often must hold for deliberation to go well, which I return to shortly.

The ideas just sketched pertain to the individual ethics and epistemology of political belief. However, responsible opinion formation should not be burdened entirely on individuals. In a different socio-political environment, partisan deference would face fewer problems.

An important qualification to my arguments against partisan deference is that not all partisans are necessarily subject to it. Rather, the problems with partisan deference arise most strikingly for those for whom partisanship is closer to an emotional attachment rather than issue- or value-based. Those who are particularly at risk at those who are strong, consistent, long-term, and univalent (Lavine et al. 2012; Goren et al. 2009). Partisans who are weaker, more recent, or ambivalent (i.e., less trusting of their own party or less distrusting of out-parties) are less likely to display the normative or epistemic flaws I've outlined. Not all partisans are alike, and hence neither is all partisan deference. This raises the question: how can we reduce the need to rely on affective partisan identity? More generally, how can and improve the conditions for opinion-formation?

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33. Thanks to Allan Hazlett for noting this.

34. More controversially, perhaps we should factor in the costs of inaction such that everyday political belief can meet the evidential threshold for knowledge. Other views allow us to factor in the costs of acting on a false belief. Ilya Somin writes, "precisely because there is so little chance that her vote will have a decisive impact" that "even a modest degree of certainty might be enough to justify forming an opinion and voting on that basis." (Somin 2016, 86).

There are least two institutional ways to address these questions. The first is to advocate implementing political changes aimed at making partisanship less affectively driven. This may involve, among other things, reducing affective polarization via strategies such as empathetic engagement (Hannon 2020), increasing the number of parties,[35] increasing the focus on issues rather than group-identity, (Mendelberg 2002), and implementing desegregation policies to encourage diversity (Anderson 2010; Landemore 2012). Implementing many of these changes also makes group deliberation more reliable, helping us avoid the pitfalls of thinking for oneself mentioned in §2. Of course, some of these changes—specially increasing the number of parties and desegregating—would require broad democratic support and radical institutional changes. Affective polarization is a notoriously difficult problem to tackle, and I certainly do not think we should expect these changes to be implemented anytime soon.

The second option is to think more broadly about how to improve the conditions for responsible opinion formation and deliberation, perhaps to ultimately reduce the reliance on partisan cues. In fact, one way to interpret the concerns with political deference is as providing fodder for alternative political arrangements that reduce the need for parties in the first place.

Indeed, some philosophers have recently defended alternatives to contemporary political arrangements based on familiar epistemic and moral concerns with partisanship. For example, Alex Guerrero has recently advocated for lottocracy in part based on such concerns. In a lottocracy, there would be no parties, no politicians, no elections, and no campaigns (Guerrero 2021b). Rather, the legislative function would be fulfilled by many different single-issue legislatures, each focused on policy area; members of these single-issue legislatures would be chosen by lottery from the relevant political jurisdiction. A lottocratic system further promises to help us better realize the conditions for responsible opinion formation: for example, they are issue-focused, have high circulation of information, and have greater potential to be more diverse. Less democratically, Brennan has advocated for epistocracy—or rule by the most knowledgeable—based in part on concerns about ordinary citizens' ability to form epistemically responsible opinions (Brennan 2012, 2016).

While it is far beyond the scope of this paper to assess these proposals, it is currently unduly difficult for ordinary citizens to satisfy the conditions for responsible opinion formation, especially given current expectations to form so many of them.

6 CONCLUSION

In sum, deference is widely viewed as necessary, given expectations on citizens to form responsible political beliefs about an inexhaustible range of political issues. This raised

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35. Thanks to Kevin Elliott for this suggestion and to pointing me to work by Johnston (2006) in support of it.

the question: deference to whom? A promising answer to this question was that we are permitted to defer to co-partisans; in particular, doing so appeared to be a morally and epistemically responsible way to form one's political beliefs and met two challenges from action-guidance and normative deference. However, there are serious worries about partisan deference. Given this, we should reconsider our expectations and requirements of citizens in a democracy. Perhaps surprisingly, worries about deference may provide support for radical political reforms.

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