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New Challenges for a Normative Theory of Parties and Partisanship

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances normative theorizing about political parties by highlighting concerns arising from recent empirical scholarship on marginal partisanship, affective polarization, and identity convergence. These phenomena challenge the ideal of healthy partisanship as characterized in recent democratic theory, and point toward a new theoretical agenda. I argue that democratic theorists' current focus on the virtues of mature partisanship has obscured essential questions about the scope of partisanship as an ideal and about processes of partisan socialization and mobilization.

KEYWORDS

Democratic theory;
partisanship; political parties

Introduction

Political parties – or more accurately, *partisans* – have enjoyed a recent surge of attention in normative democratic theory. Often framed as defending partisanship against more consensual or individualist ideals of politics, an emerging body of normative theory excavates the constellations of practices, attitudes, and forms of organization commonly labelled as ‘partisan’ to uncover distinctive democratic virtues in the partisan mode of politics, and to construct an ideal model of democratic partisanship. This literature makes a compelling case for the value of partisanship in pluralist democracies: ideal-type partisanship fosters deliberative shaping of political conflicts and helps to cultivate virtuous forms of citizen engagement. This theory of democratic partisanship does not provide a complete empirical description of partisanship as a political phenomenon, nor is it meant to. Rather, it offers a regulative ideal against which existing practices and reform proposals can be evaluated and critiqued.

Empirical realities still inform the development of a regulative ideal of partisanship, though. A *regulative* ideal is an ideal that is meant to be in some way action-guiding. Even if the ideal of partisanship as described by normative democratic theorists will never be fully realized, it is nevertheless intended to help us understand what ‘better partisanship’ looks like and to improve existing forms of party politics in light of that understanding. Constructing and defending a regulative ideal of partisanship, then, requires showing not only that it is conceptually possible to distinguish the democratic virtues of partisanship from its associated vices, but also that this exercise offers guidance for regulating our institutions and practices in accordance with democratic ideals.

Demonstrating the usefulness of a regulative ideal of partisanship calls for empirical analysis to identify common and consequential pathologies of partisanship and to illuminate the psychological, behavioural, and institutional links among various elements of partisanship. Understanding these relationships is necessary for determining whether (and under what conditions) it is possible to mitigate the potential downsides of partisanship without compromising its valuable contributions to democracy.

Recent normative theorists of partisanship have drawn upon this sort of empirical analysis to formulate tests of the quality of normative guidance that a regulative ideal of partisanship can offer. For example, Nancy Rosenblum (2008) and Russell Muirhead (2014) test the ability of a regulative ideal of partisanship to diagnose concerns about partisan extremism and ideological polarization. Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2016) demonstrate how a regulative ideal of partisanship can navigate tensions among the various political and associative obligations that partisans bear.

The regulative ideal of partisanship performs quite well against these tests. Recent empirical scholarship, though, has yielded new insight into the nature and prevalence of a set of partisan phenomena that strain the diagnostic and critical capacities of existing normative theories of partisanship. In this paper, I highlight aspects of three behavioural phenomena – marginal partisanship, affective polarization, and identity convergence – that raise significant questions about existing formulations of the ideal of partisanship, especially regarding the distinction between parties and factions and the role of ideological content in partisan identity and activity. I argue that the challenges of addressing these phenomena with existing formulations of the ideal of partisanship suggests a need to reorient normative democratic theory on the subjects of party and partisanship. This analysis also points to an important set of under-explored empirical questions about how different modes of partisanship interact. Understanding patterns in how citizens take up various aspects of partisanship is crucial for developing a useful ideal of democratic party politics and for evaluating existing party systems and partisan practices.

In Section I of this paper, I describe some common strands within recent normative work seeking to characterize a regulative ideal of partisanship. In Section II, I discuss three significant phenomena related to partisanship that have been well-documented in recent empirical literature on political behaviour, and I demonstrate how each resists adequate diagnosis by existing normative theories of partisanship. In Section III, I briefly outline a research agenda for addressing the challenges raised in this discussion. I argue that advancing a normative theory of political parties and partisanship calls for shifting attention from the regulative ideals of mature partisanship to the relationships between partisanship and other political practices as well as to the processes that produce and shape partisan attitudes and activities.

Section I: A Regulative Ideal of Democratic Partisanship

Scholars of political parties have long argued that parties perform an essential function for modern democracies by defining the political agendas that structure competition and enable meaningful judgment aggregation. In contemporary electoral democracies, parties play a formal role in the agenda-setting process by nominating candidates for office. But parties also ‘simplify alternatives’ (Schattschneider, 1942, p. 50) by linking multiple offices to a common platform or political brand (Aldrich, 2011, pp. 42–48) and

articulating clear narratives of their primary disagreements with opposing parties, thus raising the salience of particular ‘cleavages’, or dimensions of conflict (Lipset & Rokkan, 1990). These agenda-setting functions make political judgment formation cognitively manageable, and they also enable mutually intelligible and productive deliberation among citizens.

