

# Partisanship, Polarization, and Political Identity

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## Abstract

This dissertation develops a normative account of partisanship sensitive to the challenges of polarization in contemporary democracies. I join recent theorists in defending the value of partisanship for democratic politics, but I do so in a different way. The first part of the project argues that many recent accounts objectionably idealize from elements of real-world partisanship, and that, consequently, their normative prescriptions are silent on the most pressing problems in real-world democracies (Chapter 1). Injecting a dose of methodological self-consciousness into the new partisanship literature, I defend an alternative idealization strategy. Chapter 2 proposes a richer account of political contestation, theorizing partisanship as a distinctive form of *identity*. But, drawing on work on the politics of difference, I assuage worries that such a view necessarily impinges on agency or promotes zero-sum conflict. I show how a particular kind of partisan identity could, in fact, support political agency, while lending philosophical heft to the intuition that something goes wrong when politics and social life collapse together.

The dissertation's second part further explores the normative implications of this view. I turn, in Chapter 3, to the intra-party relationship. I show how, given certain qualifications, parties can combat political alienation by inculcating the democratic virtues of solidarity and belonging while avoiding charges of exclusion that have long followed defenses of such virtues. Chapter 4 considers the relationship across party lines and asks what citizens of diverse, divided democracies must share. I show how my view of partisan identity makes available an attractive account of political cohesion for divided societies. I premise citizenship not on shared *identity* or shared *beliefs*, but on shared *action* among politically interdependent citizens – action of which partisanship is a principal form.

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# Introduction

## **1. Context and Motivation**

Few topics loom as large in writing about contemporary democracy – in social science scholarship and public commentary alike – as that of polarization. In the United States particularly, though not only there, anxiety over "political tribalism" abounds, as the citizenry seems divided between hostile opposing camps – most clearly across party lines.<sup>1</sup> Partisan division threatens all notions of political unity or community, of a common people standing united. We are awash with the rhetoric of division – of uncivil wars, of things falling apart, of centers not holding.<sup>2</sup> We should be "Americans, not partisans," and set our partisanship aside to focus on what we have in common.<sup>3</sup>

Nor are the rising levels of inter-partisan antipathy, distrust, and hatred confined to politics. Political division increasingly plays an outsized role in ostensibly non-political spheres, shaping citizen interactions in social life and transforming the role politics plays in our lives.<sup>4</sup> Many worry that a new politics of identity now elevates the expressive, symbolic dimensions to

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<sup>1</sup> James Campbell, *Polarized: Making Sense of a Divided America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Yphtach Lelkes, "Mass Polarization: Manifestations and Measurements," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2016): 392–410; Shanto Iyengar and Masha Krupenkin, "The Strengthening of Partisan Affect," *Political Psychology* 39, no. S1 (2018): 201–18; Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019); Geoffrey C. Layman, Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences," *Annual Review of Political Science* 9, no. 1 (May 15, 2006): 83–110; Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (July 1, 2015): 690–707; Christopher Hare and Keith T. Poole, "The Polarization of Contemporary American Politics," *Polity* 46, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 411–29.

<sup>2</sup> President Joseph R. Biden said during his inaugural address that "We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal." Joseph R. Biden, "Inaugural Address," 20 January 2021. The latter two lines come from W. B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919), which Arthur Schlesinger noted while introducing the 50-year anniversary edition of his classic had already, by the late 1990s, become clichéd. This observation is even more apt today. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew S. Levendusky, "Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (October 2017): 59–70.

<sup>4</sup> Richard M. Shafranek, "Political Considerations in Nonpolitical Decisions: A Conjoint Analysis of Roommate Choice," *Political Behavior*, June 2019, 1–30; Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Richard M. Shafranek, "Political Consequences of Partisan Prejudice," *Political Psychology* 41, no. 1 (2020): 35–51; Shanto Iyengar, Tobias Konitzer, and Kent Tedin, "The Home as a Political Fortress: Family Agreement in an Era of Polarization," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (September 6, 2018): 1326–38.

public life over the reasonable argumentation in which healthy democratic discourse consists.<sup>5</sup> The culture wars have reached new heights, imbuing relations of all sorts with an us-versus-them logic and rendering compromise impossible. A vast literature in political science and psychology echoes public concern that polarized partisanship has become the site of the collapse of politics into social life.<sup>6</sup> When everything feels political, and politics is polarized, then everything else feels polarized, too.

The latter set of concerns are mirrored across the Atlantic, if in different ways. In many European democracies, where the party landscape is increasingly fragmented, the worry is less the all-consuming nature of partisan identity than its retrenchment. Declining rates of partisan affiliation are viewed as symptoms of political disengagement and alienation, as well as of general distrust in democratic institutions (– the latter in the US as well).<sup>7</sup> Populist movements have upended the traditional lines of party competition in many countries, contributing to a realignment of the political space along an open-versus-closed cultural dimension – fueling the worry that, again, identity is playing an objectionable role in democratic discourse.<sup>8</sup>

So, political partisanship has today emerged as a central locus of concern, a place where two grave democratic anxieties overlap. Parties divide the citizenry. And partisanship channels a debased form of attachment between citizen and politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Popp and Thomas J. Rudolph, “A Tale of Two Ideologies: Explaining Public Support for Economic Interventions,” *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 808–20; Christopher D. Johnston, Howard G. Lavine, and Christopher M. Federico, *Open versus Closed: Personality, Identity, and the Politics of Redistribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Christopher Claassen, Patrick Tucker, and Steven Smith, “Ideological Labels in America,” *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015); Leonie Huddy, Lilliana Mason, and Lene Aarøe, “Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 1–17.

<sup>6</sup> Lilliana Mason, “Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization,” *The Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 47–66; Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, “Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2012): 405–31; Leonie Huddy, Alexa Bankert, and Caitlin Davies, “Expressive Versus Instrumental Partisanship in Multiparty European Systems,” *Political Psychology* 39 (February 2, 2018): 173–99; John T. Jost, Alison Ledgerwood, and Curtis D. Hardin, “Shared Reality, System Justification, and the Relational Basis of Ideological Beliefs,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 171–86; Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Piero Ignazi, *Party and Democracy: The Uneven Road to Party Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (New York: Verso Books, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Stijn van Kessel, *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

But perhaps partisanship's woes need not be so worrying for defenders of liberal democracy. Even if it is true that parties are becoming more polarized, or weaker, why should we worry? Perhaps partisanship's crisis is democracy's opportunity: a chance to diminish an institution that even in the best of times is widely perceived to obstruct fact-based, rational discourse and frustrate the pragmatic desire to "get things done."

The answer is that parties are fundamental. Democratic politics, in every representative democracy in the modern age, is deeply partisan – current fluctuations notwithstanding. Parties perform crucial tasks, such as organizing the boundaries of political competition<sup>9</sup>, solving collective action problems within governments<sup>10</sup>, facilitating voter choice<sup>11</sup>, "linking" citizens to government<sup>12</sup>, and much more.<sup>13</sup> As one influential political scientist famously put it, "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties."<sup>14</sup> There is nothing like parties, and so the extensive body of empirical scholarship documenting their alteration or delegitimation signals a broader democratic crisis.

Yet despite their status as the sine qua non of representative governance and their prominence in public debates about democracy's dilemmas, parties had been curiously absent from the vast majority of normative political theory until quite recently. Participants in many influential debates – including those on deliberation, political liberalism, and national identity – have either cast partisanship in the role of foil or ignored it entirely when constructing ethics of democratic citizenship. Parties frustrate genial visions of civic bonhomie, of striving for the common good with fellow citizens committed to rational deliberation.<sup>15</sup> Even theorists who

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<sup>9</sup> Sara B. Hobolt and Catherine E. de Vries, "Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition," *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 9 (August 2015): 1159–85.

<sup>10</sup> Gary W. Cox, William B. Heller, and Matthew D. McCubbins, "Agenda Power in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1988–2000," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2008): 171–98.

<sup>11</sup> Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> See, generally, John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1942), 1.

<sup>15</sup> For the most comprehensive survey of anti-partisanship in modern and contemporary political thought, see Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Parts I and II.

afford significant role for discourse and participation on the basis of identity, and so relax the privileging of rational deliberation in a way that might seem friendly to partisanship, either focus exclusively on social identities such as race and gender or worry that parties' inherently zero-sum nature represents a usage illegitimate from a democratic point of view.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the field's tendency toward abstraction and idealization has resulted in theories of democracy and of justice so removed from political reality that phenomena such as partisanship disappear from the picture altogether. For these and other reasons, political theorists have largely avoided the topic when probing the normative dimensions of democracy.

It has therefore been particularly welcome that, in recent years, a growing group of democratic theorists has begun remedying this neglect with attention to partisanship. These theorists argue that political parties and partisanship have an essential role to play in normative theories of democracy. Their accounts connect the practice of partisanship to various principles of political morality, and their arguments are that, when partisanship conforms to certain specified norms, it furthers these virtues.

In this dissertation, I lend my voice to this resurgence of theoretical interest in partisanship. I do so, however, in a different way. I develop a normative theory of partisanship that responds to the twin challenges of contemporary polarization: its transformation of the ways in which citizens relate to politics and its disfigurement of the ways in which they relate to one another. In so doing, I diverge from some fundamental assumptions of this new literature. Before specifying in more detail the nature of my intervention, it will be helpful to first outline in broad strokes my response to the political context outlined above.

Much of the public concern surrounding polarization tracks concern about the new politics of identity – the perceived tendency to frame public debate around who we are rather than what we think. This invites contentiousness and prevents citizens from accurately assessing

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the issues – especially when the identity at stake is *partisan* identity. Politics would be far more productive and humane, the popular wisdom holds, if partisanship operated less like an identity and more like principled belief held loosely. Citizens should aim to achieve a reasoned relation to the political sphere, with analysis of the issues displacing distorting group allegiances, rather than let partisanship become shorthand for a distinctive mode of being, an all-consuming way of life.<sup>17</sup> The solution to democracy's crisis, much popular wisdom holds, is citizens who are more reasonable, more open-minded, more discerning – and yet also more engaged.<sup>18</sup>

This response is understandable, and I agree that something goes wrong when citizens view politics through the prism of partisanship as a stage for performing a quasi-aesthetic or largely symbolic individualism. But the desire for a purely rational, identity-less politics is, I will argue, a profound error. It rests on a mistaken understanding of the nature of political disagreement and of the preconditions for much political participation. Critics of deep-seated partisan identity neglect the fact that partisan identity can take different forms, and so miss the possibility that some forms may be democracy-promoting rather than democracy-hindering – and to be so precisely in virtue of their being an identity. The first half of this dissertation, then, insists on both the inevitability of a degree of identitarian connection to the state through the mechanism of party and the diversity of such forms of connection. I aim to vindicate the beneficial possibilities of a certain form of partisan identity, while lending philosophical heft to the intuition that something does indeed go wrong when politics and social life collapse together under conditions of polarization.

Conceptual confusion also clouds our thinking on the second great danger of polarization, the rise of inter-partisan hostility. In our anxiety over social and political division

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<sup>17</sup> Advocacy of this sort of political rationalism is frequently indistinguishable from advocacy of a politics without partisanship altogether. See Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 35-40.

<sup>18</sup> Robert B. Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Think Again: How to Reason and Argue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes*, Reprint edition (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

and widespread desire to cooperate across boundaries, we have not given sufficient attention to the target of our aspirations. We have not paused in any sustained manner, that is, to ask what the *opposite* of polarization could be – what "unity" might mean beyond an inaugural slogan (or a cynical means of suppressing disagreement and berating opponents<sup>19</sup>). The second half of this dissertation offers such an analysis of the citizen bond in contemporary, diverse democracies. I premise citizen cohesion on a vision of shared action focused not on what citizens believe or who they are, but on what they *do* together. I argue that removing partisanship from our ethics of citizenship eliminates an especially visible form of such action. This conception constitutes an unabashedly ambitious theory of participation – and a call to recommit to the democratic project. And so, while I join the chorus of commentators worried about polarization's effects on the political community, I argue that their conspicuously nonpartisan solutions neglect the insight that politics – including partisan politics – has a role to play in enacting the most plausible and attractive vision of political unity.

Let me offer a brief note on the scope of this project. Delivering a sufficiently rigorous investigation of the trends identified above demands a careful and sustained focus on the problematics of partisanship in a relatively narrow band of cases: the United States, first and foremost; secondarily, the United Kingdom; and all other advanced liberal democracies, thirdly. The challenges of polarization seem to develop most acutely in polities with majoritarian, first-past-the-post electoral rules, with their inevitable two-party systems.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, my principal objects of analysis will be well-established parties that command significant support across their citizenry, plausibly seek the reins of political office, and cultivate deep and enduring forms of partisan identity. (Defining the dimensions of partisan identity is a core aim of the first

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<sup>19</sup> In this way, the desire to transcend polarization plays a role similar to talk of civility, dressing up a means of scoring political points in "concern" for the common good. See Teresa Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, "A Simpleton's Sketch of Politics in the Knowledge Society and the Role of Populist Radical Right and Left" (Workshop on Radicalism and Realignment, Duke University, 2018). Further justification for the American focus stems from the fact that its forms of partisanship and polarization are the most well-studied empirically – a fact useful for my project, since I develop my arguments in close consultation with the current state of the relevant empirical literatures.

two chapters.) I am less concerned with parties developed around cults of personality (e.g., Italy's Five Star Movement); "movement" parties focused on a relatively narrow subset of issues (e.g., the United Kingdom Independence Party); parties lacking substantial support outside the highest offices (La République en Marche); or parties that in other ways move along the spectrum to transient or specialized interest groups, advocacy organizations, or civil society groups. Or, at least, I am concerned with these latter types of party insofar as they manifest features similar to traditional, broad-based parties. And there are many similarities, which is to say that despite my Anglo-American focus, much of my inquiry generalizes to concerns in other democracies. This is not least the case because partisan identity politics and affective polarization – especially, as mentioned, within populist partisan movements – are on the rise in other democracies as well.<sup>21</sup> This remains a work of normative political theory, not place-bound institutional analysis; my ultimate aim is to address what it means for citizens to be connected to politics, and to each other – concerns which lie at the center of the theoretical study of (all) liberal democracies.

## **2. Situating the Partisanship Literature**

I develop my account of partisanship through fairly detailed dialogue with recent theorists of partisanship. I also devote a perhaps unusual degree of attention to adjacent literatures to help contextualize and evaluate the strands of argumentation in this still new area of democratic theory. Despite the exegesis in later chapters, though, it is still worth giving an overview here of the state of the literature and the areas it has not yet explored.

In the recent resurgence of theoretical interest surrounding partisanship, we can discern two broad strategies for defending its value for democratic politics. The first defends partisanship for its role in supporting the liberal ideal of political justification through public

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<sup>21</sup> Jennifer McCoy, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer, "Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (March 2018): 16–42; Dan Slater and Aries A. Arugay, "Polarizing Figures: Executive Power and Institutional Conflict in Asian Democracies," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 92–106; Sean J. Westwood et al., "The Tie That Divides: Cross-National Evidence of the Primacy of Partyism," *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (2018): 333–54.

reason.<sup>22</sup> This strategy is situated within, and derives much of its plausibility from, public reason liberalism, the influential set of positions stemming from the work of John Rawls concerned with securing state legitimacy in the face of moral pluralism. Theorists in this vein understand the central challenge of modern states in justificatory terms: given ubiquitous and persistent disagreement over fundamental questions of meaning and value (the good), citizens must nevertheless converge on a mode of discourse supportive of common concerns of justice (the right).<sup>23</sup> Restricting political discourse to concerns of the latter sort is necessary for ensuring that coercive state power is adequately justified. It is this process to which parties are meant to contribute. Jonathan White & Lea Ypi and Matteo Bonotti view parties as carriers of principled moral claims of right that exert a felicitous disciplining effect on the types of reasons citizens contribute to public discourse. At the core of partisanship is, therefore, a commitment to offering generalizable moral claims – public reasons – rather than justifying political positions on the basis of sectoral or "factional" forms of reasoning. I call this the Moral Partisanship view.

On this view, the contribution of partisanship to democratic life lies in its tendency to broaden citizens' reasoning capacity in line with political liberalism's aspiration for the formulation of law and policy to proceed in terms of justifications that no citizen, suitably idealized, could reject. As in most of the public reason liberalism literature, however, the idea of citizens being "suitably idealized" does significant work in Moral Partisanship. The cogency of the argument from public justification to partisanship depends on some quite strict assumptions about the nature and purpose of parties. More specifically, partisan competition is conceived as a reason-giving argumentative domain, and partisanship is understood as, primarily, "a vehicle for

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<sup>22</sup> The principal statements here are those of Matteo Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). There are of course important differences between these two accounts, which I explore in Chapter 1, but for much of my purposes their shared commitment to partisanship as an instrument of political justification is more important.