One important strand in recent normative work on partisanship links this classic account of parties’ agenda-setting function with a deliberative model of democracy. In *On the Side of Angels*, Nancy Rosenblum (2008) argues that partisans ‘articulate positions, define divisions, and their antagonism is the engine of “trial by discussion”’ (160). Likewise, Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2011) have argued that practices of partisanship contribute to ‘the systematic generation of principled alternatives’, a necessary precondition for deliberative justification (385). Partisanship, according to White and Ypi (2016), also contributes to shaping the background of shared meaning against which justifications can be intelligible (66).

Defending the democratic value of parties or partisanship requires more than demonstrating that they perform an essential function in collective decision-making. It also requires demonstrating that they perform this function in a way that is compatible with democratic principles. Many classic theories of electoral democracy have viewed the democratic credentials of party-driven agenda-setting processes as a by-product of the structural incentives facing elite party leaders (e.g. Schattschneider, 1942, p. 4) By contrast, the more recent accounts coming from within normative democratic theory have located democratic values in the ideal of partisanship that drives deliberative agenda-setting within and among parties.

While there is substantial disagreement among normative democratic theorists on some aspects of the relationship between parties and democracy, there is also substantial consensus on many others, especially in the defence of an ideal of democratic partisanship. The most striking point of agreement within this literature is the choice to emphasize the value of *partisanship*, rather than parties, and to characterize it separately from its connection to the party organization.¹ These defences of partisanship variously describe partisanship as an ‘identity’, (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 319) a ‘practice’, (White & Ypi, 2011, p. 382), or a characteristic attitude or stance (‘party spirit’) (Muirhead, 2006), but all treat ideal-type partisanship as a mode of citizenship that is not limited to an elite political class (Muirhead, 2014, pp. 146–48; Rosenblum, 2008, p. 319, 354; White & Ypi, 2011, pp. 387–88, 2016, pp. 28–31).

At the same time, recent defenders of partisanship also reject the common characterization of ordinary partisans as passive political consumers, analogous to sports fans or brand loyalists. Thus, a second point of agreement in the recent normative literature on partisanship emerges in the ideal of partisanship as a critical, engaged, and active mode of citizenship. Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2011) argue that partisan fora support ‘the socialization of their members into complex political, economic, and legal affairs’ (387), and that engaging in partisan practices helps citizens develop the ‘confidence’ needed to act effectively (388) and the ‘critical awareness’ needed to resist elite manipulation (389). Other defences of partisanship in the same spirit argue that partisans’ participation in intra-party deliberation provides a channel for more widespread influence over the substance of the political agenda (Wolkenstein, 2016a, 2016b). While Nancy Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead do not advance radically participatory ideals of partisanship, they do

describe ideals in which ordinary partisans take responsibility for the work of building comprehensive political visions that can attract broad electoral support, disseminating those visions, and convincing others of their value (Muirhead, 2014, p. 79; Rosenblum, 2008, p. 321).

A third point of agreement within the normative literature on partisanship can be found in the association between partisanship and the democratic value of publicity. Recent normative defences of partisanship have argued that partisanship's democratic virtue arises not simply because it is a distinctively and necessarily collective phenomenon (e.g. White & Ypi, 2016, p. 9), but also because it is oriented toward the mass public. While earlier descriptions of the value of party competition characterized the publicity of partisan appeals as a by-product of structural incentives, the more recent defences of partisanship have identified publicity as virtue that is basic to the ideal of partisanship. As Nancy Rosenblum (2008) puts it, partisans prefer to operate 'not conspiratorially, but in public view' (20).

In Rosenblum's and Muirhead's defences of partisanship, the virtue of publicity appears as a desire on the part of partisans to see their political vision gain widespread electoral support, and to be part of a broad coalition. While they acknowledge that parties' tendency to advance broadly appealing proposals is driven in part by 'strategic or prudential concerns' (Muirhead, 2006, p. 719), Rosenblum and Muirhead both assert that the ideal partisan values widespread support for its own sake. Rosenblum (2008) claims that, even when it is not necessary for electoral victory, partisans 'want the moral ascendancy that comes from earning the approval of "the great body of the people"' (357). The chief virtue of partisanship, according to Muirhead (2006) is that it 'expresses a willingness to make a good faith effort to stand with a group striving for democratic legitimacy' (Muirhead, 2006, p. 719).

Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2016) locate the democratic virtue of publicity in partisanship's characteristic justificatory stance – including the entire public in the constituency to which the partisan aims to justify his or her positions (58–61) – and in the mode of justification that partisans adopt. White and Ypi (2011) argue that practices of partisanship aim to amplify justificatory claims and make them 'cognitively accessible' to the democratic community to which they are addressed (386).

Finally, a fourth point of agreement among recent defences of partisanship can be found in how they distinguish healthy partisanship from corrosive factionalism. Modern democratic theory and political culture treat parties and partisanship as suspect because political divisions raise the spectre of factionalism. Factionalism is the condition in which one group aims to seize power in a society and to exercise that power in their own interest and at the expense of others, compromising the democratic ideals of political equality and self-rule. Appreciating factionalism's threat to democracy, recent defenders of partisanship have consistently emphasized a conceptual distinction between parties and factions and argued that non-factionalism must be central to partisanship as a regulative ideal.²

Recent defenders of partisanship have also been consistent in locating the distinction between partisanship and factionalism in the *content* of the partisan identity and of partisans' justificatory claims. Partisanship exhibits the virtue of non-factionalism insofar as partisans act for the sake of the political community as a whole (Rosenblum, 2008, pp. 356–60; White & Ypi, 2011, p. 382), and in line with 'more or less exact understandings

of the common good' (Muirhead, 2014, p. 19). Drawing on Edmund Burke's classic definition of a political party as aiming to promote 'by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (Burke [1770] 1999, p. 146), democratic theorists have argued that the key distinction between parties and other political groups is that parties aim to advance some conception of the common interest, and partisans make good-faith references to this conception of the common interest in their public discourse. Partisan clashes do not reflect bare conflicts of interest, but rather, disagreements over the common good.³

Section II: Three Challenges for a Normative Ideal of Partisanship

The virtues of partisanship that I reviewed in the previous section form the basis of a regulative ideal that might be used to critique existing practices. Defenders of partisanship do not generally defend the status quo. Rather they defend an approach to democratic reform that strives to preserve and reinforce the distinctive virtues of partisanship. As Russell Muirhead (2014) puts it: 'what politics needs is not less partisanship, but better partisanship' (xii).

Gaining critical purchase on real-world party organizations and practices of partisanship requires that normative theories of partisanship maintain some distance from empirical realities. But, as I argued at the start of this paper, empirical scholarship still has an essential role to play in formulating a useful regulative ideal.

In this section, I discuss a set of partisan phenomena that have recently gained much attention from scholars of political behaviour. Critical scrutiny of these phenomena highlights important limitations of existing formulations of the regulative ideal of partisanship, and, as I argue in the next section, points to fruitful new directions for normative work on party politics.

Marginal Partisans

Nancy Rosenblum (2008) and Russell Muirhead (2014) defend the ideal of partisanship against the competing ideal of independence, which has a certain moral appeal in contemporary society. They also critique an extreme and pathological form of 'hyper' partisanship, characterized by ideological rigidity and unwillingness to compromise.⁴ But these two oppositions, between independent identity and partisan identity, and between ideal-type partisanship and hyper partisanship, obscure the normative significance of particular ways in which ideal-type partisanship can break down into different forms of marginal partisanship.

Most citizens in contemporary democracies do not fit the descriptions that Rosenblum and Muirhead offer for either 'moral purist' independents nor ideal-type partisans, nor even hyper partisans. Many of them are instead what political scientists call 'party-leaners.'⁵ Party-leaners tend to be habitually loyal to a party in their voting habits and patterns of information consumption (Abramowitz, 2014). In these respects, they are so similar to self-identified partisans that they are sometimes considered to be partisans in empirical scholarship. At the same time, these citizens often exhibit distaste for the idea of partisanship and decline to identify with the party (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016). They also refrain from publicly supporting their party and from taking part in internal

deliberations about the party's principles or platforms (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016, pp. 83–106). Rosenblum's and Muirhead's critiques of pathological partisanship do not straightforwardly extend to critiquing the stance of marginal partisans who are neither apolitical independents nor hyperactivists.

Though other normative ideals of partisanship place less emphasis on the distinction between partisanship and independence, they still do not offer adequate resources to critique forms of marginal partisanship. Some defenders of partisanship take care to distinguish between different levels of partisanship, but they typically do so as a way of explicitly excluding the vast majority of party-supporters and especially party-leaners from their analyses. Lise Herman (2017), for example, argues that evaluating the health of a political party system requires looking at the claims of partisan activists, not the broader category of party supporters or party members (748). Though Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2016) do offer a more expansive definition of partisanship that includes the activities of non-members, they describe these non-member partisans as 'activists' and explicitly exclude most of the party's base of electoral support (28).

Theorists of partisanship as an affirmed identity or mode of political activism might argue that the phenomenon I have called marginal partisanship is simply outside the scope of their theory. The norm of including party-leaners in the category of partisans in empirical scholarship need not dictate the boundaries of the normative category that an ideal of partisanship might regulate. There are at least two reasons, though, why a normative theory of partisanship should be sensitive to the nature of marginal partisanship.

First, marginal partisanship may not simply be a generally weaker version of partisanship. Marginal partisans may exhibit distinctive constellations of partisan vices and virtues. Some research, for example, suggests that party-leaners act like strong partisans in regard to the opposing party – even electorally punishing their own party's leaders for compromising with an opposing party (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016, pp. 128–39) – But these same citizens act like independents with regard to their own party, declining to take part in shaping the party's identity or long-term political projects. Other studies similarly show that negative partisanship can operate independently from positive identification with or attachment to a party of one's own (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Mayer, 2017). This work suggests that different breakdowns of the regulative ideal of partisanship may have distinctive normative implications, calling for greater attention from normative political theorists.

Second, it is unlikely that the attitudes and behaviours of activist partisans or party-identifiers are independent of the attitudes and behaviours of marginal partisans. At the very least, they are likely to be influenced by the same features of the political environment, and it is also plausible that they directly affect each other. Both the characterization of the ideal of partisanship and the normative guidance to be gleaned from it depend on an understanding of how partisan activities and the conditions that foster ideal-type partisanship affect those who do not fully embody the ideal.

Affective Polarization

Another partisan phenomenon – what empirical scholars have called 'social' or 'affective' polarization – has recently garnered substantial attention from political behaviourists. The characterization of affective partisanship that has emerged from this scholarship poses a

second set of challenges for existing normative theories of parties. Whereas ideological polarization refers to either increased sorting or extremity in partisans' issue positions, affective polarization refers to increased social distance among different groups of partisans, encompassing increased partisan prejudice, increased emotional reactivity to partisan concerns, and their behavioural consequences (Mason, 2016, p. 17; Iyengar, Leikes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019). While political scientists debate the relative importance of ideological and affective polarization and the causal links between them, a number of studies have demonstrated that affective polarization and ideological polarization are distinct phenomena, with distinct behavioural consequences (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Iyengar, Sood, & Leikes, 2012).

Normative political theorists have not been indifferent to the affective aspects of partisanship as a social identity, nor to their potential pathologies. But, because they closely associate partisan identity with ideological identity – ideal-type partisanship entails commitment to a group with a shared vision of the common good – normative theorists of partisanship have not clearly distinguished concerns about affective polarization from concerns about ideological polarization. Nancy Rosenblum critiques the class of 'hyperactivists' who 'subvert the ethics of partisanship', not because they exhibit high levels of partisan prejudice or emotional reactivity, but because they are 'single-minded in their aims and intractable' (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 387). Russell Muirhead, likewise, in characterizing a 'reasonable' form of partisanship, focuses on resisting the rigidity and epistemic blind spots of ideological polarization (Muirhead, 2014, pp. 99–110).

Affectively polarized partisans are not always ideologically rigid, though. To the extent that affective polarization drives activism, it tends to drive activism for the sake of party victory, rather than a particular issue position. In fact, one of the concerns that political scientists raise about affective polarization is precisely that it leads partisans to be willing to sacrifice substantive policy goals for the sake of a 'win' for the party (Mason, 2016, pp. 53–54; Miller & Conover, 2015).

Affective polarization is not simply a new territory to which existing normative theories of partisanship can be straightforwardly applied. First, affective polarization raises a potential problem for how normative theories have distinguished parties from factions. Defenders of partisanship have celebrated the ways that partisanship operates as a social identity able to motivate political action and sustain commitment to long-term political projects (Muirhead, 2006; Rosenblum, 2008). Existing defences of partisanship's democratic value, though, have rested on a distinction between partisanship and other social identities located in the meaning or content of the identity. What distinguishes partisanship from destructive political factionalism is the good faith commitment of partisans to an inclusive vision of the common good, and to the party labouring on its behalf (e.g. White & Ypi, 2016). The prevalence of affective polarization, though, challenges the adequacy of this content-based distinction between factionalism and healthy partisanship. Empirical scholars have raised alarms about the attitudes and behaviours associated with affective polarization that echo earlier denunciations of partisanship as a form of factionalism (Mason, 2016, pp. 59–60).⁶ Adequately addressing these concerns may require reconceiving the distinction between parties and factions.