<sup>23</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). I discuss the nature and grounding of political liberalism and its relation to this defense of partisanship in some detail in Chapter 1.

channeling public justification."<sup>24</sup> These assumptions allow White & Ypi and Bonotti to build the demands of public reason into their normative understanding of partisanship at the conceptual level. By arguing that "partisanship itself...embodies an *intrinsic* commitment to public reason,"<sup>25</sup> and that "partisanship and political justification seem essentially intertwined,"<sup>26</sup> Moral Partisanship stakes its claim on a highly rational vision of politics.<sup>27</sup> One may wonder, though, what purchase it has over the identity-ridden politics of partisan polarization described at the outset. What is lost on these accounts is any attention to the senses in which partisanship is an identity. Moral Partisanship is, of course, a normative thesis, not a descriptive one, and so its idealization does not necessarily sacrifice its ability to evaluate degraded forms of partisanship. Still, the relationship between partisanship as moral claim and partisanship as identity, and how it bears on the role partisanship might play in a normative theory of democracy, remains underexplored.

The second broad strategy – or, more accurately, set of strategies – for defending the normative value of partisanship is less tightly connected to an external political theoretical ideal. It consists of a number of normative arguments that can be helpfully seen together to value parties for their role in promoting or protecting political pluralism. These include partisanship's role in delineating the lines of political contestation, legitimating the parties to this contestation, and rendering it "decisive" for effective governance. So Nancy Rosenblum, whose 2008 book was arguably the first systematic, direct treatment of partisanship by a normative theorist in 40 years, defends partisanship for its "creative" role in rendering the issue space intelligible: "Parties

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<sup>24</sup> White and Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 108; emphasis in original.

<sup>26</sup> White and Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Although Fabio Wolkenstein's party scholarship is not as explicitly tied to the public-reason paradigm, his emphasis on partisan deliberation shares much of the spirit of these rational approaches to the subject. See, e.g., Fabio Wolkenstein, "A Deliberative Model of Intra-Party Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2016): 297–320; Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Fabio Wolkenstein, "The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 97–109; Fabio Wolkenstein, *Rethinking Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

create, not just reflect, political interests and opinions."<sup>28</sup> Parties also enact a commitment to pluralism, Rosenblum thinks, when they encourage respect for political opponents under a norm of "regulated rivalry."<sup>29</sup> respecting our fellow citizens as free and equal entails respecting their equal right to contest power, and a corollary respect for the limited nature of any political power one happens to hold. At its best, then, partisanship inculcates a kind of ontological humility, a feeling of partiality vis-à-vis the democratic whole, and "entails commitment to the provisional nature of political authority."<sup>30</sup>

Rosenblum's defense of partisanship is thus centrally concerned with legitimacy, but not the legitimacy at the heart of the political-liberal project of public justification. As such, she declines to build public reason constraints into her account.<sup>31</sup> Neither does Russell Muirhead. And he is even more explicit that the partisanship he defends has significant non-rational components; party affiliation is never a strictly "intellectual" activity or "a matter of sober calculation."<sup>32</sup> He sees his project as constituting "a critique of a certain modern aspiration for a politics founded on reason" and recovering a more traditional understanding of partisan conflict, rather than Moral Partisanship's project of reconciliation with (rational) liberal theory.<sup>33</sup> Muirhead emphasizes, instead, partisanship's facilitation of a valuable form of loyalty that

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<sup>28</sup> Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*, 7; see also 56, 104, 159, 365-366, 456. Harvey Mansfield's study of the early modern origins of partisanship was, prior to Rosenblum's, arguably the last book-length normative treatment of partisanship: Harvey Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). A small number of articles were published in the interim, before the burgeoning literature that has taken off since Rosenblum; see Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Political Liberalism vs. 'The Great Game of Politics': The Politics of Political Liberalism," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 1 (2006): 99-108; Russell Muirhead, "A Defense of Party Spirit," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 4 (2006): 713-27; George Kateb, "The Moral Distinctiveness of Representative Democracy," *Ethics* 91, no. 3 (1981): 357-74; Carolyn M. Hendriks, John S. Dryzek, and Christian Hunold, "Turning up the Heat: Partisanship in Deliberative Innovation," *Political Studies* 55, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 362-83.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*, 362-365.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 362. Questions of so-called "militant democracy," or the legal and moral limits of antidemocratic and/or illiberal parties and political movements, become relevant here. See, e.g., *ibid.*, Chapter 9; Alexander S. Kirshner, *A Theory of Militant Democracy: The Ethics of Combatting Political Extremism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Though she does emphasize, like Moral Partisanship, that partisanship ideally has an important broadening influence on discourse which pushes partisans toward "comprehensiveness" in their appeals to the public. This criterion shares much of the spirit of public reason liberalism. See Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*, 359-364, 392.

<sup>32</sup> Muirhead, *The Promise of Party*, x.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

sustains partisan contribution through memory of past achievements and patience for future ones – loyalty "that goes beyond what might be rationally justified in the moment."<sup>34</sup>

The accounts of Rosenblum and Muirhead get us closer to perceiving and evaluating the changing nature of partisan identity under conditions of polarization. Their insistence on the non-justificatory roles of political parties and the connection partisanship cultivates between citizen and state inspires much of my project.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, they leave some crucial questions unanswered: What precisely does it mean for partisanship to be an identity? What is the relationship between this form of identification and forms of identification in personal and social life? And, given widespread polarization, should we worry that identifying with a party prevents citizens from identifying with one another?

But before one can address these questions, one needs a response to those who defend partisanship in rational-justificatory terms. It is necessary to dwell on the tensions, if indeed there are any, between highly idealized visions of partisanship and those more sensitive to the ways it operates in actually existing democracies, including its identitarian components. I therefore adopt as my chief theoretical opponent in this dissertation Moral Partisanship, which develops with admirable analytic sophistication the popular view that politics, and especially polarized partisan politics, should proceed without identity. And it does so within "the presently dominant form of philosophical liberalism."<sup>36</sup> In their efforts to make partisanship palatable to democratic theorists who have long feared it, defenders of Moral Partisanship repeat the blind spots of the liberal tradition of argumentative rationality within which they situate their work. Careful attention to the challenges of polarization reveals how these arguments depend on an impoverished

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19, Chapter 5.

<sup>35</sup> I explore these "linkage" arguments in Chapter 3, Section 2. Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "The Partisan Connection," *California Circuit Law Review* 3 (2012): 99–112; Wolkenstein, "A Deliberative Model of Intra-Party Democracy"; Lea Ypi, "Political Commitment and the Value of Partisanship," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 3 (2016): 601–13.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Vallier, "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 1 (March 2012): 149–65, at 150.

understanding of social and political pluralism.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the reality of a certain kind of disagreement has been central to the motivation of the political liberal legitimating project – and the foundations of modern liberalism. Our differences over religion, morality, philosophy, and all the "highest things" at stake in what it means to live a good life mean we should settle for a morally minimal, contractualist politics that eschews more controversial foundations.<sup>38</sup> As an exercise in the ethics of this sort of disagreement, Moral Partisanship plays party (perhaps unwittingly) to a grander debate about the attractiveness of such a view of politics – and also fails to appreciate how the study of partisan identity might reward us with fresh perspectives on it.

And so my engagement with Moral Partisanship opens into a modest contribution to larger questions about the role of meaning, belonging, and connection in the liberal society. This set of questions has been largely absent from the new partisanship literature, but it is fundamental, I believe, to adequately evaluate polarization concerns and formulate positive alternatives. For our great anxiety over polarization raises in particularly stark form the aspiration for substantive political community in line with those who have long criticized liberal non-foundationalism for its lack of vitality and motivational potential. The task of emptying politics of the baser passions, but also of desires for solidarity beyond toleration, was always futile, many have held – liable only to push the desire for them in more pernicious, illiberal directions.<sup>39</sup> Political liberalism forgets the lessons of a chain of theorists that has run parallel to the development of the liberal hope for the politics of reason – Hobbes's fear, Machiavelli's awe,

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<sup>37</sup> Plenty of theorists have charged political liberalism with not "taking disagreement seriously," or doing so in the wrong ways. See, e.g., David Enoch, "Taking Disagreement Seriously: On Jeremy Waldron's 'Law and Disagreement,'" *The Israel Law Review* 39, no. 3 (2006): 22–35; Matt Sleat, "Legitimacy in a Non-Ideal Key: A Critical Response to Andrew Mason," *Political Theory* 40, no. 5 (2012): 650–56; John Horton, "Rawls, Public Reason and the Limits of Liberal Justification," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 5–23; David Enoch, "Against Public Reason," in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, Eds. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Stephen Wall, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Timothy Fowler and Zofia Stemplowska, "The Asymmetry Objection Rides Again: On the Nature and Significance of Justificatory Disagreement," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (2015): 133–46.

<sup>38</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> For a recent, forceful rendition of this argument, see Rogers M. Smith, *That Is Not Who We Are!: Populism and Peoplehood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); and also his Rogers M. Smith, *Political Peoplehood: The Roles of Values, Interests, and Identities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). It is also a prominent theme in the literatures on liberal nationalism and republicanism that I consider in later chapters.

Rousseau's fraternity. The study of partisanship, that consummately dynamic identity, provides a particularly helpful location for investigating where and to what extent identity might be "made safe" for liberal democracy.<sup>40</sup>

For these reasons, I connect the analysis of partisanship with a set of literatures focused on thick notions of citizen community, especially civic republicanism and liberal nationalism. Liberal nationalists have devoted considerable attention to the ways in which substantive community can be reconciled with the concerns of inclusion and pluralism, and generally advocate a citizen bond inclusive of at least some cultural elements.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, civic republicans emphasize a citizenship of active participation to maintain the democratic ethos.<sup>42</sup> Neither group of theorists, however, has systematically investigated the role of partisanship in these visions – how partisanship threatens them, but also how parties might serve surprising roles in facilitating a view of democratic cohesion and participation for divided societies.

### **3. Structure of the Dissertation**

**Part I** (of II) of this dissertation reconstructs and critiques the model of political contestation undergirding many contemporary normative accounts of partisanship and proposes an alternative model. The primary research questions I seek to answer in this part are: What relevance should the empirical phenomenon of partisanship have for a normative theory of partisanship? And, are there forms of partisan identity that are both realistic and beneficial for democracy? In answering these questions, I place methodological questions center stage. I construct an "ideal type" of partisanship that looks different from models of partisanship in the literature, and justify my conceptual choices with an alternative idealizing strategy.

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<sup>40</sup> Patchen Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (2000): 38–63.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Gina Gustavsson and David Miller, "Why Liberal Nationalism Today?," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000); Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

In **Chapter 1**, I argue that we should reject Moral Partisanship, the normative thesis that partisanship is valuable for its contribution to political justification and public reason. My grounds for rejecting Moral Partisanship are that the model of political disagreement which underpins it idealizes in such a way that it is insufficient for normative prescription applied to actual political practice. Moral Partisanship presupposes a model of disagreement that, following mainstream public reason accounts, understands parties as instrumental carriers of prior moral beliefs. I appeal to empirical work in political science and political psychology to show that this view conflicts with a significant portion of partisanship as a practice in real-world democracies. Contemporary normative theories of partisanship have not adequately reckoned with the reality of political disagreement – that partisanship is not only a vehicle for channeling antecedent, moral commitments, but is itself a powerful source of identity and attachment. Partisan contestation is as much about *difference* as it is about rational disagreement. I conclude the chapter with further methodological attention to adequate forms of idealizing in the theory of partisanship. I specify how political liberals' idealizing strategy limits the relevance of their recommendations when it comes to partisanship in the real world.

**Chapter 2** provides my alternative account of partisan identity that incorporates this richer understanding of political disagreement. I call my view Political Partisanship. This view navigates between the over-idealized normative view (partisanship without identity) and that of the social identity literature (partisanship as cultural identity). I show how taking seriously partisanship's identitarian components need not condemn us to endorsing polarized tribalism, since there are different forms partisanship as an identity can take. I draw on work on the politics of difference to argue that, just as cultural identities can be more or less inhibiting of various normative goods, so, too, can partisan identity. Consequently, I argue that what goes wrong with partisanship under conditions of polarization is that it fails to be a sufficiently *political* identity, collapsing, instead, into a cultural identity. I seek to move beyond the claim that partisanship shares much in common with cultural identities by elaborating two dimensions

along which Political Partisanship properly differs from cultural partisan identity. The harms of affective polarization I isolate are its constraint of political agency and its transformation of the content of political contestation into a struggle for recognition. To avoid these problems, political partisan identity must maintain a degree of contingency in relation to underlying social identities and respect certain minimal democratic norms of engagement with opponents. These criteria are partly instruments of conceptual analysis, but they are also, importantly, normative criteria that constitute a critical diagnosis of the state of contemporary partisan identity. Further, and more controversially, they constitute conditions under which partisan identity qua identity can positively contribute to democracy, contra idealized normative views, by furthering the broadly civic-republican values of active citizenship.

The core of the argument in Part I, then, is a broadly realist critique and replacement of the concept of "partisanship" in the literature to date. My argument is not, it is important to note, that theorists of partisanship are wrong to idealize, that it is illegitimate to posit a normative standard of good partisan behavior to which partisans should strive as much as possible. Such a position would represent an indefensible capitulation to political reality. Instead, I argue that some prominent theories of partisanship tend to abstract from democratic practice *in an objectionable way*. Their idealizing is objectionable in three senses. First, it results in a political model that is unrealizable. Given our best empirical understanding of human psychology, it seems hopelessly unrealistic to think that partisans at any mass scale would participate politically in line with the assumptions and standards of the literature. Second, current accounts are conceptually confused. Moral Partisanship theorists have idealized in such a way that they describe something that risks being unrecognizable to many partisans. The third sense of my realist critique falls out of the first two: because they describe an ideal that is unrealizable, let alone recognizably about partisanship, the normative insights they derive are misguided. In other words, current theorists' failure to understand the *nature* of partisanship means that they miss out on crucial aspects of its normative *value*.

But mine is not a pessimistic realism. I intend something more than a "realist critique" of liberal-rational theories of partisanship, if by "realism" is meant a deflationary or chastened view of democratic potential. Quite against the pessimism found in many corners – deliberative democrats, political liberals, many political scientists – of the more identity-based and conflictual mode of partisanship, part of my purpose is to rehabilitate these as necessary for a full normative account of democracy. This leads to **Part II** of the dissertation, which further probes the normative dimensions of my more realistic model of partisan identity and political contestation. The primary purpose of Part II is to ask what role partisan identity plays in a normative theory of citizenship.

The core idea of Part II is that parties uniquely foster a valuable form of political community (at the level of the party) that makes possible a robustly participative ethic of citizenship (at the level of the polity) in which citizens must share neither a pre-political identity nor consensus on a substantive set of values, but a commitment to democratic *practices*. My analysis of partisanship's normativity is thus two-tiered, roughly corresponding to the value of partisanship for individual partisans and the value of partisanship for the democratic public (the arguments, respectively, of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). I investigate the role of partisanship in democratic culture – the moral bonds among citizens and those between citizens and the state. Doing so allows me, it is hoped, to provide a novel perspective on the question of what conception of unity or cohesion is appropriate for contemporary democracies characterized by deep division and disagreement – including disagreement of the identity sort channeled through parties.

Since the plausibility of my answer to that question depends on a distinctive account of parties as moral communities, I start with the party tier before proceeding to the polity tier. **Chapter 3** concerns the relationships within a party. I articulate and defend an ideal of *partisan community* according to which parties serve as uniquely effective schools of important virtues of active citizenship. At their best, parties inculcate a morally valuable form of civic friendship

among co-partisans (that I call "solidarity") and a moralized form of attachment to the state that combats alienation ("belonging"). This chapter thus joins accounts that defend partisanship for its role in connecting or linking the citizenry and the state. My ideal of partisan community draws on a family of broadly communitarian accounts of citizenship, capturing much of what those arguing for the values of active citizenship and substantive notions of civic community have thought important. I submit that insofar as we value solidarity and belonging – two compelling citizen virtues that gain distinctive importance in the light of disconnection and alienation from contemporary politics – we have strong reasons to value partisanship.

This view is consistent with Part I's methodological investigations, where I insisted that the content of partisan identity is not exhausted by adherence to a set of principles or values, but also contains a sense of "we," a thicker identity of the sort many have thought necessary to ground the virtues of solidarity and belonging. But of course, unlike other theorists, I advocate for these at the *subnational* level. And this immediately raises the worry that partisan community comes at the expense of democratic community and risks inflaming polarization. A clear-eyed account of the potency of partisanship requires a concession that the demands of partisanship stand in tension with those of citizenship, and I flag in Chapter 3 the ways in which the very mechanisms that allow partisanship to foster solidarity so effectively always put a certain kind of pressure on democracy-wide moral relationships, especially as those have been understood by theorists of substantive national community.

To adequately answer the polarization worry, we need an account of the relationships across parties – the topic of **Chapter 4**. In this chapter I move up a tier, to the democratic community, and ask what citizens of societies marked by division must share. I argue that the two leading theoretical accounts of democratic cohesion – those based on shared *identity* and shared *belief* – face profound problems when applied to divided contexts such as those of the contemporary United States. Instead, I premise citizenship on shared *action* among politically interdependent citizens – action of which partisanship is a principal form. Even though I also

argue that co-participation should be supplemented by nonpolitical forms of citizen action, my vision of cohesion among active citizens form a basis for pushing back against the great worries about partisanship becoming an "identity."

Overall, then, I argue in this dissertation for a more complex understanding of the role of identity in democracy than what is operative in most contemporary democratic theory. I defend parties as localized sites of thick ties as key to motivating the active citizenship that forms the basis of polity-wide community. Where others see in any departure from argumentative rationality a surrendering of the normative potential of discourse, and thus of a commitment to the public realm as a place of enlightened understanding, I seek to decouple the monopoly a certain kind of political rationality has on commitment to the political. My project highlights the ways in which partisanship does not reduce to the kind of rational disagreements political liberals and deliberative democrats seek to channel, and yet defends the moral value of partisanship even so.