A related challenge for the normative theory of partisanship arises from the social consequences of affective polarization. Existing normative accounts have focused on how partisanship ideally functions in traditional political domains. Ideal partisans actively engage

in political persuasion and activism to help advance the party agenda, but are willing to accept policy compromises when appropriate (e.g. Muirhead, 2014, p. 89; 97). Much of the empirical scholarship on affective polarization, though, has highlighted its ‘spillover’ consequences for interpersonal, economic, and civil relations. Affectively polarized partisans display an aversion to social interactions with partisans of different stripes and even discriminate on the basis of partisanship in hiring, purchasing, and benefit-allocation (Iyengar et al., 2019). Some studies of affective polarization have shown that partisan bias can be as strong or even stronger than linguistic, ethnic, or racial bias (Michelitch, 2015; Westwood et al., 2018). These aspects of affective polarization threaten relations of equal respect among citizens, often touted as one of democracy’s chief virtues. The behavioural consequences of affective polarization also threaten democratic institutions that depend on public trust and some degree of democratic fraternity.

Finally, just as marginal partisanship is not simply a weaker form of partisanship, affective polarization may not reflect generally intensified partisan identification and activity. For example, affective polarization in the US appears to be driven disproportionately by an increase in negative attitudes toward the opposition rather than by positive attitudes toward or affinity with one’s own party (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Iyengar et al., 2012). This asymmetry in partisan affect might also disproportionately motivate some types of partisan activity at the expense of others. As I discussed in the previous section, the predominance of negative partisanship can lead to the loyalty of ideal-type partisanship, without the associated responsibility for ensuring that the party remains faithful to its own long-term commitments. Thus, just like marginal partisanship, affective polarization exposes possible constellations of partisan virtues and vices that deserve attention from a normative theory of partisanship.

Partisan Identity and Other Social Identities

The distinction between parties and factions is crucial to the regulative ideal of partisanship. Recent defenders of partisanship acknowledge that partisanship often functions as a social identity, with many of the benefits and pathologies typical of other social identities, including a risk of factionalism. Defenders of partisanship have argued, though, that parties and factions remain conceptually distinct insofar as the partisan identity is constituted around beliefs about the nature of the common good. Healthy, *democratic* partisan conflict represents a clash of beliefs about the common good, rather than a clash of interests among different sub-groups in society. Put another way, partisanship can be distinguished from factionalism insofar as the partisan identity is constructed around beliefs and principles that all members of society could plausibly be persuaded to endorse, and insofar as partisans make a good faith effort to address their messages to all sectors of society.

The complex causal relationship between partisan identity and other social identities puts pressure on this vision of the non-factional character of partisanship, though. Normative theorists of partisanship acknowledge that parties often form explicitly around ethnic, linguistic, religious, or other social identities, but they criticize such parties as deviations from an inclusive ideal of partisanship (E.g. Rosenblum, 2008, pp. 356–58; White & Ypi, 2016, p. 13). Social identities can affect the formation and operation of partisanship in ways that are more difficult to identify, though, and more complicated to diagnose.

Even where the content of partisan rhetoric or party platforms does not explicitly invoke social identities, stereotypical associations between parties and other social groups may play a significant role in driving partisan identification and other partisan attitudes (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Huddy & Bankert, 2017). For example, recent scholarship has demonstrated that racial and regional identity remain important drivers of partisanship – especially negative partisanship – in the United States, to an extent that cannot be fully explained by individuals’ substantive political opinions (Achen & Bartels, 2016, pp. 246–58; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Mangum, 2013; Mason, 2016, pp. 32–33).

Casual links between social identity and partisanship may be pathological even when they do not manifest in exclusionary rhetoric. This is most clear when these causal links result in socially sorted parties. When partisanship is highly correlated with other social identities, partisan identity does not necessarily substitute for other identities or make them less politically salient. In fact, partisanship can bind together multiple social identities to make them even more important to individuals (Mason, 2016; Mason & Wronski, 2018), even when partisan identity is consciously understood in ideological terms (Mason, 2018). Many scholars have also pointed to social sorting of parties as a driver of affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2016), heightening the concerns I raised in the previous section.

Even in the absence of socially sorted parties or dominant partisan stereotypes, though, causal links between social identity and partisan identity or partisan activity may remain and may pose challenges to the standard theoretical distinction between parties and factions. First, even if partisanship is immediately driven by beliefs about the common good, these beliefs themselves likely reflect the holder’s social position and community norms, both of which are related to social identity and group membership. Second, the strategies party leaders use to mobilize partisan identity and affect into partisan activity often leverage social networks, which may be formed around other identities or social positions such as religion, ethnicity, or occupation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; See also Campbell, 2013). The causal links between social identity and partisan activity matter for a normative theory of parties, especially if the group contexts within which people engage in partisan activity affect the character and meaning of their partisan identities.