## Chapter 1: Partisanship and Political Disagreement

*"Political difference is of the essence of politics, and political difference is a relation of political opposition, rather than, in itself, a relation of intellectual or interpretive disagreement."*

— Bernard Williams<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

At the core of politics – especially partisan politics – is disagreement. One way of understanding the recent normative accounts of partisanship, then, is as exercises in the ethics of disagreement: Defenders of partisanship are concerned that political disagreement, mediated through the mechanism of parties, proceed in a certain way, and their argument is that when it does, it supports some valuable democratic ideal(s). Their projects are avowedly normative, but they still involve certain empirical assumptions about precisely how disagreement in real democracies works – e.g., what the substance of democratic disagreement is and on what terms it proceeds. I will refer to such a cluster of views as a "model of disagreement." A normative theory of partisanship – of the democratic value of parties when they operate according to specified prescription – presupposes an empirical model of disagreement.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, beyond a few stray comments, none of the recent normative defenses of partisanship, to my knowledge, are especially forthcoming about the model of partisan disagreement that their ideals presuppose.<sup>3</sup> This lack of specificity is not necessarily a problem, but some models of disagreement are more appropriate than others as foundations for normative prescription. That is, the applicability and attractiveness of the normative recommendations for how partisan disagreement ought to proceed depend, in part, on the

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 78.

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Williams makes a similar point about theories of representation: "Every coherent theory of fair representation must have a correlative theory of groups," by which she means a sociological understanding of how group identity works. Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 26.

<sup>3</sup> This instantiates Andrew Mason's observation that "many political theorists do not explicitly take a stand on the question of *why* political disagreement in its different forms resists resolution." Andrew Mason, *Explaining Political Disagreement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

(empirical) model of disagreement that underpins them. A crucial question, then, is what relevance empirical partisan disagreement, in all its stunning variety, ought to have for a normative theory of partisanship.

I answer this question in this chapter via a critique of the answer given by defenders of Moral Partisanship, the view that partisanship is normatively valuable for supporting the liberal ideal of political justification (especially through public reason). These theorists import their model of disagreement from political liberalism, with their view that the great achievement of parties is to encourage a particular kind of reasoning that gains urgency in response to the "fact of reasonable pluralism" – the reality that citizens, under conditions of freedom, will always disagree about fundamental moral (and philosophical and religious) issues. The moral purpose of parties is to support legitimacy-as-justification in the face of this disagreement. These theorists neglect, however, the idiosyncratic features of specifically *partisan* disagreement – the ways in which their object of normative theorizing diverges from the liberal understanding of disagreement as "reasonable pluralism." Put simply, this prominent account is conceptually confused: they have idealized away some important elements of what makes partisanship *partisanship*. And this divergence matters, I will argue, because it limits the ability of Moral Partisanship's normative prescriptions to provide action guidance in the realm of real-world partisan competition. When it comes to partisanship, the normative recommendation to reason publicly is at best incomplete, and at worst misguided. Moral Partisanship should therefore be rejected because it relies on a model of disagreement that idealizes in an objectionable way from disagreement in the real world. This chapter's focus on models of disagreement is thus a lever for exposing the idealized nature of this prominent defense of partisanship and a foundation for arguing that this idealizing strategy is indefensible.

I will have a longer methodological discussion at the end of the chapter, but it will be helpful to explain a bit more upfront about the relationships among a model of disagreement, a normative account of partisanship, and the role of idealization to get a sense of this chapter's

aims. Consider the basic structure of the arguments within recent debates on partisanship's normative value. Although there are important differences among these accounts, all of them take an existing democratic practice – partisanship – and specify the conditions under which it can further some valuable aspect of democracy. But to do this, I suggest that two idealizing moves are required. The first is conceptual clarification: identifying from the messy realities of actually existing partisan disagreement a cleaner model of what counts for the purposes of normative theorizing. Disagreement is a highly complex phenomenon, and theorists need to specify an "ideal type" of the kind of partisanship for which their normative recommendations will be relevant. This includes questions about what kinds of parties are included in the analysis (must they be broad-based, "programmatic" parties, or would "clientelistic" patronage parties count?<sup>4</sup>) and also what kind of disagreement (which varies in the ways I will specify below). So, theorists do not take partisanship as it is and explore what value (or disvalue) it has for democracy; they first construct a cleaner model of partisanship, abstracting away from certain empirical elements.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Moral Partisanship, as I will show, partisan disagreement is thought to arise from fundamental differences in moral values combined with factual uncertainty, and to proceed in terms of an exchange of reasons. Parties are then conceived as carriers of this prior moral and rational disagreement. I call this the *moral rationalism model* of disagreement.

Only then does the argument proceed to the second, normative level of idealization. This is where theorists articulate the conditions under which that now-identified phenomenon (partisanship) can either further or hinder democratic ideals. This is the level where theorists offer moral arguments and normative prescriptions for partisans to follow in order to maximize

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<sup>4</sup> For the distinction, see, e.g., Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, "Citizen–Politician Linkages: An Introduction," in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> White & Ypi imply the necessity of this first step when they state that theirs is a project of "rational reconstruction," by which they mean surveying an "existing social practice – one that may display variations, inconsistencies, and degenerate forms, but also a basic coherence from a conceptual point of view." Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3-4.

the fulfillment of those ideals. The choice of which normative prescriptions are appropriate will be influenced, but not wholly determined, by the prior idealizing move. The core normative argument of Moral Partisanship is that parties are valuable for their ability to channel one kind of principled disagreement – namely, generalizable beliefs – and suppress another kind – namely, factional beliefs.

My argument in this chapter is that Moral Partisanship goes wrong at the first level of idealization – about how the diverse empirical phenomenon of partisanship may be appropriately whittled down – and that therefore their normative recommendations are insufficient. Defenders of Moral Partisanship are too discriminating in their judgment specifically about what partisan disagreement consists in, and about the nature of partisan identity. Their moral rationalism model of disagreement fails to explain some crucial facets of both partisan disagreement and partisan identity in real democracies – idiosyncrasies of partisan disagreement that have been central topics of study for political scientists and psychologists for the past few decades. At the end of the chapter, I further show that the expected response to justify this discrepancy – an appeal to the normative, ideal nature of their work – is indefensible. So even though this chapter levies a broadly realist critique of the political-liberal defense of partisanship, it is not my claim that idealization *as such* is bad – only their strategy. After all, in later chapters I develop my own normative account of the value of partisanship that constitutes a standard for judging actually existing partisanship and, in that way, idealizes (in the second sense). But such a project must begin with a defensible understanding of the relationship between empirical practice and normative principles, which is the purpose of this chapter and the next.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 2, I reconstruct the (implicit) model of partisan disagreement shared by accounts of Moral Partisanship. In Section 3, I show what features of real-world disagreement this model fails to explain. And in Section 4, I argue that a normative theory of partisanship must take account of this discrepancy.

## 2. Moral Partisanship and Disagreement

Those who defend partisanship for its role in the liberal project of public justification do so with a particular set of understandings about how political disagreement works and where it comes from. In this section I aim to make explicit the assumptions about disagreement and the relationship between partisans and parties within these accounts. The principal exponents of Moral Partisanship are Jonathan White & Lea Ypi<sup>6</sup> and Matteo Bonotti.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned, neither of their accounts systematically explores the nature of disagreement, but we can gain a fairly clear idea of their positions by looking at the broader theoretical approaches within which they consciously situate themselves.<sup>8</sup> I will argue that they share a similar understanding of disagreement with mainstream accounts of political liberalism and deliberative democracy. This is only fitting, as the recent wave of partisanship theorizing represents a kind of *internal* critique of public reason: White & Ypi and Bonotti are concerned that political liberals and deliberative democrats have not yet fully taken account of disagreement in the form of party competition, but they insist that there is nothing inherent to their frameworks that would prevent them from doing so.

I suggest we can distinguish three primary features of Moral Partisanship's model of disagreement. These are: people disagree over beliefs about fundamental moral values and facts relevant to policy (the substance of disagreement); partisan contestation consists in the exchange of reasons stemming from these divergent moral commitments (the terms of disagreement); and parties exist as instruments to organize these divisions for the purposes of electoral competition

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<sup>6</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*. Their first treatment of this theme is found in Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, "On Partisan Political Justification," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 2 (2011): 381–96.

<sup>7</sup> Matteo Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), which develops his earlier Matteo Bonotti, "Partisanship and Public Reason," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2014): 314–31. An earlier attempt to at least partially reconcile partisanship with Rawlsian political liberalism can be found in Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Political Liberalism vs. 'The Great Game of Politics': The Politics of Political Liberalism," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 1 (March 2006): 99–108.

<sup>8</sup> This is to follow the rest of Mason's observation quoted above: the writings of political theorists "generally provide some clues as to how they would answer it were they to address it directly." Mason, *Explaining Political Disagreement*, 1.

(the mechanism of disagreement). Together these comprise the moral rationalism model of disagreement. I consider each in turn.

### 2.1. *The Substance of Disagreement: Belief-Based*

As a starting point to anchor the discussion, let us consider the brief comments White & Ypi make on disagreement. They state that partisan disagreement will always persist due to "differences in first principles and the limits of factual evidence."<sup>9</sup> Citizens have different foundational moral outlooks, meaning they begin thinking about politics with different "premises." Because of these differences, "disagreements due to intersubjective differences in the combination of these premises, or due to the interference of different kinds of comparative metric, are unavoidable."<sup>10</sup> Political disagreement is thus a species of moral disagreement, and, because moral differences as well as differing interpretations of the facts required to enact them persist, political disagreement therefore persists.

This is already to say quite a lot, so we need to unpack the elements of these comments. I claim that this view of the substance of disagreement is the same one adopted by deliberative theorists seeking to make their theories responsive to the demands of disagreement in reaction to critiques of consensus-oriented deliberation. Early deliberation theory, especially that which emerged from Habermasian discourse theory, developed a reputation for downplaying disagreement. It tended to assume that participation in a certain kind of communication scenario under idealized conditions and procedures (e.g., perfect information, unlimited time) would lead to a rational consensus – that is, the elimination of disagreement. Citizens would converge on the truth, or on a course of action, through a mode of "discursive" or "communicative rationality" – the exchange of speech-acts governed by reason.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on consensus was

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<sup>9</sup> White and Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. See also Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 95-96.

<sup>11</sup> The classic statement is Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1992).

not merely a contingent feature, but key to the initial normative attractiveness of deliberative theory. Early accounts took pains to distinguish themselves from "aggregative" models of democracy that emphasized "strategic behavior" and amounted to "competitive pluralism" by election: "rather than simple compromise or bargaining equilibrium, the goal of deliberation was consensus, the agreement of all those affected by a decision."<sup>12</sup> The absence of disagreement was thus a key part of the normative plausibility of early deliberation theory's conception of democratic legitimacy.<sup>13</sup>

But the idea that consensus should be built into the core architecture of a normative conception of democracy drew fire from a number of directions. For example, some theorists have argued that aiming for consensus would only serve to mask power differences and reify objectionable elements of the status quo, oppressing marginalized populations.<sup>14</sup> Most relevant for our purposes, though, are the critics who pressed a challenge from disagreement, and constructed alternative models of deliberative politics that did not rely on consensus. They sought to insulate deliberation as a normative project from the reality of persistent, deep disagreement. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, for example, state that the "problem of moral disagreement" is pervasive, and that more work is needed "to cope with conflicts about fundamental values."<sup>15</sup> The fact that citizens will never resolve their differences of opinion on political matters – certainly in real-world politics, but also likely within speech scenarios idealized in certain senses – is now more or less a given for theorists of deliberative democracy. But how, precisely, do deliberative theorists understand disagreement? Aaron Ansell provides a helpful

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<sup>12</sup> James Bohman, "Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 4 (1998): 400–425, at 400. The theoretical opponent of Habermasian deliberation was "elitist" or "minimalist" theories of aggregative democracy, of which the canonical locus classicus is Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942).

<sup>13</sup> For two other early takes emphasizing the deliberative ideal of legitimacy's distance from mere aggregation, see Jack Knight and James Johnson, "Aggregation and Deliberation: On the Possibility of Democratic Legitimacy," *Political Theory* 22, no. 2 (May 1994): 277–96; Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State* (New York: Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> This critique is prominent in the work of, e.g., Iris Marion Young. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1.

synthesis. He shows how many recent theorists – including Gutmann and Thompson, Robert Talisse, William Galston, Christopher McMahon, Hélène Landemore, and others – rely on a very similar understanding of political disagreement as stemming from citizens' divergent moral values and grasp of the (non-moral) facts and evidence.<sup>16</sup> Ancell summarizes the main features of all of these assumptions about disagreement in contemporary political theory as follows:

"People's political views are grounded in their moral principles and values together with their understanding of the relevant non-moral facts. Political disagreement arises in one, or a combination of, two different ways: First, since people have divergent value sets, divergent value priorities, and divergent value specifications, they often reach different conclusions about which laws, policies, and courses of action are morally desirable, obligatory, or forbidden. Second, people often have different understandings of the relevant non-moral facts because the evidence bearing on such facts is often complex, conflicting, and open to interpretation. These different understandings of the relevant non-moral facts cause people to disagree about the causes of social problems and about the probable effectiveness of proposed solutions."<sup>17</sup>

The kind of disagreement contemporary theorists are concerned to accommodate is disagreement that arises from holding divergent fundamental moral values, weighting those values differently, reaching different conclusions about their implementation, and ambiguity over empirical facts. I think this description fits White & Ypi's understanding of disagreement as well. Consider their comments quoted above. Citizens have "differences in first principles" or

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<sup>16</sup> Aaron Ancell, "Public Unreason: Essays on Political Disagreement" (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2017), 6-12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 18-19. To the list of theorists he considers, I would add those participating in the recent debates on compromise. This literature is principally concerned with a similar understanding of disagreement as moral. As the introduction to a recent edited volume on the topic explains, "we [citizens] disagree not merely on what leads to a good life, but also on the facts...and the means...." The inevitability of this kind of disagreement is, for them, the starting condition of politics, and is why they seek "to center the debate on disagreement within democracies around the concept of compromise." Christian F. Rostbøll and Theresa Scavenius, eds., *Compromise and Disagreement in Contemporary Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1.

"premises" in political argumentation, and there are "intersubjective differences in the combination of these premises, or due to the interference of different kinds of comparative metric."<sup>18</sup> This aligns with Ancell's picture of political disagreement as moral conflict. White & Ypi imagine partisans holding different sets of moral values and coming to different conclusions about how to move forward when values conflict. For example, a party that favors a more progressive tax scheme appears to endorse, at least in this case, a greater priority for *equality* of post-tax income distribution over the *liberty* to spend one's money as one wishes. It is likely, as Ancell notes, that this sort of conflict – about the relative ranking of values that all sides to a conflict endorse to some extent – is more common than cases in which one side holds a value or set of values the other completely dismisses; "divergent value *priorities*" are more common in contemporary discourse than "divergent value *sets*."<sup>19</sup> Partisan disagreement is derivative of these more basic moral conflicts.

Bonotti, too, endorses the understanding of political disagreement as derivative of moral disagreement, although he does so via political liberalism, whose understanding of disagreement overlaps significantly with that of deliberative theory. By his own lights, he works squarely within Rawlsian political liberalism, and so adopts its understanding of political contestation as consisting of competing claims over the right (and an agreement to privatize disagreements over the good).<sup>20</sup> Pushing back against worries that political liberalism unduly constricts the scope of (reasonable) public argument, Bonotti argues that it in fact leaves "many controversial issues open to democratic contestation."<sup>21</sup> The crystallization or fixing of a specific set of socioeconomic or political principles within the constitutional structure – i.e., effectively removing them from political debate – is not warranted on Bonotti's reading of Rawls. In the course of this argument about how political liberalism leaves plenty of room for party

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<sup>18</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 22, 73.

<sup>19</sup> My emphasis. An important exception he notes is the value of religious faith, which is widely endorsed on the political right in the United States and in certain traditionally Catholic European states, for example, but not prized so dearly (or at all) by many on the left. Ancell, "Public Unreason: Essays on Political Disagreement," 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

competition, Bonotti reveals that he understands political disagreement to consist in competition over divergent beliefs about public policy choices. He is not explicit on these points, so we can glean a clearer understanding of his model of disagreement by looking at other political-liberal writing.

Disagreement was central to the founding motivation of political liberalism. The core Rawlsian project is to find a theory of legitimacy that could be endorsed by all citizens, who, in contemporary and diverse liberal democracies, will inevitably disagree. But what kind of disagreement? Rawls focuses on disagreement over "comprehensive doctrines" or visions of the good – including religious, moral, and other sets of beliefs that amount to how to live a life.<sup>22</sup> This is his famous "fact of reasonable pluralism" – the admission that, like post-consensus deliberative theory holds, no free democratic society will ever contain citizens who converge on important questions of politics, religion, etc.<sup>23</sup> Rawls adduces various reasons why political disagreement is so persistent, which he calls "the burdens of judgment." These include disagreement over the nature and relevance of facts (like scientific evidence); the vagueness of concepts; the influence of prior life experience; and competition between different values that the same person recognizes are good.<sup>24</sup> As Jonathan Quong notes, the burdens of judgment perform the function of explaining "why reasonable and rational people will be permanently divided over matters of philosophy, religion, and other aspects of the good life."<sup>25</sup>

The imperative of public reason is thus centrally concerned with the goal of privatizing (removing from political disagreement as much as possible) seemingly intractable worldview divergence. The province of political disagreement that remains would then (ideally) consist of a narrower range of issues and concerns about which citizens would bring public reasons, and

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<sup>22</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. This is the problem to which public reason is the solution: Rawls and his followers think an "overlapping consensus" on liberal values that are distinctively political, in some sense, could be arrived at from within the terms of every citizen's own private views if a certain kind of legitimating discourse was used. This is public reason: roughly, the duty to couch political arguments in terms of values and arguments that no citizen, suitably idealized, could reject. See *ibid.*, Lectures IV and VI.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-58.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Quong, "Public Reason," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Spring 2018).

public reasons only, to bear. There remains lively debate among political liberals about what qualifies a reason as "public" – how much and when, exactly, citizens should leave their disagreements over the good life in the private sphere. Some critics of Rawlsian political liberalism have worried that its focus on "reasonable" disagreement has been construed so narrowly as to exclude a wide swath of citizens in contemporary democracies, and that this narrowness of focus means that the project of public reason is either too trivial or too demanding to do the legitimating work it wants to.<sup>26</sup> In response, some public reason theorists have argued for a conception of public reason that is more permissive of wide-ranging argumentation (thus expanding the scope of "reasonable disagreement").<sup>27</sup>

Insofar as his goal is to argue that partisanship plays a vital assisting role in Rawlsian political liberalism, Bonotti falls back on the Rawlsian understanding of disagreement as divergent beliefs stemming from divergent moral-political values and the difficulty in ascertaining and assessing the relevant facts. There are important differences between the role of disagreement in, as I have simplistically stylized them here, the Habermasian paradigm of deliberative democracy and the Rawlsian paradigm of political liberalism.<sup>28</sup> But they are united in their understanding of political disagreement as primarily being disagreement over *beliefs*.<sup>29</sup> At

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<sup>26</sup> David Enoch, "Against Public Reason," in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, Eds. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Stephen Wall, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); John Horton, "Rawls, Public Reason and the Limits of Liberal Justification," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 5–23. Their criticisms apply most forcefully to "consensus" versions of public reason liberalism, notably Quong's: Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism Without Perfection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> The most influential such permissive view is Gerald Gaus's "convergence" public reason liberalism, which allows citizens to converge on decisions from reasons internal to their own conception of the good without requiring that these be the same reasons other citizens bring. See Gerald Gaus, *The Order of Public Reason: A Theory of Freedom and Morality in a Diverse and Bounded World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and also Cécile Laborde, "Three Cheers for Liberal Modesty," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2020): 119–35.

<sup>28</sup> For one relevant example, Habermas has criticized what he views as the restrictiveness of Rawlsian public reason, arguing that its demands ought only restrict politicians, not unelected citizens. Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25. Bonotti endorses this more permissive conception of public reason as a means of "revising" Rawls's conception: Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 124–127. For a recent, comprehensive treatment of general differences between Habermas and Rawls, see James Gordon Finlayson, *The Habermas-Rawls Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> In this way, contemporary democratic theory's understanding of the moral salience of disagreement differs from how other literatures understand the ethical salience of disagreement – notably analytical epistemology. Much of the recent philosophical attention to disagreement has focused on the question of whether, and when, disagreement should cause a person to revise their views – particularly someone with roughly equal competence and information (an "epistemic peer"). See, e.g., David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *Philosophical*

stake in political – and, for White & Ypi and Bonotti, specifically partisan – competition is conflicting beliefs about what the state should do which stem from different moral values and assessment of the relevant facts. In sum, then, theorists who defend the value of partisanship through Moral Partisanship import their understanding of political disagreement directly from the sources of this account – namely, deliberative democrats and political liberals. Political disagreement sits downstream from moral disagreement. This is the first facet of Moral Partisanship's model of disagreement: Partisans disagree cognitively – in terms of their moral beliefs.

## 2.2. *The Terms of Disagreement: Exchange of Reasons*

There is more to Moral Partisanship's model of partisan disagreement. We must look, also, at the terms by which these theorists think partisans disagree (this subsection) and what role parties play in mediating this (the next subsection).

The core normative principle for defenders of Moral Partisanship is that partisans ought to speak in language that is *generalizable* in some sense. For White & Ypi, the heart of a normative account of partisanship is what they call "the partisan claim," by which they mean the kinds of demands partisans ought to make in public discourse: "preserving the normative specificity of partisanship means highlighting a certain kind of claim – that to be advancing political commitments of a principled kind."<sup>30</sup> More specifically, partisan claims need to involve "an attempt to move beyond a particularist viewpoint with the aim of demonstrating public appeal."<sup>31</sup> For Bonotti, partisan claims must "take account of general ends and the common good."<sup>32</sup> This is in contrast to claims that are more factional, sectoral, or private. Although they specify the constraints slightly differently, these accounts share the general argument that

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*Review* 116, no. 2 (2007): 187–217; Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds., *Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 105.

partisanship is valuable insofar as it consists in the kind of argumentation that satisfies the requirements of public justification.

This recapitulation of the normative core of Moral Partisanship highlights an implicit feature in their model of disagreement: that it is *rational*, in the sense that it proceeds in terms of the exchange of reasons. These theorists are concerned that partisans offer particular *kinds* of reasons – namely, generalizable ones – rather than others. I suggest that the imperative to conform to the demands of public reason makes sense as the most urgent task for a normative theory of partisanship only if one thinks that what is most in need of normative direction is the kind of reasons partisans are liable to give. In other words, building the demands of public reason into the concept of partisanship – at its heart, in fact – implies that partisanship's essence is an exercise in reason giving. This focus on reasoning is always counterposed to an unedifying clash of identity, or, as White & Ypi put it, "appeals to brute interest and identity."<sup>33</sup> Partisanship is democratically valuable only insofar as it eschews such appeals.

Now, it is true that the moral duty partisans are under to make a particular kind of claim is a *normative* duty, and so one may object that I am mistakenly attributing empirical assumptions to White & Ypi and Bonotti, when in fact it is their claim only that partisan disagreement *ought to* proceed in terms of the exchange of reasons. Indeed, surely their choice of normative emphasis – that parties are valuable for disciplining disagreement into reasoning – is, in part, a recognition that disagreement in practice often contains appeals to identity.

I will have more to say about the defensibility of that kind of idealizing in Section 4. Here I wish to call attention to the fact that there are really two idealizing moves going on here. The normativizing move just mentioned corresponds to the second idealizing step I outlined in the introduction. But, as I mentioned there, this presupposes a prior idealizing move. Of all the things that might count as partisan disagreement, Moral Partisanship is concerned only with *claims* – claims that can be made in the form of reasons. Predicating the value of partisanship on

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<sup>33</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 75.

public reason means that the real normative work in judging good partisanship from bad entails sifting good reasons from bad reasons. It is to rule out automatically – before normative judgment can even begin – other forms partisan disagreement takes in real democracies (as I show in Section 3) as obviously bad from the start.

I note that in calling their model of disagreement reason-giving, I do not mean to suggest that it does not contain elements of affect, nor to draw a firm distinction between reason and emotion. That would be to attack a strawman version of Moral Partisanship. Nowhere do White & Ypi or Bonotti suggest that partisan disagreement is "reasonable" in the sense of calm, cool, or emotionless. This is in keeping with the large literature on moral epistemology, in which many writers hold that emotions are not simply physical sensations or feelings (to be contrasted with cognition), but have propositional (perception-based, evaluational, motivational, etc.) content all their own.<sup>34</sup> (Granting this acknowledgment on the part of Moral Partisanship now will strengthen the contrast I draw between their moral rationalism account of disagreement and real-world partisan disagreement.)

But still, there is a sense in which disagreement's being rational in the sense of reason-giving is fundamental not only to the internal coherence of the empirical model of disagreement undergirding their accounts, but also to the broader normative project of which it is put into service. There is, in other words, a tight connection between Moral Partisanship's two idealizing moves – a connection which poses, I shall endeavor to show, a deep problem for the view.

To see how and why, consider, as an illustrative example, Bonotti's argument about partisanship's contribution to the Rawlsian notion of stability through the overlapping consensus.<sup>35</sup> As part of his broader argument for partisanship within political liberalism, Bonotti argues that "parties are carriers of an overlapping consensus and they are desirable for the

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<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> For further development of the points made in this and the next two paragraphs, see my "Does Partisanship Contribute to Stability?," *Philosophy and Public Issues*, Forthcoming, Section 2.

stability of liberal democracies within the confines of Rawls's political liberalism."<sup>36</sup> The key way in which parties support the overlapping consensus, according to Bonotti, is by encouraging public reasoning, "helping citizens to relate their comprehensive doctrines to political liberal values and institutions."<sup>37</sup> This commitment to public reasoning is, as we have seen, what distinguishes true partisans from mere members of factions on Bonotti's account.

Now, Rawls's notion of stability through the overlapping consensus – the target of the normative work Bonotti is here assigning to partisanship – is quite an idiosyncratic one. It is necessary to attend in some detail to the nature of the normativity of Rawlsian stability even more than Bonotti does to illustrate the depth of Bonotti's reliance on the moral rationalism model of disagreement. Rawlsian stability refers not to societal collapse or institutional decay, but to a technical solution to the core problem of Rawlsian political liberalism – namely, "How is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?"<sup>38</sup> The conditions of freedom in modern societies rule out agreement on the good. But, partly because of this pluralism, it remains important to "establish and preserve unity and stability"<sup>39</sup> amongst reasonable citizens around the "basic structure of society" – "a society's main political, social, and economic institutions, and how they fit together into one unified system of social cooperation."<sup>40</sup> Rawls believes such stability can be achieved via "an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines."<sup>41</sup> Although citizens hold a great diversity of comprehensive doctrines, what they all share is endorsement of society's basic structure of institutions and foundational laws: "the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that in different ways

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<sup>36</sup> Matteo Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 3. Rawls has a briefer discussion of stability in his earlier work: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Chapters 8 and 9, though I limit myself here to his more mature account of stability in *Political Liberalism*. For an interesting comparison between the two, see Brian Barry, "John Rawls and the Search for Stability," *Ethics* 105, no. 4 (1995): 874–915, at 876–880.

<sup>39</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 133.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it."<sup>42</sup>

The fact that political allegiance "rests on the totality of reasons specified within the comprehensive doctrine affirmed by each citizen" gives one reasons to maintain such allegiance even in cases where one's interests are not (or are perceived not to be) adequately considered in the political process.<sup>43</sup> This helps clarify that Rawlsian stability is a highly *moral* concept; it is stability "for the right reasons." This is distinguished from a "mere modus vivendi," which is "founded on self or group interests" and contingent on circumstances.<sup>44</sup> Society's basic structure is "affirmed on moral grounds" and not "a compromise compelled by circumstances" or political expediency.<sup>45</sup> The motivation for Rawls's political turn is therefore mostly to do with the philosophical justifiability of the modern state under terms diverse citizens can all endorse.<sup>46</sup> As such, the process of public reasoning plays an essential role in the achievement and maintenance of an overlapping consensus, while also ensuring that such consensus is legitimate according to liberal standards: legitimacy as justification.<sup>47</sup> This is what allows Bonotti to claim that there exists a "correspondence between the normative demands of political liberalism and those of partisanship, as both of them require that policies and laws be defended on the basis of public reasons, rather than by appealing to sectarian and factional values that only reflect the interests and conceptions of the good of a specific group of citizens."<sup>48</sup> Both his account of partisanship and the ideal it supports, then, consist in a similar grammar of rational justification.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 147, 145-148.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 147, 169.

<sup>46</sup> This is, certainly, the primary reading in the secondary literature; see, e.g., Barry, "John Rawls and the Search for Stability"; Larry Krasnoff, "Consensus, Stability, and Normativity in Rawls's Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 95, no. 6 (1998): 269–92; Thomas E. Hill, "The Problem of Stability in Political Liberalism," in *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Rawls displays passing interest in more colloquial understandings of stability, as when he states that it also involves moral-psychological questions about "whether people who grow up under just institutions...acquire a normally sufficient sense of justice so that they generally comply with those institutions": Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 140. The bulk of his analysis, however, is focused on the overlapping consensus, and hence philosophical stability – as is Bonotti's.

<sup>47</sup> For an explanation and contextualization of justification as a candidate to capture the liberal spirit of legitimacy (or neutrality), see Collis Tahzib, "Pluralist Neutrality," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (2018): 508–32.

<sup>48</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 111.

Emphasizing that the rational basis of disagreement is not merely incidental to their projects but crucial to the motivation of the normative principles they think parties support foreshadows the depth of my critique of Moral Partisanship. If the relationship between the rational terms of disagreement and legitimacy-as-justification – i.e., to the two forms of idealization identified in the introduction – were more contingent, then objecting to the former might not spell trouble for this account as a normative project. But since their reliance on this particular understanding of disagreement is central to the moral appeal of their normative project, they will not be able to respond to criticisms of their first idealizing move by simply adopting a more complex, realistic notion of disagreement. Any pressure we put on Bonotti's notion of partisanship as, first and foremost, an exercise in reasoning giving therefore also puts pressure on his project at the level of the ideal. As we will see throughout the rest of this chapter, I mean to cast doubt on the relevance of the entire effort to defend partisanship within justificatory terms – not just on the particular ways in which White & Ypi and Bonotti have chosen to do so.

Let me formalize Moral Partisanship's model of partisan disagreement as I have explored it so far, combining the conclusion of the previous subsection (disagreement is belief-based) with that of this one (disagreement consists of an exchange of reasons). A and B disagree over a political issue P when:

1. A and B possess different opinions over whether it is right for the state to pursue P;
2. A and B come to their different opinions on P from a process of considered moral reasoning combined with interpretation of relevant factual evidence;
3. P is at least partly a matter of morality<sup>49</sup>;
4. A and B offer competing reasons – claims for why the other should accept their opinion on P.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> I say "at least partly" because, on these accounts, not every political issue need be completely or comprehensively a moral issue. Some of the disagreement may stem from differences in judgment of the relevant empirical evidence, or, as White & Ypi state, "the limits of factual evidence." White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 22. But what seems inappropriate, on their accounts, is disagreement that is merely a matter of competing interests.

(c). *Partisan Disagreement and Parties*

The theorists under consideration here are concerned not only with general political disagreement, but with specifically *partisan* disagreement. I contend that Moral Partisanship's moral rationalism model of disagreement is consonant with a particular view of *what parties are* and of the *relationship between partisan and party*.

Before making those views explicit, though, it is worth noting that it is in this domain – the domain of specifically partisan disagreement – that we see the most significant departure of partisanship theorists' understanding of disagreement from that of prior deliberative democrats and political liberals. A key argument shared by all recent pro-party theorists is the idea that parties are necessary to organize the opinion space and direct political competition into something meaningful for the conditions of modern representative government. Whereas prior theorists sometimes wrote as if the deliberative exercise – instantiated in such real-world institutions as deliberative polls, mini-publics, etc. – was enough to vindicate the democratic ideal given inevitable disagreement, participants in the partisanship literature insist that there can be no meaningful, large-scale deliberation without something like partisanship. Even though White & Ypi and Bonotti build the ideal of public justification directly into their account of partisanship, this is a significant divergence from the form of democratic theorizing that gave rise to that ideal. Parties are necessary to organize the lines of political division and, when there is inevitable remainder from deliberation, to make differences of opinion amenable to decision and implementation via elections.<sup>51</sup>

This leads to the vision of what parties are within Moral Partisanship. Political parties serve as collectors of policies that, together with certain narratives about the direction of the

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<sup>50</sup> A and B might also be thought to disagree over P if they agree the state should pursue P but for different reasons. For example, suppose a colleague and I agree that the state should pursue an aggressive de-carbonization energy strategy, but whereas I think this is an imperative of environmental justice, my colleague thinks it is necessary to preserve the religious sanctity of the natural world. In this case, we disagree only on our justifications for P, but both levels of disagreement crop up in real-world political discourse.

<sup>51</sup> Rosenblum and Muirhead are most explicit about this "creative" role of partisans in organizing the lines of political division and making political competition "decisive" in a way it would not be without partisanship. See Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 365; Muirhead, *The Promise of Party*, 86.

polity, suggest a vision for how the state ought to be run (and for how the state *would* be run, were the party to take control). Because political issues are ultimately moral issues, party competition consists in competition over fundamental moral values and visions of society. In Rawlsian terminology, the party platform consists of a cluster of positions in the domain of the political "right" – matters of justice within the overlapping consensus – and party competition consists in competing claims about what justice requires. This is why Bonotti is so concerned to argue that political liberalism leaves many issues open to contestation – that the crystallization of any particular socio-economic arrangement within a constitution (or otherwise removed from effective political competition) is unwarranted.<sup>52</sup> White & Ypi, for their part, emphasize that parties are defined by the kind of goods they pursue – specifically, they "define their activities in relation to a good irreducible to that of a sectional grouping." Parties "are not primarily about interest representation," or aggregation, but rather are distinguished by their "offer[ing] principled justification for the particular combination of ends they promote."<sup>53</sup> In other words, "at the core of the idea of party" is "the pursuit of political visions irreducible to the self-centered aims of sectoral groups or to personal interests."<sup>54</sup> These definitions echo the features of disagreement I outlined above, but they also add something new, in their insistence that what makes a political party is that it is centered around the kind of disagreement Moral Partisanship understands as paradigmatic: belief-based and reason-giving.