This body of research appears to present normative theorists of partisanship with a dilemma. Theorists might maintain a standard of non-factionalism that only governs the *content* of partisan commitments and rhetoric. In this horn of the dilemma, so long as partisanship is based in beliefs about the common good and manifests in good-faith appeals to the common good, it avoids the pitfalls of factionalism. This approach leaves the regulative ideal of partisanship undesirably toothless, though, without the resources to interrogate the processes by which partisans form their beliefs about the common good or their commitments to particular political values or projects. It also leaves the normative theory of partisanship without the resources to diagnose socially sorted parties, or mobilization strategies that target particular social groups.

The second horn of the dilemma takes the opposite approach, expanding the ideal of non-factionalism to reject not only explicit appeals to sectional interests, but also causal links between sectional social identity and partisanship. This approach risks being overly demanding, though. First, links between social identity and partisanship play an important role in enabling groups of citizens to politicize their legitimate concerns (Huddy, 2018). Second, causal links between partisanship and other social identities

may be practically necessary to produce the virtues of partisanship. Partisan identification supplies citizens with a sense of purpose and motivation to act. Communities of co-partisans supply social rewards for partisan activism. Together, these products of partisanship help to overcome collective action problems and allow partisans to act together for common purpose. These are among partisanship's benefits to democracy (White & Ypi, 2016, p. 9). It is not clear that we can eliminate the links between partisanship and other social identities without generally undermining partisanship's contribution to enabling collective action.

These difficulties with specifying a workable distinction between parties and factions (or between partisanship and factionalism) suggest that the most fruitful directions for advancing a normative theory of political parties might reconceptualize the ideal of non-factionalism in a way that does not rest on such a distinction. An ideal of non-factionalism might be reformulated, instead, to characterize party systems that mitigate various normative concerns related to factionalism. Characterizing non-factionalism at the level of the party system calls for an understanding of how systems produce and shape the forms of partisanship that emerge, a key theme across the questions that I raise in the next section.

Section III: Advancing the Normative Theory of Political Parties

In this section, I discuss three broad questions that arise from the preceding discussion of the challenges to normative theories of partisanship emerging from recent scholarship on political behaviour. Adequately addressing these questions requires more than an application or extension of existing theories; it requires a substantial shift in focus. Where existing normative work on partisanship has focused on the functions and normative features of mature partisanship, the questions that I discuss here invite attention to the processes that produce and direct partisan attitudes and practices. Taken together, these questions constitute a research agenda for democratic theorists focusing on the link between partisanship and party, and the relationship among various forms or aspects of partisanship within a democratic political system.

What is the Scope of Partisanship as a Regulative Ideal?

Perhaps the most immediate question that defenders of partisanship need to address is this: should all citizens be partisans? Recent normative theory has focused on refuting the idea that partisanship has no democratic value, and consequently, have neglected the question of partisanship's ideal scope. But understanding whether partisanship serves as a regulative ideal for all citizens is essential for understanding how we ought to respond to phenomena like marginal partisanship. Does a full understanding of partisanship's place in a healthy democratic practice include some role for marginal partisanship? If so, how should we understand the regulative ideals of that role? And how should we understand the appropriate relationships among marginal partisans, core partisans, and party organizations? If, on the other hand, marginal partisanship is best understood as a pathological political disposition, should we view it as a failure mode of partisanship, or of independence?

It seems implausible that a thriving democratic practice requires only a single mode of citizenship that can be characterized under a unified ideal of partisanship. It is far more

likely that democracy requires interactions among citizens occupying different roles – or performing different modes of citizenship – only some of which can be characterized as partisan. Keeping this in view, though, means more closely scrutinizing how the structural interactions between partisans and non-partisans (and possibly marginal partisans) bear on the ideals that govern each variety of citizenship. If there is to be a division of political labour between partisans and non-partisans, what is the ideal distribution of these forms of citizenship in a democratic society? And should we understand these different forms of citizenship as roles or identities occupied by distinct individuals? Or should we instead, perhaps, envision a comprehensive ideal of citizenship that incorporates a variety of partisan and non-partisan political practices?

Exploring the scope of the regulative ideal of partisanship invites closer scrutiny of various constellations of partisan attitudes and activities, to better understand how they are related and consistent patterns in how they come apart. Characterizing the role of ideal-type partisanship in relation to other modes of democratic citizenship also invites further attention to the side effects of partisan activities and of the socialization and mobilization processes that engender partisan attitudes and partisan practices

What Regulative Ideals of Party or Partisanship Govern the Socialization of Partisans?