This view of parties, in turn, relates to Moral Partisanship's view of the relationship between partisans and parties. Their core idea is that partisans join and support the party that is most consistent with their fundamental, prior moral and political beliefs. As White & Ypi put it, parties "elaborate explicitly *political* identities, which citizens do not passively inherit as part of their social experiences and position within society, but to which they orient themselves

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<sup>52</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, Chapter 3.

<sup>53</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

reflexively based on an evaluation of the associated political objectives."<sup>55</sup> The chronology is important: a citizen comes to some (at least provisional) understanding of what is morally important *and then* comes to support the party that best matches these convictions – that is, on the basis of those beliefs. It is true that most citizens of most democracies never had anything like a distraction-free moral deliberation period preceding the existence of a set of party alternatives; barring brand-new democracies, citizens must undertake their moral reasoning with at least some knowledge of the options. So I take it that the priority of moral convictions and the "evaluation of the associated [party] political objectives" that is meant to precede identification with a party would not usually occur literally. Perhaps that is why the authors use "reflexively": the idea is that citizens must constantly gauge the coherence of their considered moral beliefs with the positions espoused by their party.<sup>56</sup>

But there is still an important sense in which, for Moral Partisanship, the partisan's affiliation with a party is *the result of* their moral convictions in combination with an assessment of the party landscape. For White & Ypi, what makes partisanship an "explicitly *political*" identity is, as noted above, the fact that it is importantly non-arbitrary: it is not a "passive" matter of "inherit[ance]" from either background experience or social position.<sup>57</sup> It appears that, on this definition of "political," any motivation to associate with a party on the basis of one's interests can only be permissible if it is confirmed by a process of moral, rational reflection. To do otherwise is to premise partisanship on (mere) interest or "brute identity" and disqualify oneself from counting as a partisan in the relevant sense: "at the heart of [partisanship] is some form of coordination between individuals committed to similar political ideas."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 26. Original emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> Ancell diagnoses a similar priority of moral disagreement to partisanship in many deliberative-democratic accounts, which he thinks subscribe to a version of the following: "Disagreement about the moral merits and probable effectiveness of various laws, policies, and courses of action *in turn* leads to disagreement about the merits of particular parties and politicians who represent different political views." Ancell, "Public Unreason: Essays on Political Disagreement," 18. My emphasis.

<sup>57</sup> White & Ypi, 26. Original emphasis.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9.

It is once again important to be careful in distinguishing the descriptive and the normative parts of Moral Partisanship. It is not true that these accounts suppose that parties are, in an empirical sense – that is, parties in contemporary democracies – carriers of principled claims that transcend the interests of particular groups. As Bonotti says, "the fact that many (perhaps most) partisans do not actually fulfill this commitment to public reasoning does not undermine the claim that they ought to."<sup>59</sup> The picture of the partisan as engaged in moral, rational disagreement with partisan rivals and attached to a party from the basis of moral convictions is the essence, for these theorists, of partisanship at its very best. Moral Partisanship gives no sense of how plausible – how feasible – it would be to fulfill such a vision of party and partisan; they do not engage in a systematic way with the by-now vast empirical work on these topics. I seek in the next section to expose the model of disagreement and picture of parties presupposed by Moral Partisanship to empirical scrutiny. And then, in Section 4, I will ask if the distance between the two is justifiable.

### **3. Disagreement in Real-World Democracies**

Political disagreement has received considerable treatment by scholars in empirical political science and political psychology. Many of these accounts give different answers to the questions of why and how partisans disagree, and how parties mediate that disagreement, than those supplied by the moral rationalism model. I will now review some of this empirical evidence with an eye to exposing the gap between the understanding of disagreement in this vein of the normative partisanship literature and how partisans disagree in the real world. To qualify the scope of my claims upfront, I shall not be arguing that the moral rationalism model of disagreement is entirely absent from contemporary politics. Rather, the claim is that it fails to explain a significant portion of political disagreement, and that this is especially the case when it comes to *partisan* disagreement.

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<sup>59</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 109.

In the last section I set out the model of political disagreement undergirding Moral Partisanship by starting from its understanding of moral disagreement and moving to how that is mediated through partisanship. But when it comes to real-world partisan disagreement, it will be more helpful to do the reverse: to begin by explaining empirical work on parties and partisan identity. This is because, as I will explain in a moment, much of the empirical evidence suggests that the relationship between moral disagreement and political identity is, for many citizens, the reverse of what the moral rationalism model supposes. The reality of disagreement in real-world politics follows a very different logic from that supposed by recent theorists of partisanship – one that corresponds to a different understanding of what parties are, and of the relationship between partisan and party.

### *3.1. Political Parties and Partisan Identity*

I begin by considering a distinction between two candidate theories for explaining the nature and origins of partisan identity in contemporary political science. The first is the so-called "instrumental" (or "running-tally") approach, according to which citizens form and revise their partisan identities in response to political events and the performance of those in power. Drawing on a rational choice perspective, this view is optimistic about voters' ability to judge the extent to which parties match their interests and realign their partisan loyalties accordingly. Citizens have a preferred ideology or a suite of preferred policy positions that they would like to see advanced in politics. Parties "bundle" policy positions in such a way as to appeal to as broad a section of the electorate as possible, from which citizens "shop" for the best match with their preferences. Winning parties implement these programs, and at subsequent elections voters hold them accountable for their successes and failures.<sup>60</sup> The instrumental view of parties is consistent

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<sup>60</sup> The original, influential statement is Downs's: Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957). For an overview of the essential features and critical discussion, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson, "Citizen–Politician Linkages: An Introduction." For more recent practitioners of the model, see Charles H. Franklin and John E. Jackson, "The Dynamics of Party Identification," *The American Political Science Review* 77, no. 4

with the moral rationalism model of disagreement. Citizens' moral reasoning and conclusions about politics are in some sense prior to – and the crucial basis of – their party identity. This view of the nature and purpose of political parties is intuitive; it pervades the public and journalistic consciousness so much that it has been called the "folk theory of democracy."<sup>61</sup>

But alas, as the wistful tone of "folk" indicates, the story is not so simple. The instrumental view of parties has been eclipsed in recent decades by a rival model for explaining the origins and nature of partisan identity. According to the "socialization" or "expressive" view, partisan identity is not so much a matter of shopping for whichever party matches one's predetermined goals, but an enduring attachment that shares certain characteristics with other social identities (one comparison is often religion). In *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, a classic statement of this view, a trio of political scientists show how "party identification is a genuine form of social identification. Citizens have an enduring sense of what sorts of people belong to various parties and whether they identify with the social groups."<sup>62</sup> The relationship of partisan to party is thus not so much about rational evaluation of which party is likeliest to further one's interests understood in a rudimentary way; it is, instead, a process of "social identification" enabled by the fact that "partisan group images are coherent, widespread, and influential."<sup>63</sup>

Proponents of the socialization approach to partisanship draw heavily on social identity theory – especially the classic work of Henri Tajfel. In a series of experiments that have achieved legendary status in social and political psychology, Tajfel set out to understand the nature and limits of social group attachment. It is evident that group identity markers of all kinds – not least nationalities, ideologies, races – license attachment to others who share the identity marker and, very often, prejudice toward those who do not. Tajfel wondered what it would take to activate

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(December 1983): 957–73; Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>61</sup> Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), ix. This perspective harkens back to that of the original iteration of mid-twentieth century American public opinion research, as exemplified by Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>63</sup> Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 9.

such group sentiment. To his surprise, Tajfel documented how even the most minimal group assignments – manufactured for the purpose of the experiment – came to take on great meaning for participants. For example, in one experiment, Tajfel divided participants into groups based on whether they over- or under-estimated the number of dots they were shown on a screen. When asked how they would (hypothetically) allocate money, participants consistently discriminated against members of the opposing group, opting to give them a smaller share – even at the expense of their own share.<sup>64</sup>

Social identity theory is, by now, "a well-established approach to intergroup relations that is supported by a vast empirical literature."<sup>65</sup> The development of this psychological literature over the past 40 years could be summed up as the increasing discovery of the massive effects even minuscule and apparently irrelevant differences have on dividing people into groups and activating our capacity for identity formation and preservation. Such is the power of the human propensity for social attachment, and both the positive longing and negative bias that often result, that "in every conceivable iteration of this experiment, people privileged the group to which they have been randomly assigned."<sup>66</sup> Social identity theorists emphasize that it takes very little for people to feel a sense of belonging for their "ingroup" and prejudice toward the "outgroup." Such attachments inflame the intensity of a biased form of reasoning often called motivated reasoning – in which we regulate and reinterpret information to "converge on judgments that minimize negative and maximize positive affect states" relating to a salient identity.<sup>67</sup> Our need and capacity for meaning through belonging is so great as to arise in even apparently meaningless contests. This is not at all to say that cultural, institutional, and many

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<sup>64</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); See also Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), Chapter 1.

<sup>65</sup> Leonie Huddy, Lilliana Mason, and Lene Aarøe, "Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 1–17, at 15. See also Leonie Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology (Second Edition)*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Drew Westen et al., "Neural Bases of Motivated Reasoning: An fMRI Study of Emotional Constraints on Partisan Political Judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 18, no. 11 (October 27, 2006): 1947–58, at 1947.

other contingent constraints do not profoundly shape the nature and extent of social group attachments and their implications.<sup>68</sup> But the contribution of social identity theory has been to insist on the messy substrate of political interaction – to drive home the stubborn existence of the ways in which we are hardwired for both belonging and prejudice, especially when it comes to politics.

Which brings us to partisan disagreement. Political parties, as proponents of the socialization approach argue, are precisely the kinds of organizations most liable to prime in-group attachment, outgroup bias, and motivated reasoning. They point to evidence that partisan views are acquired early in life and rarely change. Affiliation with a party activates the same psychological mechanisms that affiliation with any group that becomes salient for one's identity activates. It "involves a subjective sense of belonging to a group that is internalized to varying degrees, resulting in individual differences and identity strength, a desire to positively distinguish the group from others, and the development of ingroup bias."<sup>69</sup> This socialization approach "has gained growing popularity" because there are certain features of partisanship in the real world for which it is better able to account.<sup>70</sup> Party attachment is remarkably stable – immune to most short-term economic and political fluctuations. Partisanship exerts an extremely powerful (and highly predictive) influence on vote choice independent of issue preference; citizens' partisan affiliation "often has little to do with unfolding political and economic events."<sup>71</sup> Contrary to popular belief, it is not the case that citizens put up a "perceptual screen" or are necessarily

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<sup>68</sup> Even though an argument of this chapter is that the empirical realities of partisanship – especially those captured by social identity theory – are profoundly important for normative theorists to account for, we must scrupulously avoid an opposite position that uncritically applies insights from social-psychological experiments to the political realm. Merely pointing to human propensities for motivated reasoning, intergroup bias, etc. rooted deep in human brains is rarely illuminating completely on its own: If our ultimate goal is accurate diagnosis of contemporary democratic ills and ideals to aim for in light of them, we need an account of in what ways and to what extent social identities manifest in various institutional and cultural contexts.

<sup>69</sup> Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe, "Expressive Partisanship," 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>71</sup> Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, 6.

always biased when processing news. Rather, it is because "evaluations of party capabilities are distinct from [evaluations of] partisan identities."<sup>72</sup>

So, the social-identity model of partisan identity reverses the priority given to an individual's considered political beliefs that the instrumental model – and Moral Partisanship – suppose: one's partisanship often influences how one feels about political issues.<sup>73</sup> It is a mistake to view parties as carriers of moral claims that are prior to the partisan identity itself. As the authors of one synthesis state, "parties are not simply vehicles through which political actors pursue their policy goals. For many individuals, party support is a goal in its own right, motivating political involvement, shaping policy preferences, and serving as a potent force in structuring political change."<sup>74</sup>

### *3.2. The Substance of Disagreement: Identity- and Belief-Based*

What does this view of partisan identity entail for political disagreement? The first implication is that the substance of partisan disagreement is not only a conflict over beliefs about moral issues, but over the partisan identity itself. This is consonant with the findings that at least some of the content of partisan identity – what it represents for the people who subscribe to it – does not concern the policy or ideological stances the party takes. Consider a long-noted puzzle in political science: the fact that many citizens' self-reported ideological labels – liberal, conservative, libertarian, etc. – do not match in any obvious way the policy positions to which they subscribe. Many studies have investigated, for example, the so-called "conflicted conservative" in the American context – a citizen who identifies as a "conservative" or a "Republican" but who favors traditionally Democratic policies like increased spending on the welfare state. How to explain the disconnect? Christopher Ellis and James Stimson distinguish

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>73</sup> For a particularly extreme formulation of this position, see Peter K. Hatemi, Charles Crabtree, and Kevin B. Smith, "Ideology Justifies Morality: Political Beliefs Predict Moral Foundations," *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 4 (2019): 788–806.

<sup>74</sup> Geoffrey Layman et al., "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (May 2010): 324–46, at 344.

between "operational" and "symbolic" ideology. An operational ideology is one that tracks the expected policy content of party affiliation. A symbolic identity, by contrast, is one adopted or maintained for reasons outside of what is normally thought of as partisan contestation – reasons to do with what sorts of people adhere to what ideology.<sup>75</sup>

This involves "two qualitatively different types of ideological considerations."<sup>76</sup> The first, reasoning and judgment about operational ideology, is familiar. Citizens evaluate partisan identity based on the fit between the party's proposed policies and their thoroughly considered moral judgments. This corresponds to Moral Partisanship's view of disagreement about beliefs over policy. The second, symbolic ideological evaluation "works through an evaluative process rooted in affective attachments toward the symbols and people associated with ideological labels."<sup>77</sup> This may involve beliefs that a party will further one's interests or policy beliefs in a straightforward sense, but they do not reduce to those factors. These identitarian judgments are judgments about whether members of a given party are "on my side." In this way, partisan identity contains distinctive "affiliative motives...shared within a given relationship or group" linked to "basic human motives to...maintain value to your personal relationships."<sup>78</sup> "Relational and epistemic motives are intertwined."<sup>79</sup>

The idea that partisanship as an identity comes apart from partisanship as a representation of political views is supported by two other well-documented phenomena: political ignorance and affective polarization. Contemporary democratic citizens are infamously ignorant about many political matters – from the basic workings of government's major

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<sup>75</sup> Christopher Ellis and James A. Stimson, *Ideology in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Christopher Claassen, Patrick Tucker, and Steven Smith, "Ideological Labels in America," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Popp and Thomas J. Rudolph, "A Tale of Two Ideologies: Explaining Public Support for Economic Interventions," *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 808–20, at 808.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.

<sup>78</sup> John T. Jost, Alison Ledgerwood, and Curtis D. Hardin, "Shared Reality, System Justification, and the Relational Basis of Ideological Beliefs," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 171–86, at 171.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 173. This social-scientific understanding of the nuances of political ideologies shares much of the spirit of the study of ideology in political theory, particularly in the work of Michael Freeden. Freeden theorizes ideologies as packages of views that have been "decontested." See, e.g., Michael Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

institutions to the candidates running for office – and this includes what the major parties stand for on the issues.<sup>80</sup> However, citizens are much more reliably accurate evaluators of politicians and parties for their symbolic-ideological fit.<sup>81</sup> Nathan Kalmoe has shown how coherent ideological sophistication is largely the province of political elites, rather than most everyday citizens: "a knowledgeable fraction show signs of real ideology while most people do not."<sup>82</sup> Only about 20 to 30% of the population has "polar, coherent, stable, and potent" ideologies – core political values and policy views – of the kind defenders of Moral Partisanship think give rise to partisan identity. These findings are "in contrast with partisan ubiquity."<sup>83</sup> It would be hard to reconcile the widespread persistence and depth of political disagreement and ignorance of the issues without appeal to an identity-based view of partisanship.

Second, scholars of American political behavior have documented rising affective polarization – the degree of animosity partisans feel toward opposing partisans. Using "thermometer ratings" – which allow partisans to rate how they feel about members of the opposing party, one study found that negative feelings toward opponents have increased significantly in the past 50 years. Negative stereotypes of opposing partisans have also increased, as has stated displeasure if one's child were to marry someone of the opposing party.<sup>84</sup> And as measured by the Implicit Association Test as well as behavioral indicators, partisans make prejudicial judgments towards members of the other party.<sup>85</sup> Curiously, though, studies have shown that this increasing distance of feeling has not been associated with increasing distance in policy positions, at least for the mass public.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ilya Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), Chapter 1.

<sup>81</sup> William G. Jacoby, "Ideology in the 2000 Elections: A Study in Ambivalence," in *Models of Voting in Presidential Elections*, ed. Herbert F. Weisberg and Clyde Wilcox (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 103–19.

<sup>82</sup> Nathan P. Kalmoe, "Uses and Abuses of Ideology in Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 41, no. 4 (2020): 771–93, at 772.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 771–772. See also Donald R. Kinder and Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>84</sup> Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 405–31.