Existing normative accounts of democratic partisanship largely examine the virtues of partisanship as a mature political identity or active practice. They give little attention to the processes by which citizens are socialized into partisan identities or mobilized into partisan activity. But these processes raise a set of important questions on which a regulative ideal of partisanship ought to provide normative guidance: what does cultivating the virtues of ideal-type partisanship require of a democratic society, and who bears responsibility for it? How do processes of partisan socialization affect relationships among citizens, within party organizations or partisan groups, or across party divides? Most importantly, perhaps, does the democratic value of partisan attitudes and behaviours depend on the nature of the processes that produce them?

Partisan socialization highlights an important tension in the regulative ideal of partisanship. Partisanship entails commitment to a political group – a disposition to work together with others and to sustain long term collective projects. At the same time, partisanship – at least democratic partisanship – entails a set of political goals with distinctive content, i.e. concern for the common good. These two aspects of partisanship, though, may arise from different – and competing – socialization processes. Emphasis on the content of partisan goals would seem to favour a socialization process in which partisanship emerges from political experience with how parties promote particular political goals or values. On the other hand, emphasis on the group commitment needed to sustain ambitious political projects would seem to favour a socialization process that occurs early in life, and that primarily involves the strengthening of affinity for the party label and those who bear it. Empirical scholarship on partisanship has largely treated these as competing models of the nature and origin of partisanship (e.g. Huddy & Bankert, 2017; Kroh & Selb, 2009). Both forms of partisan socialization may occur, especially in different contexts, but they do stand in theoretical (and perhaps practical) tension. If a normative theory of parties and partisanship is to reconcile the group-

oriented and content-oriented aspects of partisanship, or at least to characterize an appropriate balance between them, the nature of partisan socialization will need to occupy a more central role in the theory.

A second set of normative concerns about the processes of partisan socialization highlight the role of power and vulnerability in these processes. First, how should we think about the normative status of tactics that parties can adopt to promote partisan socialization, such as maintaining youth organizations, employing political theatre to evoke partisan affect, or even disseminating misleading images of opposing parties? Second, how should we think about the role of party 'elites' or other powerful agents in these processes? What does political equality require when it comes to influence over the meaning of partisan identities? More generally, should we be concerned about the vulnerability of people in adolescence (when significant partisan socialization may occur (Kroh & Selb, 2009; Sapiro, 2004, pp. 13–14))? Normative theorists of partisanship have resisted elitist characterizations of party politics in which ordinary partisanship amounts to mere brand loyalty. They have argued instead that ideal-type partisanship promotes active and critical modes of citizenship. But normative democratic theorists have yet to examine how political power operates in shaping the norms of partisanship and in determining who is socialized into them. The concerns about marginal partisanship and affective polarization that I discussed in section II raise additional questions about the operation of power in socialization processes, since these processes shape the kind of partisanship that they produce.

Finally, closer scrutiny of partisan socialization processes is essential to fully characterizing how the ideal of non-factionalism can apply to parties and partisanship. As I argued in section II, empirical literature on the links between social and partisan identity formation points to a potentially fundamental problem with existing formulations of the ideal of partisanship as conceptually and functionally distinct from factionalism. At the same time, though, more engagement with empirical work on how political culture and institutions can affect socialization processes (Kroh & Selb, 2009; Sapiro, 2004) may also yield new theoretical resources for reconceiving the ideal of non-factionalism, perhaps as a virtue of party systems, if not of individual parties.

What Regulative Ideals of Party or Partisanship Govern the Mobilization of Partisans?

While partisan socialization refers to the processes that inculcate partisan attitudes (including partisan identification), partisan mobilization refers to the processes that lead citizens to translate those attitudes into political action. These two processes are related but distinct; partisan attitudes do not automatically translate into partisan activism. Thus, while the concerns regarding partisan mobilization parallel the concerns I have just raised about partisan socialization, they also reflect a distinct set of normative considerations related to political action and to common patterns in partisan mobilization.

The tension between the group-orientation and the content-orientation of partisan commitment seen in partisan socialization arises in partisan mobilization as well. Group-oriented and content-oriented aspects of partisanship can motivate political action independently of each other, and mobilization processes can draw upon either or both. More importantly, these two aspects of partisanship may well motivate different *kinds* of partisan activities. The group-orientation of partisanship might be expected to

facilitate mobilization in contexts of interparty competition, but it is less clear whether it also facilitates mobilization in intraparty politics. Both kinds of activity, though, are crucial to an ideal of partisanship as an active form of citizenship that entails taking responsibility for building efficacious political coalitions, and promoting and protecting particular political projects.

Partisan mobilization processes also raise a distinct set of questions about the operation of power in party politics. Partisan mobilization efforts typically target adults, so mobilization processes do not raise the same kinds of concerns as socialization processes about the vulnerability of those they influence. At the same time, though, party agents exercise more direct and intentional control over mobilization efforts, strategically targeting groups of citizens for mobilization into particular activities (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Thus, concerns about an unequal distribution of power among partisans may be more pressing where party elites exercise substantial control over the nature and locus of partisan activity by controlling the deployment of the party's mobilization resources. Partisan mobilization strategies can also raise general concerns about political equality, as they may reinforce disparities in participation and political resources (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, p. 238; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012, p. 310).

Finally, partisan mobilization processes raise a set of concerns about the distinction between partisanship and factionalism similar to those raised by partisan socialization processes. Parties can use their mobilization resources most effectively when they build on existing social ties and organizational resources in related parts of civil society. Mobilization efforts that leverage membership in or connections to institutions like churches, universities, and labour unions can enable partisans to mobilize a broader swath of citizens and also facilitate politicization of their concerns. At the same time, though, these links between parties and organizations associated with particular social groups undoubtedly affect the composition of parties and the meaning of partisan identity in ways that put pressure on the distinction between parties and factions.

Addressing these questions regarding the scope of partisanship as an ideal mode of citizenship and how that ideal bears on partisan socialization and mobilization calls for greater integration of normative work on partisanship, parties, and party systems. A variety of studies have shown that the structure of electoral systems affects not only the number and kinds of parties that emerge and how they operate in government, but also the forms of partisanship that develop. Electoral systems shape parties' incentives to pursue different mobilization strategies (Cox, 2015). Electoral systems also affect socialization into partisan attitudes, especially when it comes to the relationship between partisanship and ideology (Huddy, Bankert, & Davies, 2018; Sapiro, 2004). Electoral systems even affect the development of affective polarization, as coalition politics may play a role in mitigating negative attitudes toward out-partisans (Westwood et al., 2018). Tying normative theories of partisanship more closely to democratic theory on representation and governing institutions promises a more holistic approach to evaluating and reforming party systems.

Conclusion

By focusing sustained attention on the democratic functions of parties and partisanship (and on some of their common failure modes), theorists of a regulative ideal of partisanship have taken an important step in bridging the gap between normative democratic

theory and empirical scholarship on electoral democracy. Further development of a normative theory of parties and partisanship, though, depends on further engagement with recent developments in empirical scholarship on political behaviour. As I have argued in this paper, emerging literatures on marginal partisanship, affective polarization, and the relationships between partisanship and other social identities do not just point to new applications for existing normative theories of partisanship. They also raise fundamental challenges to common formulations of the regulative ideal of partisanship and point to new directions for normative scholarship on the relationships between parties and partisans, and between partisanship and other democratic practices.

While this paper has focused on ways that normative democratic theory can benefit from closer attention to empirical scholarship, the reverse is, of course, also true. The questions for a normative theory of partisanship that I have raised in this paper also point to important research areas that remain under-explored in empirical scholarship. One such area involves the relationship between participating in intra-party partisan activity and participating in outward facing partisan activity. Another involves the relationships among citizens who exhibit different types or degrees of partisanship. Characterizing the appropriate normative standards for evaluating party politics and the systems that shape them depends on a better understanding of the relationship between different aspects or modes of partisanship. And as the normative theory of parties and partisanship develops, we can hope for further refinement of these and other questions for empirical scholarship.

Notes

1. Two of the most prominent defences of partisanship explicitly distinguish their analysis of partisanship from official party agents, or the party organization (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 360; White & Ypi, 2011, p. 382, 2016, p. 28).
2. Terrence Ball has also argued that the development of a conceptual distinction between parties and factions enabled a positive view of parties in democratic theory and practice in nascent modern republics (Ball, 1989, pp. 166–69).
3. Several recent normative theories of partisanship have even identified non-factional partisanship with the deliberative exchange of public reasons (See, e.g. Bonotti, 2017; Herman, 2017; Wolkenstein, 2016a).
4. Muirhead (2014) dubs these pathological partisans ‘zealots’ (49). Rosenblum (2008) criticizes ‘hyperactivists’ or ‘party purists’ who fail to exhibit the virtues of partisanship as much as independents, but ‘instead of circumventing parties, they set out to capture them.’ (387).
5. Though the characterization of ‘party-leaners’ comes primarily from research on partisanship in the US, similar concerns about the behavioural consequences of marginal partisanship may arise from the broad decline in party membership and partisan identification in Europe (see, e.g. Dalton, 2002; Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012).
6. Mason explicitly invokes George Washington’s concerns about parties creating factionalism in her work on the consequences of socially sorted parties.

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