<sup>85</sup> Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (July 1, 2015): 690–707.

<sup>86</sup> Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*.

I will have more to say in the next chapter about what it means for identity to be the subject of political contestation, and why we have reasons for criticizing this. For now, I merely want to demonstrate that it is a widespread feature of public discourse.

### 3.3. *The Terms of Disagreement: Expressive Cheerleading*

Moral Partisanship (and political liberals and deliberative democrats) believe disagreement proceeds in terms of an exchange of reasons. But a final implication of partisanship as a social identity calls this into question. Some have argued that when partisans disagree with opposing partisans, the "reasons" they sometimes offer do not look like considerations rooted in genuine beliefs, but rather like instances of "cheerleading" their own side rooted in a desire to protect their identities.<sup>87</sup> Partisans express viewpoints whose primary function is to support their party or denigrate the other(s) – not, as most theorists of discourse suppose, to persuade. As Michael Hannon writes, "a seminal finding of new research in political behavior is that what seems like factual disagreement is *often* just partisan cheerleading," and so much of what we think of as "genuine" partisan disagreement is in fact merely "expressive" of our partisan identities.<sup>88</sup>

Many studies have shown that what looks like deep disagreement between opposing partisans is often just bias deriving from attachment to one's own party masquerading as disagreement. For example, John Bullock et al. found that the chasm between reported beliefs by Democrats and Republicans about a given issue decreased significantly when participants in their experiment were given a small financial incentive to give a more accurate response.<sup>89</sup> These results are surprising: "to the extent that factual beliefs are determined by partisanship, paying

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<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, "Can We Talk?: Communicating Moral Concern In An Era of Polarized Politics" (Uehiro Lectures in Practical Ethics, University of Oxford, October 14, 2019); John G. Bullock, Alan S. Gerber, and Gregory A. Huber, "Partisan Bias in Factual Beliefs about Politics," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 4 (2015): 519–78; Kabir Khanna and Gaurav Sood, "Motivated Responding in Studies of Factual Learning," *Political Behavior* 40, no. 1 (2018): 79–101.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Hannon, "Political Disagreement or Partisan Badmouthing? The Role of Expressive Discourse in Politics," 2019. Unpublished manuscript. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Bullock, Gerber, and Huber, "Partisan Bias in Factual Beliefs about Politics."

partisans to answer correctly should not affect their responses to factual questions. But it does."<sup>90</sup> Offering an incentive gets partisans out of their default support-party-and-denigrate-opposing-party mindset, causing them to abandon beliefs that supported their party but that they knew, all along, were untenable. It would be a mistake, then, to view the contributions of the partisans to the disagreements these authors measured as exchanging reasons for their political beliefs. Instead, Bullock et al. offer an analogy from sports: "Just as people enjoy rooting for their favorite sports teams and arguing that their teams' players are superior, even when they are not, surveys [and political discourse more generally] give citizens an opportunity to cheer for their partisan teams."<sup>91</sup>

#### **4. Methodological Considerations**

So far in this chapter I have been at pains to enumerate the ways in which Moral Partisanship's assumptions about disagreement and partisan identity fail to capture a significant amount of those phenomena in the real world. Let me once more be careful about the scope of my claims. None of the empirical evidence I am marshaling is meant to be evidence for the claim that parties are *only* carriers of symbolic ideology; that partisanship reduces completely to symbolic attachment; or that partisan disagreement is only identity cheerleading. These deeply identitarian characteristics of partisanship are merely one component of the highly complicated phenomenon of partisan disagreement. I still must show, however, that normative theorists of partisanship should care about these ostensibly problematic aspects of partisanship.

For an obvious objection is, simply, that I have missed the entire point of their projects. Moral Partisanship is not a thesis that aims to describe political reality, but rather to describe partisan disagreement as it *ought* to proceed. The gap I have exposed in this chapter is useful, at most, for showing that we still have a long way to go to achieve disagreement that follows the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 522.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 522-523.

political-liberal ideal of public justification. But Moral Partisanship readily grants as much. The failure of real-world partisans, often, to couch their claims in public discourse in terms of public reasons – the core action-guiding feature of these accounts – does not undermine the ideal according to which they should. The understanding of partisanship in the normative literature is meant to retain some contact with the practice of partisanship we see in the world, but be revisionary or reformist in some way. As with Rawls, and the bulk of public reason liberals who follow him, Bonotti and White & Ypi work in *ideal theory*, insofar as they aim to provide a defense of partisanship for "liberal democracies [that] are reasonably just."<sup>92</sup> As such, they would likely claim, the gap between partisanship in theory and partisanship in practice does not trouble arguments from partisanship to stability or related ideals of justificatory legitimacy.

This objection represents an appeal to idealization – a standard feature of normative theorizing. A normative principle – in this case, the principle of public reason – is not meant to *describe* political reality, but to *guide* it – to posit a standard from which to judge real-world partisan behavior. The aptness and appropriateness of the normative principle stands in relation to the empirical reality it is meant to guide, but the nature of this relationship requires explanation. In this section, I will argue that the idealizing strategy presupposed by Moral Partisanship is objectionable – that is, the answer their accounts presuppose about the relationship between empirical partisanship and normative partisanship is unsatisfactory. A normative theory of partisanship must take account of the messy realities of disagreement in the real world. Before making this argument, though, let me review the two idealizing steps involved in moving from practice to principle that I distinguished in the introduction so it will be clear where exactly my argument intervenes.

1. What is partisanship? Theorists parse the diverse associations of the object of idealization (partisanship) in the real world and identify which elements count as properly "partisan"

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<sup>92</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 12.

for the purposes of the analysis. This is where theorists of Moral Partisanship idealize away the identity components of partisanship (Section 3) into the moral rationalism model of partisan disagreement (Section 2).

2. What is *good* partisanship? Theorists idealize from this model to show how partisanship ought to proceed if it is to have value for democracy. Moral Partisanship argues, here, that only certain kinds of reasons (namely, generalizable or public ones) make for good partisan disagreement.

I contend that the first idealizing move is illegitimate. In so doing, my argument falls in the realist methodological camp. In the past decade, there has been a surge of interest in "realist" or "non-ideal" political theory, with many questioning ideal theory's status as applied moral philosophy (among many other critiques).<sup>93</sup> I invoke, specifically, concerns about conceptual clarity, feasibility, and (the right kind of) normativity.

#### 4.1. *Conceptual Confusion*

My first realist contention is that the idealizing strategy operative in Moral Partisanship has caused these theorists to misplace their object of idealization; they are conceptually confused, or arbitrary. White & Ypi aver that the conceptual core of parties is "the partisan claim" – a set of principles and ideals and policies that the party would adopt when in power. Partisanship is "a highly principled mode of activity" – "a commitment to persuade others of their views through the appeal to reasons that can be generally shared."<sup>94</sup> But parties are not only claim-making bodies that adjudicate among the preferences of their adherents and present those to the wider public. The empirical work I have surveyed demonstrates that a significant part of what political parties are is missing from this account. They are sources of deep attachment and meaning in

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<sup>93</sup> For a longer discussion of realism and extensive referencing, see Section 2 of the next chapter.

<sup>94</sup> White and Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 3.

partisans' lives – a prism of identity that is a primary way most citizens of contemporary democracies relate to politics. Moral Partisanship effectively takes sides on the empirical debate between instrumental and socialization view of partisan identity.

One way of describing the worry with conceptual confusion is that the arguments within Moral Partisanship risk being made true by mere definitional fiat and thus threaten an unedifying circularity.<sup>95</sup> It is especially instructive to consider these issues in the context of Bonotti's argument from partisanship to stability understood as the overlapping consensus undergirded through public reasoning. There are many instances in Bonotti's text, for example, that encourage the suspicion that much of the argument from partisanship to stability hinges on definitional matters. Bonotti claims to show how "in fact the very normative demands of partisanship are in syntony with those of public reason."<sup>96</sup> The nature of the connection between partisanship and the commitment to public reasoning is intrinsic, on his account: "partisanship itself, as a normative conception, embodies an *intrinsic* commitment to public reason"<sup>97</sup>; and: "once we understand the distinctive normative demands of partisanship, we can see that there is no inherent tension between them and the demands of the Rawlsian overlapping consensus."<sup>98</sup> The language of "intrinsic" and "inherent" – as well as the repeated usage of stressing modifiers such as "in fact" and "itself" and "once we understand" – indicate Bonotti thinks there is something inevitable, almost natural, conceptually speaking, about the connection between partisanship and public reason (and hence stability). There seems a real sense, on this account, in which the proposition that "political parties threaten societal stability" is simply unintelligible.

The question to ask here is: Is this the right way of understanding partisanship? Is the political party, at least as an ideal type, as naturally committed to public reason, and as inevitably facilitative – at least, given the proper normative guidance – of the overlapping consensus and stability as Bonotti supposes? These works contain surprisingly little motivation for the move of

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<sup>95</sup> The remainder of this section adapts my argument in Section 5 of "Does Partisanship Contribute to Stability?"

<sup>96</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

building the normative demands of public reason into the very concept of partisanship, as opposed to other candidate normative functions partisanship might fulfill. Instead of partisanship's intrinsic connection to public reason, why might partisanship not suggest an intrinsic connection to, say, a morally valuable form of loyalty, as Muirhead argues, and which does not involve an intrinsic commitment to public reason?<sup>99</sup> This latter view, to emphasize, is also a normative one. True, Bonotti does point to various historical and empirical reasons to suggest that parties naturally, at their best, but also in political practice, exert the sort of broadening effects on public discourse that may plausibly be distilled into a commitment to public reason.<sup>100</sup> This is the kind of motivating story that is needed to convince that his normative definition is the right one, but, alas, I do not think it is up to that challenge. Equations between partisanship and other normative functions can equally lay claim to plausible emergence from partisanship as an empirical practice – consider, again, loyalty. The fact that this (and other) normative values do not require a commitment to public reasoning, and therefore might not necessarily support the overlapping consensus, suggests that Bonotti's argument trades in significant part on the definitional move.

The worry then becomes that, especially in the case of Bonotti, it is not very interesting that his idiosyncratic normative conception of partisanship contributes to stability, since it seems to be made true, in significant part, by conceptual assertion.<sup>101</sup> How surprising is it that partisanship contributes to stability as the overlapping consensus through public reason, given that partisanship is defined as the very thing that stability happens to require? To the extent this is true, it gives us no independent reasons to value political parties or partisanship. In this light, Bonotti's statements such as "once we understand the distinctive normative demands of

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<sup>99</sup> Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age*, Chapter 5.

<sup>100</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 120-122, 104-109.

<sup>101</sup> In a review of Bonotti, Lea Ypi similarly critiques the definitional move: "If we interpret both partisanship and political liberalism as ideal projects, they are of course compatible but as a matter of definition": Lea Ypi, "A Sufficiently Just Liberal Society Is an Illusion," *Res Publica* 25, no. 4 (2019): 463-74, at 466. I am quite sympathetic to Ypi's comments here, but I build on and sharpen her argument by offering detailed reasons for why a theory of partisanship that is excessively idealized prevents action guidance, which she declines to offer. She also fails to situate her own work within the methodological dilemmas here described.

partisanship" assume a question-begging ring.<sup>102</sup> Nor is this issue avoided by Bonotti's construal of the commitment to public reasoning as something that partisans automatically take on when they decide to become partisans: "when citizens decide to promote their religious or other comprehensive doctrines qua partisans, that is, via political parties, they are already committing to public reason and to an overlapping consensus."<sup>103</sup> Bonotti is proposing that public reason is not really constraining of partisanship, since being a partisan simply means conforming to public reason. But this simply moves back the constraining effects a level, to the definitional question of who counts as a partisan. Again, definitional work looms large.

Another way of framing the problems with Bonotti's definitional argument is to say that he connects a highly idealized and technical concept with another highly idealized and technical concept. He defends, that is, the value of partisanship (understood as something fairly esoteric from the perspective of everyday partisans) with reference to its support of the normative value of stability (understood as an equally esoteric overlapping consensus of a particular kind of moral allegiance to the state). But one problem with this argument is that, where neither the concept being argued for nor the concept it is supposed to support is particularly self-evident from the perspective of everyday political observation, it invites the question: So what? Why care about this phenomenon describable as "partisanship," when to do so, we must also get on board with this other phenomenon describable as "stability"? Bonotti has not provided much motivation or argumentation for why Rawls's notion of stability is correct, or important – important enough to ground a defense of a concept of which democratic theorists (and many democratic citizens) have long been skeptical. Those predisposed to either agnosticism or hostility toward the contribution of parties to democratic politics are unlikely to be persuaded. I do not mean to say that we are therefore doomed to merely descriptive analysis of partisanship. One might, for instance, argue that partisanship-as-public reasoning fosters recognizably valuable democratic

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<sup>102</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

goods, such as motivation to get involved in politics. Such an argument connects a technical concept with a familiar concept, thereby making the argument for partisanship more plausible. This problem seems less potent for White & Ypi's account, insofar as their argument makes less use of Rawlsian concepts, running, instead, from partisanship to a more "democratic" rather than "liberal" conception of reason-giving. Still, the heart of their account is a similar appeal to the value of justificatory legitimacy "situat[ed] in a tradition of democratic theory committed to the importance of political justification" through principled claim-making.<sup>104</sup>

The answer they would presumably give is that this is what makes partisanship valuable for these accounts – its ability to contribute to an ideal of legitimacy understood as justification. But it might be just as appropriate to theorize parties as kinds of *communities* – as indeed I shall – and to subject this aspect of partisanship to normative inquiry – to ask under what conditions partisanship as an identity furthers, or hinders, a normative understanding of democracy. This means that the conceptual core from which we begin theorizing – level I of idealization – requires amendment from the way Moral Partisanship understands it.

Patrick Tomlin's point about the different levels of idealization warranted by different kinds of concepts is relevant here. Tomlin argues that concepts like justice are "first-order normative/deontic" concepts, and can suitably idealize from many facts about human nature. Other concepts – like democracy – are different. Democracy is a proposed solution to the problem of disagreement over first-order normative concepts (like justice), and its value is in helping us realize better versions of first-order concepts (i.e., more just societies). Tomlin writes:

"When thinking about democracy conceived of as a problem-solving concept, we begin our theorising deep within non-ideal theory – we are not to assume strict compliance....

And we are not to assume ideal reasoning capacities for, again, those form part of the problem [we are trying to address in the first place]. Since the problem arises from

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<sup>104</sup> White & Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, 55.

certain aspects of human nature, any solution would need to take human nature into account in a way that theories of justice or fairness may not need to. Any theory of democracy that does not take human nature seriously may run the risk of providing circular recommendations, and circular recommendations are not good solutions to problems."<sup>105</sup>

So, in order to make the distinctive problems of a concept like democracy remain in the picture, we have to rule out a certain degree of ideal theory. For the same reason Tomlin thinks democracy must be "significantly more embedded in social and physical reality" than concepts like justice – its second-order normative nature – so too must partisanship. To do otherwise is to misunderstand the nature of the object of inquiry. There is something inevitably, and especially, non-ideal about partisanship, as opposed to theorizing about other kinds of concepts; we should be "utopophobes" about partisanship in particular.

The critique from conceptual confusion constitutes, at base, a plea for methodological consistency. Theorists of partisanship already go some way to accepting some "realistic" methodological constraints on an ideal theory of democracy in order to frame the very problems their theories address. They accept that democratic politics will always contain disagreement, and that political parties are, and are likely to remain at least for the foreseeable future, the main sites and channels of that disagreement. The question then becomes, why should we accept the interminability of disagreement and the existence of parties and partisanship without accepting some of the baser elements of partisan disagreement enumerated above? The worry is that the acceptance of only certain kinds of empirical facts seems ad hoc – engineered for the purpose of enhancing the plausibility and attractiveness of a certain normative framework.<sup>106</sup> The

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<sup>105</sup> Patrick Tomlin, "Should We Be Utopophobes about Democracy in Particular?," *Political Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2012): 36–47, at 45.

<sup>106</sup> Ancell makes a similar point about Rawlsian political liberalism. In order to frame the very problem political liberalism tries to address – reconciling authority with moral pluralism – Rawls already makes some concessions to realism (otherwise we might suppose citizens would converge on the moral truth). But he argues that, *by those same*

instrumental view of partisanship presupposed by the public-justification defense of partisanship is utopian in the Tomlinian sense because it is partial with respect to the empirical facts it accounts for in a way that causes it to miss out on core features of that very concept.

#### 4.2. Feasibility

At this point, defenders of Moral Partisanship might insist that there is still value to the normative nature of their conception of partisanship, since it provides valuable critical purchase on real-world political pathologies. Politics would be better if more partisans conformed to the demands of public reason more often. The action guidance of normative theory justifies its idealization. My case that it is incumbent upon theorists of partisanship to take account of the ways in which disagreement diverges from moral rational disagreement would be weakened, perhaps fatally, if we could *expect* disagreement to conform to those presumptions in a possible world near to ours. But a relevant, unexplored issue here – one essential to addressing critical usefulness – is the *feasibility* of this normative project.<sup>107</sup> Concerns of feasibility have generated a rich literature as part of broader inquiries into non-ideal theory and political realism<sup>108</sup>, but I limit myself to a relatively simple thought: that the degree of action guidance of a normative theory of partisanship is limited by infeasible conditions (a simple version of "ought implies can"). This is already to move away from Bonotti, with his claim that "the fact that many (perhaps most) partisans do not actually fulfill this commitment to public reasoning does not undermine the claim that they ought to."<sup>109</sup> What he should have said is that the empirical reality does not *necessarily* undermine the normative claim – for, as non-ideal theorists have long emphasized,

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*constraints of realism*, political liberalism must account for less felicitous moral-psychological facts. Aaron Ancell, "The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5, no. 4 (2019): 410–28. See also Enoch, "Against Public Reason," 117–129.

<sup>107</sup> Indeed, to my knowledge, there is no sustained discussion of questions of feasibility or related concerns anywhere in the new partisanship literature.

<sup>108</sup> See, e.g., Zofia Stemplowska, "Feasibility: Individual and Collective," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33, no. 1 (2016): 273–91; Holly Lawford-Smith, "Understanding Political Feasibility," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (September 2013): 243–59.

<sup>109</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, 109.

there are cases in which stubborn, unfavorable empirical realities should indeed influence the character or attractiveness of normative ideals.<sup>110</sup>

It is worth examining, then, the feasibility of the idealizing conditions set out – what politics and partisans would have to look like for partisanship to contribute to legitimacy-as-justification – and the nature of the barriers that stand in the way of their realization. Bonotti enumerates a number of background conditions that must be met in order for party politics to be "a fair scheme of cooperation," largely in the context of his discussion of political obligation.<sup>111</sup> These criteria also seem central to the broader political-liberal project within which he situates his general defense of partisanship, including the argument from stability. How realistic are these conditions? I call attention, in particular, to the *stubbornness* of motivated reasoning, group-based thinking and other psychological mechanisms. Summarizing the relevant findings on these "formidable obstacles to thinking rationally" about politics, Ancell notes that "since these obstacles arise from normal features of human psychology together with features endemic to politics," – and, I would add, especially endemic to *partisan* politics – "there is no reason to believe that they will disappear in [even] an ideal liberal society."<sup>112</sup>

I do not wish to overdraw the point. It is not impossible for some partisans to heed the call to engage in public reasoning; Moral Partisanship's normative recommendations do not completely lack action guidance. But given the nature of the barriers – the inherently adversarial nature of party competition, and the way this exacerbates tendencies with deep roots in human psychology – I remain skeptical on grounds of feasibility that partisanship will contribute to the overlapping consensus and stability and sustained commitment to public reasoning for any great

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<sup>110</sup> See work on the theory of the "second-best," including, e.g., David Wiens, "Assessing Ideal Theories: Lessons from the Theory of Second Best," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 15, no. 2 (May 2016): 132–49.

<sup>111</sup> Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies*, Chapter 2.

<sup>112</sup> Ancell, "The Fact of Unreasonable Pluralism," 420. Muirhead also questions the feasibility of partisans to a large degree adhering to public reason constraints. He thinks the demand for parties to "mobilize" the citizenry requires them to engage in more particularistic forms of appeals that would not often rise to the standards of public justification, and that therefore partisans would "have to choose" between mobilization and justification: Russell Muirhead, "Partisan Justification," *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 82–89, at 87–88. This argument is complementary to mine, but I have emphasized in this chapter a different set of mechanisms that makes justification standards less feasible, and also shown more precisely in what ways Moral Partisanship's normative vision depends on the empirical feasibility of its theoretical constraints.

proportion of the citizenry. And this, I think, severely limits the scope of the argument. Even if we grant the claim that partisans who strictly adhere to public reason can contribute to the moral stability of a well-ordered liberal regime, the relevance of this argument to our own world may be fairly called into question. Even if, that is, Bonotti has shown that there are stability-related reasons to value some specific practice describable as "partisanship," if that "partisanship" consists in a rarefied practice that few actual partisans can live up to or perhaps even recognize, then he has not shown that there are stability-related reasons to value partisanship as we find it in the real world. This argument risks becoming idealized in the pejorative sense of the term, vindicating the criticisms of non-ideal and realist thinkers, and encouraging the wrong attitude toward the relationship between partisanship and stability in our own polities. For the fact that a form of partisanship we are unlikely to see in the near future (if ever) would contribute to stability does not tell us what kind of partisanship best contributes to stability today.

#### *4.3. Normativity*

The last reason why a normative theory of partisanship must take seriously partisanship as a social identity is that doing so yields a different picture of the normative role of parties in democracy. It opens up a whole new site of normative inquiry – about what kinds relationships partisan identity can license – between citizens, and between citizens and the state – and when those relationships can be democracy-supportive or democracy-hindering. In order to appreciate the specific normative role partisanship plays in democracy that I will later highlight, we must operate with a richer understanding of what partisanship is – beyond just an exercise in reasoning. This is not to say that the choice of normative ideals (the second idealizing move) follows directly from the prior conceptual move, but it will certainly be influenced by it. If one thinks partisanship is fundamentally about formulating and making political claims, then justificatory ideals of legitimacy are more natural a fit than they would be if one thinks partisanship is fundamentally an identity.

As I will argue later, there are significant democratic virtues to partisanship conceived as an identity – virtues sometimes gestured toward by social scientists. The expressive model of party attachment explains (and the instrumental view of parties fails to adequately explain) the ability of partisanship to "generate strong emotions and drive political engagement."<sup>113</sup> The fact that partisanship lends itself to deep attachment and transcends disagreements over the moral principles that may have led one to adopt a party label in the first place turns out to be a crucial motivating mechanism for encouraging felicitous democratic behavior. It is no accident that the most engaged partisans – actually, the most engaged citizens simpliciter – are those who identify most strongly with their party.<sup>114</sup> Predicating partisanship on moral-rational disagreement neglects one of the most powerfully motivating mechanisms in political life.

But the negative side is relevant too, because we cannot gain a full appreciation of the harms of certain forms of political participation and association if we assume away partisanship as a social identity from the very beginning. This is especially true in certain contemporary democracies experiencing polarization – where the relationship among the cognitive, affiliative, and symbolic elements of partisan identity is changing, as I will soon show. What, precisely, is wrong when partisanship begins to look more like cultural attachment? How do we isolate and criticize such harms without falling back on an unrealistic model of partisan disagreement? These are among the questions I will address in the rest of this dissertation.

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<sup>113</sup> Huddy and Bankert, "Political Partisanship as a Social Identity," 2.

<sup>114</sup> Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe, "Expressive Partisanship."

## Chapter 2: Political Partisanship

*"Partisanship is a distinct identity, and participation as a partisan is a form of identity politics."*

— Nancy Rosenblum<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

In the last chapter, I illustrated the ways in which some leading normative accounts of partisanship rely on a model of political disagreement and partisanship that diverges considerably from those phenomena in the real world, and I cast doubt on the attractiveness of such idealizing. A core feature of empirical partisanship that I focused on is the "identity" component: the idea that partisanship is often not a carrier of prior moral beliefs or generalizable principles, but is an identity in its own right often compared to social identities like religion. Partisanship is, for many, a fairly stable form of self-orientation significantly involving relational motivations and evaluations. This is especially – and increasingly – the case under conditions of partisan polarization such as those obtaining in the contemporary United States. When normative theorists limit their picture of partisanship to principled claim-making, they miss out on a great deal of contemporary politics.

But this argument immediately raises two important clusters of issues. The first concerns what kind of conception of partisanship and political contestation might be a better theoretical starting point than what Moral Partisanship presupposes. If I have successfully established the need for a more realistic understanding of partisanship, and if my claim that democratic theorists must take partisanship seriously as an identity is compelling, then what, precisely, does such an understanding look like? Merely arguing that it is incumbent upon normative theorists to move further beyond the conceptual presuppositions of deliberative theory is not sufficient to show what would be a better conceptual starting point. More to the point, many commentators worry

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 347.

about the ascendance of the expressive dimension of partisanship I have identified, and so worry embracing the identity components of partisanship means acquiescing to zero-sum political conflict and the culture wars. Of particular concern are the ways in which this form of partisanship increasingly plays an outsized role not only in politics, but also in ostensibly non-political spheres, shaping citizen interactions in social life.<sup>2</sup>

An urgent question, then, is whether there is a normative view of partisan identity available to us that navigates between the over-idealized normative view (partisanship without identity) and that of the social-identity literature (partisanship as cultural identity). Can we take seriously partisanship's identitarian components without collapsing into polarized tribalism? Just as we should reject views of partisanship divorced from its empirical reality, so must we avoid undue capitulation to the status quo, as diagnosed by the often-fatalistic empirical literature. Although the latter views are primarily descriptive, participants in this influential wave of political-psychological analysis are rarely shy in offering prescription: the minimization of partisanship, often, and sometimes even the abandonment of democratic ideals altogether.<sup>3</sup> This is too hasty; it overlooks the idea that partisan identity can take different forms, and that some might be democracy-promoting, rather than democracy-hindering.<sup>4</sup>

The second cluster of issues addresses the normative grounds of any alternative vision of partisan identity. By rejecting liberal accounts of partisanship and embracing a more group-based political ontology, do we not also reject the attractive constraints on permissible political behavior to which liberal views are committed? If not, what kind of political morality could

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<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Shafrank, "Political Consequences of Partisan Prejudice," *Political Psychology* 41, no. 1 (2020): 35–51; Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (July 1, 2015): 690–707; Lilliana Mason, "Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization," *The Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 47–66.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). For an exception, see Frances McCall Rosenbluth and Ian Shapiro, *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Methodologically, this chapter's project is most similar to that of Joel Landis, who similarly seeks to expose potential benefits of parties missed by over-idealization, specifically within the context of David Hume's thought. See Joel E. Landis, "Whither Parties? Hume on Partisanship and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 2 (2018): 219–30.

ground ethical constraints and shape the value of partisanship as an identity? Justifying my conceptual choices about the proper relationship between partisanship as an empirical practice and a normative ideal seems to open a Pandora's box of larger questions about the relationship between morality and politics.

I address both sets of issues in this chapter. I develop and defend a *political* conception of partisan identity. I argue that what goes wrong with partisanship under conditions of polarization is that it fails to be a sufficiently political identity, collapsing, instead, into a cultural identity. I seek to move beyond the claim that partisanship shares much in common with cultural identities – a claim ubiquitous, yet frustratingly undertheorized, in the polarization literature – by elaborating two dimensions along which political partisanship properly differs from cultural partisan identity. The harms of polarized partisan identity I isolate are its constraint of political agency and its transformation of the content of political contestation. To avoid these problems, political partisan identity must maintain a degree of contingency in relation to underlying social identities and respect certain minimal democratic norms of engagement with opponents. These criteria are partly instruments of conceptual analysis, but they are also, importantly, normative criteria that constitute a critical diagnosis of the state of contemporary partisan identity.

I begin, in Section 2, with an inquiry into the status of "politics" and "the political" in three strands of contemporary political theory before introducing my own intended sense of these terms. In Section 3, I provide some very brief comments on the overall structure of identity. Sections 4 and 5 contain my investigations into two large characteristics of partisan identity – agency and conflict.

## **2. Realist Normativity and the Autonomy of Politics**

The need to explore the normative foundations of my view of partisanship can be put in the form of an objection to my methodological project as developed to this point. I have suggested that efforts to defend the value of partisanship for its contribution to liberal ideals of

democratic discourse – especially public justification – are suspect because they involve idealizing away from much of partisanship as an empirical practice. But, setting aside the soundness of the argument from partisanship to public justification or public reason, such views have a certain normative structure that has much to recommend it. Moral Partisanship has a clear account of where partisanship's value comes from. These accounts have a clear sense of normative anchoring, or grounding, in a deeper ethical framework that provides the core elements of a normative evaluation of a concept: the value it contributes, the harms it causes when it deviates from that value, and the corollary set of limiting principles, or ethical constraints, to maximize the value and minimize the harms. For example, the Moral Partisanship view seems committed to a roughly-Kantian principle of individual moral autonomy as the basis for democratic judgment and agency, which gives meaning and urgency to the project of justifying government decisions through reasons each citizen can accept. But if we reject their methodological framework, and embrace, as I have suggested, a more group-, identity-, or relationship-based political ontology that affords an (as yet unspecified) role for partisan identity to shape political judgment, do we not also reject such an attractive principle? And do we not surrender even the possibility for ethical constraints on valuable partisanship – that is, various moral principles to which partisans must conform for partisanship to be valuable? From where would the criteria for judging partisanship's value and disvalue come? Identifying these normative foundations is an essential precondition for the possibility of my account of partisanship having critical purchase; without it, I seem doomed to an uncritical defense of the status quo.

In response to these objections, I turn to the literature on realist political theory. Arguing against interpretations of political theory as applied moral philosophy aloof from real politics that they attribute to mainstream, especially Rawlsian, liberal theory, many theorists have offered their own methodological perspectives and manifestoes on the state of the discipline.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Seminal founding realist statements include Bernard Williams, “Realism and Moralism in Political Theory,” in *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–17; Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Judith Shklar, “The

category of "realism" is by now familiar enough in contemporary political theory, occupying a central place, along with the debate over ideal versus nonideal theory, in the recent explosion of methodological self-reflection. But realism encompasses a vast and quite diverse array of critiques and alternative stances on a better relationship between moral and political theorizing.<sup>6</sup> One common position is that political theory must account for, or respect, the autonomy of the political sphere: that which distinguishes politics, political relations, and political participation from other spheres of individual and social life. Realist thought "wants to give greater autonomy to politics (from morality, economics, etc.) as a discrete sphere of human activity."<sup>7</sup> Much of what goes wrong with mainstream theory, or "moralism," as Williams influentially dubbed it, can be traced to a failure to adequately account for the distinctively political nature of various concepts (notably power, pluralism, and coercion) or principles (especially legitimacy). "The real" that theory must be oriented toward, for this group of realists, are the problems and concerns special to the political sphere.<sup>8</sup> Emphasizing the autonomy of politics is key to realizing the central realist promise (and arguably its greatest source of tension): offering a theory of politics that avoids the excessive moralism of mainstream theory while simultaneously identifying sufficient sources of normativity to judge good from bad and prevent a collapse into might-makes-right Realpolitik.

It is far from obvious, however, what "politics" or "the political" is meant to signify, and the implications for normative political theorizing of drawing such distinctions. Is it to suggest

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Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–38.

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful categorization and critical discussion of some of the main themes within realist thought, see Alice Baderin, "Two Forms of Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 13, no. 2 (2013): 132–53.

<sup>7</sup> Matt Sleat, "Legitimacy in Realist Thought: Between Moralism and Realpolitik," *Political Theory* 42, no. 3 (February 2014): 314–37, at 315.

<sup>8</sup> Some realists have levied a more radical critique, arguing not only that different principles and concepts apply in the political realm, but that the normative underpinnings of such analysis are entirely different from moral normativity: "that political normativity is its own distinctive kind of normativity, independent of moral normativity." Jonathan Leader Maynard and Alex Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?," *Ethics* 128, no. 4 (June 2018): 756–87, at 757. Like Maynard and Worsnip, I am skeptical of the validity of this move, but remain officially agnostic. I am more concerned with whether there are values and modes of behavior more appropriate in political versus social life – an inquiry that remains valid whether or not the values in one sphere or another are values of an entirely different kind. In other words, my reason for insisting on the specificity of the political is not to demarcate a unique moral-epistemological realm in which lives a special form of "ought," and so I am agnostic as to whether the more radical critique of political moralism is successful.

that the scope of content of our concept of politics – what counts as a political question – is wrong, either too expansive or too restrictive?<sup>9</sup> That politics is understood excessively optimistically, or pessimistically, about various facts of human nature or prospects for achieving the common good?<sup>10</sup> Or that we have strayed too far from classical understandings of these concepts, perhaps allied to a critique of the modern world, or else to ordinary-language understandings of political affairs such as those that occupy the pages of major newspapers?<sup>11</sup> And what is at stake, normatively speaking, in definitional questions about politics or the political? Merely labeling something "political," of course, is not enough to show that it has value for democratic politics. There is a risk that the realist strategy begs the question; we need a further account explaining why it is important that partisan identity be political in the senses I identify below, and the success of my arguments for why partisanship ought to look like this must rise or fall on their own terms.

I advance a version of this realist critique by arguing that we must recognize the specifically political nature of certain *identities* and the relationships to which they give rise. Partisanship, properly understood, is a distinctively *political* identity: Political Partisanship. What is wrong with contemporary, especially American, partisanship in the real world is that it is insufficiently political, displaying, instead, some features common to forms of identity more appropriate in the social sphere. As a preview, the "real" in my realism refers to the richer conception of partisan identity I began sketching in the last chapter, while the normative underpinnings of distinguishing good from bad partisan identity are ultimately rooted in a civic-republican view of democracy that emphasizes the importance of participation, solidarity, and

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<sup>9</sup> For the latter, consider the classical feminist critique that "the personal is political" – a claim (among other things) that we must broaden our definition of what counts as politics to include oppression in the "private" realm. Jean Bethke Elshtain makes such a criticism in the context of a broader reconfiguration of the public and political worlds vis-à-vis the social and private worlds in Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> For critiques of political optimism rooted in alternative understandings of politics or political agency, see Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*; Brennan, *Against Democracy*; Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*; and the tradition from Carl Schmitt I trace below. While it might seem strange to associate critiques of excessive political pessimism with the generally-serious tone of realism, Hannah Arendt and her followers espouse a view of politics as one of self-actualization rooted in a (controversial) understanding of people's true, or real, political nature.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Waldron, *Political Political Theory: Essays on Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

belonging – values further spelled out in the following two chapters. But to understand my own brand of realism's marrying of such participatory values with a deep focus on political pluralism and opposition, it will be helpful to first consider three influential examples of advocacy for the autonomy of the political – those of Schmitt, Arendt, and Rawls – and compare what their view of "politics" amounts to and their justification for that move to my own.

Many strains of contemporary realism trace their origins to the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt's articulation of the distinctiveness of politics in his seminal work, *The Concept of the Political*. For Schmitt, famously, politics centers on the political relationship of friend versus enemy (or foe). This is the fundamental unit of political analysis, "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced."<sup>12</sup> Politics is inescapably a matter of opposing groups characterized by mutual enmity, occurring always under the threat of conflict and war. Schmitt argues that the basis or origins of these group associations, or political communities, can be many: "The political can derive its energy from the most varied human endeavors, from the religious, economic, moral, and other antitheses. It does not describe its own substance, but only the intensity of an association or dissociation of human beings whose motives can be religious, national (in the ethnic or cultural sense), economic, or of another kind and can effect at different times different coalitions and separations."<sup>13</sup> So the content of political friendship, and its distinction from political adversarialism, is largely irrelevant for Schmitt's account of the logic of political competition.<sup>14</sup> As with James Madison's analysis of the basis of political faction, Schmitt emphasizes the human propensity for forming groups around just

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> As Vinx comments: "Since the political is not tied to any particular substantive distinction, Schmitt argues, it is naïve to assume that the political will disappear once conflicts arising from a particular distinction no longer motivate opposing groups to fight. Political identification is likely to latch on to another distinction that will inherit the lethal intensity of political conflict." Lars Vinx, "Carl Schmitt," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/schmitt/>. Schmitt empties political competition of its ideological content – distinguishing political opponents by merely the color of their uniform, perhaps, and denying them any deeper sources of motivation – in precisely the same way that simpler social-psychological analyses of contemporary polarization style partisan conflict a battle of "us versus them." One could argue that this is its own kind of de-politicization, condescending to real citizens on opposite sides of a political fight that really matters.

about anything, and insists that, once formed, these political identities take on an existential cast.<sup>15</sup> To politicize is to draw fundamental distinctions between groups of people, to activate the salience of a particular group identity and demarcate it from an enemy group, superseding all other social relationships.

Schmitt is concerned, then, with defining the autonomy of the political as a realm of clarified conflict consisting in differences of opposition. Examining the connection between Schmitt's account of the political and his critique of liberal politics helps reveal the values underpinning his definition – why it matters that we correctly distinguish political relationships (or identities) from other kinds. The problem with liberalism, for Schmitt, is that it is de-politicizing. It tries to style solutions as achievable via compromise (we can add deliberation) in a way that denies the formation of identities of existential difference at the core of his concept of politics. Liberalism amounts to a "domestication" or "taming" of our true political nature.<sup>16</sup> Why is that bad? One of his answers leans toward the descriptive: that liberal politics represents an impossible illusion because the formation and negotiation of friend-enemy relationships are just part of what it means to be human and so are inevitable. But his more normative, interesting – and, given his well-known association with National Socialism, deeply problematic – answer seems to be based on the intrinsic value of this sort of political opposition: it gives us a source of meaning or self-understanding without which life would be shallow. A liberal politics of deliberation and compromise thus represents a disorienting negation of fundamental motivational drives and values.

The fact that Schmitt's interest in delineating the political is based not only on a descriptive political sociology of difference but also on a positive account of the value of political

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<sup>15</sup> Madison writes in *The Federalist* No. 10 that factions form when citizens "are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, addressed to the rights of other citizens," and that "the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to come to unfriendly passions." George W. Carey and James McClellan, eds., *The Federalist* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 43.

<sup>16</sup> For more on Schmitt's critique of liberalism and democracy, see John P. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Charles Larmore, "Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberal Democracy," in his *The Morals of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

conflict helps clarify that even though the political is distinguishable from the moral in one sense, his project still constitutes a normative intervention. But Schmitt is quite unclear about what exactly the normative grounding of his political vision consists in, making it difficult or impossible on his view to rule out seriously pernicious political arrangements (again, though, this should not come as a surprise given his political commitments). The price of defining the autonomy of the political in terms of relations of fundamental opposition to which moral judgments are inappropriate was, as many have noted, the assimilation of judgment about straightforwardly dangerous regimes with better ones. The problem of insufficient room for moral judgment has likewise bedeviled contemporary resuscitations of Schmitt's view of politics. The group of contemporary theorists grouped under the "agonistic" umbrella, while explicitly embracing Schmitt's view of the political as inherently conflictual, has tried to add some moral depth and avoid the darker elements. The attraction of agonist theorists, perhaps most notably Chantal Mouffe, to Schmitt is rooted less in a teleological account of the bracing and clarifying value of political division as in a worry that liberal deliberation has a taming effect on properly open-ended political contestation. Motivated by a critique of what they view as a neoliberal focus on centrist politics, particularly regarding political economy, theorists such as Mouffe, Bonnie Honig, William Connolly, and James Tully attempt to build an agonistic realism of the left that emphasizes the imperative of keeping democratic discourse open to the more hurly-burly, conflictual elements of Schmittian politics.<sup>17</sup> Besides being rooted in certain values of the political left, agonists such as Mouffe are concerned to attenuate the most aggressive impulses of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction by mandating that the "enemy" become instead an

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<sup>17</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso Books, 2000); Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso Books, 2018); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

"adversary."<sup>18</sup> Yet whether these views retain enough normative punch to successfully avoid dangerous forms of illiberalism remains a matter of dispute.<sup>19</sup>

The Schmittian perspective on the autonomy of the political as conflict is helpful for our purposes because it shows that political contestation is not just about disagreement. The process of politicization transforms the groups of people on opposite sides of an interest or issue dispute into a relationship of a deeper kind of opposition; political identities are distinct from the social identities that give rise (wholly or partially) to them. But besides its dubious relationship to morality, Schmitt's position and those that follow it suffer from a seemingly arbitrary restrictiveness of what counts as "political," the examination of which raises a point relevant to all realist analyses. Not all political relationships – not even all political relationships of opposition – rise to the level of the life-or-death opposition his analysis prizes. Critics as far back as Hans Morgenthau have pointed to the tendentious nature of Schmitt's political sociology, describing it as "abstract and rigid," ironically divorced from "historical and psychological reality" in all its complexity.<sup>20</sup> Such idiosyncrasy plagues much contemporary realist theory. William Scheuermann presses this challenge, arguing that "we too often find an implicit conceptual hierarchy where highly abstract claims about the irrepressibility of agonistic politics gain a privileged position vis-à-vis the analysis of social realities, with the latter appearing as an empirical manifestation of a quasi-transcendental concept of the political."<sup>21</sup> It is not only that it is conceptually arbitrary, it is that as long as realism premises its promise to connect philosophy back to politics on an "increasingly rarefied concept of agonistic politics, conceived as possessing its own autonomous logic disconnected from concrete social realities," its realist credentials may be fairly called into question. The worry is that realists (perhaps especially critical realists) risk

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<sup>18</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso Books, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> This debate has most recently resurfaced over the agonist approval of a "left populism" in, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*. Christian Rostbøll, for one, thinks this goes too far; see his "Second-Order Political Thinking: Compromise versus Populism," *Political Studies*, April 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in William Scheuermann, "Getting Past Schmitt? Realism and the Autonomy of Politics," in *Politics Recovered: Realist Thought in Theory and Practice*, ed. Matt Sleat (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 275.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-289.

replacing the assumptions of mainstream political philosophy they criticize with ones equally suspect, if from another point of view. What is needed, instead, is careful analysis of the nuances of political conflict and attention to the fact that pluralism is in reality "a political and social phenomenon that is capable of taking different forms" – forms obscured by Schmitt and his followers' focus on the conceptually blunt friend-enemy distinction.<sup>22</sup> Taking this lesson to heart, my own realism devotes significant attention to the empirical (especially psychological) study of the nature of political conflict and opposition.<sup>23</sup>

A second strand of delineating the autonomy of the political stems from the work of Hannah Arendt. Although Arendt is not often invoked as a progenitor of the contemporary realist movement, her distinctive dissection of the dispositions of "the human condition" and her critique of the modern world, so influential elsewhere in the discipline, are bound up with her insistence that we properly distinguish the private and social realms from the public realm – and recommit to the latter. Arendt's understanding of politics and the public sphere is broadly classical, drawing on Greek notions of polis life. She aims to recover a conception of politics that, in the modern world, has fallen prey to a general devaluation through usurpation by other modes of social being. Arendt's writings, accordingly, are intensely preoccupied with conceptual division, as she identifies "the distinctness and separateness of social, cultural, economic, private, domestic, and public political life. Arendt's scheme centres on crossings of thresholds and boundaries, some physical, some temporal, some symbolic...involv[ing] shifts and changes in our outlook and conduct."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. And as Elizabeth Frazer notes, "it is by no means settled what we mean by political." See her "Political Theory and the Boundaries of Politics," in *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*, ed. David Leopold and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 171–95.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Scheuermann notes that the psychological perspective is one that is especially absent from contemporary realism: "Sleat [for instance] openly concedes that the new realism neglects human psychology and material interests and instead links its core theses about disagreement and conflict to theories of the nature of normative value judgment." Scheuermann, "Getting Past Schmitt? Realism and the Autonomy of Politics," 288.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Frazer, "Hannah Arendt: The Risks of the Public Realm," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (June 2009): 203–23, at 208. See also Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 39.

The political world, for Arendt, is fundamentally a realm of action – of aiming to achieve things new and enduring with our fellow citizens. Unlike the realm of labor, concerned primarily with bodily maintenance and necessity, and the realm of work, concerned primarily with impermanent artificial construction, the realm of action – the political realm – is where "we respond" to a basic human impulse "by beginning something new on our own initiative."<sup>25</sup> To act politically is thus to realize our fundamental human nature. Arendt's view of political life is, as many commentators have noted, non-instrumental and highly normative: for activity to count as political, it must be creative, concerned with permanence and "organized remembrance" – from which more mundane matters of maintenance are distractions.<sup>26</sup> What captivated Arendt most was the circumstances under which human cooperation rose to the level of expressing our distinctness and plurality as individual beings engaged in meaningful encounters in a "space of appearance."<sup>27</sup>

This association of the political with plurality leads Arendt to reject common identity as the source of the citizen bond, especially identity understood ethnically or primordially. Part of what she abhors about the social sphere is its tendency toward conformity, toward making individuals feel that they are "no longer an individual but actually one with all others."<sup>28</sup> Politics is "a way of being together, based on principles of equality and nonviolence, in which people decide what to do and how to live together through open debate and common deliberation" – not, importantly, based on who they already are.<sup>29</sup> Arendt was also profoundly mistrustful of the identity-political movements that were beginning to capture the public imagination and change

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<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.

<sup>26</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198. See also Paris's model of citizenship for a link between action and the political: Crystal Cordell Paris, "Ancient, Modern, and Post-National Democracy: Deliberation and Citizenship Between the Political and the Universal," in *On Civic Republicanism: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, ed. Geoffrey C. Kellow and Neven Leddy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>29</sup> David Arndt, *Arendt on the Political* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 70. See also her emphasis on unpredictability and the power and importance of unforeseen consequences at, e.g., Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 233.

policy; she was even, at least initially, opposed to American school desegregation.<sup>30</sup> Arendt's conception of political identity, then, is quite complicated. On the one hand, she seems to advocate checking our differentiating identities at the door of politics; the political has an important logic of anonymity or depersonalization.<sup>31</sup> Here is Arendt the elitist, the zealous guardian of a pure and heroic and, arguably, outdated notion of politics that figures so prominently in the secondary literature. As Elizabeth Frazer writes, "Arendt famously restricts the class of matters properly public, excluding a swathe of issues that for modern democratic and broadly liberal societies lie at the heart of political concern: economic relations and transactions, social welfare, cultural identities and claims, and reproductive processes and relations."<sup>32</sup> But on the other hand, her preoccupation with plurality and difference as nonnegotiable starting points for theorizing the political indicates an appreciation for individualization – for what makes us *us*. "Each human being," she writes, is "distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be."<sup>33</sup> Social and cultural identities, of course, are the most common shorthand ways by which such differences are recognized and acknowledged in social life.<sup>34</sup> If plurality and difference are at the heart of action, and action is at the heart of politics, then surely Arendt is not the defender of weightless, atomized selfhood her staunchest critics make her out to be.

And so Arendt's thought itself seems to contain resources for reworking at least some of its admittedly unattractive features. Against the firm separation between "social" issues and politics, we can hold, with Honig, that Arendt's own appreciation for creative political work can be enlisted to soften the public/private distinction.<sup>35</sup> We can and should criticize the elitist elements of her view of participation, including her tendency to denigrate mundane politics of

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<sup>30</sup> Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 25-26.

<sup>31</sup> On the link between publicity and anonymity, also in service of a critique of the displacement of the modern public sphere by personalizing tendencies, see also Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> Frazer, "Hannah Arendt," 203.

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175.

<sup>34</sup> One way of reconciling these ideas is to interpret Arendt as arguing that political action requires (can only occur among) distinct, plural individuals, but that our cultivation of this sort of individuality is obstructed by relying on the crutch of given identities. This would be to read Arendt in line with the liberal critics of identity considered later.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), Chapter 4.

maintenance in favor of heroic, world-historical intervention, while valuing her effort to reinvigorate active citizenship in the face of many modern theorists' inclination toward deflationary views of the political. In this sense, though Arendt is undeniably concerned with protecting the autonomy of the political, her project is quite different from similar efforts by realist thinkers to do the same in service of a chastened political outlook. For many realists, "the romanticism of citizen participation inevitably yields to the realities of pluralist intermediaries."<sup>36</sup> This Arendt refutes.

Third, we can compare these various strategies of isolating the political to the liberal concept of politics, and, more specifically, to the "political turn" in liberal political philosophy since Rawls's later work. Rawls and his followers, of course, did not and do not style themselves as "realist" theorists – indeed, they are the most common targets of realist critiques. Nevertheless, in distancing themselves from classical (or "comprehensive") liberalism, they have articulated a clear and highly influential case for what ought to distinguish politics from other spheres. For perhaps the move most characteristic of contemporary liberal political thought is its distinguishing of *political* notions of state legitimacy, of *political* forms of reasoning and discourse, of *political* relationships among citizens. When Rawls describes his theory of justice as "political," he means "that it is framed to apply solely to the basic structure of society" and "presented independently of any wider comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrine."<sup>37</sup> In order for the many formulations of justification and public reason that followed to count as truly "political" – and not be such sectarian, controversial views as those of comprehensive liberalism or, worse, religiously-motivated justifications – the state and its policies must be grounded in "a

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<sup>36</sup> Bruce E. Cain, *Democracy More or Less: America's Political Reform Quandary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 172, quoted in Michael A. Neblo, "Reform Pluralism as Political Theology and Democratic Technology," *Election Law Journal* 13, no. 4 (2014): 526–33, at 526-527.

<sup>37</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 233. See also John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 223–51. Other important early formulations of the "political turn" within liberal theory include Jeremy Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 147 (1987): 127–50; Thomas Nagel, "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 16 (1987): 215–40; Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in *Public and Private Morality*, ed. Stuart Hampshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). For an excellent overview of this turn, see Collis Tahzib, *A Perfectionist Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), Chapter 2.

morally minimal and broadly contractualist framework, as opposed to a comprehensive doctrine."<sup>38</sup> It is this demand that most clearly distinguishes contemporary liberalism from classical liberalism's more spirited, deep-seated emphasis on individualism. As noted in the last chapter, Rawls's "disagreement" is a technical term denoting (among other things) diversity of comprehensive beliefs – ruling out, for instance, Schmitt's relationships of opposition. And the working out of political disagreement through public reason takes place within state institutions and mechanisms of coercion understood as encoding "fair terms of social cooperation between citizens as free and equal."<sup>39</sup>

In liberal theory, then, delimiting "politics" or "the political" constitutes a strategy of privatization of areas of controversy deemed intractable, too controversial or inappropriate for public resolution. The autonomy of politics is autonomy from deep disagreement on fundamental questions of what it means to live a good life. The political turn is a turn toward common ground, toward the minimum required for collective decision-making and the most we can count on in a diverse world. On one reading, it is a rather deflationary view of politics, defining it mostly in the negative; we are very far from Arendt's rhapsodic elegy of the possibilities of public life. Democratic politics should avoid, as far as possible, questions of meaning and value, aiming, instead, to be "*neutral*" on the issue of the good life, and restrict itself to establishing the fair terms within which citizens can pursue their own beliefs about what gives value to their lives."<sup>40</sup>

This is not to say it is not normative, of course. As with Arendt's, the political-liberal concept of politics is also highly normative, as much of the recent literature consists of specification of the (often quite stringent) conditions under which all that we colloquially consider to be politics would count as "political" under this definition. Although the state cannot

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<sup>38</sup> Collis Tahzib, "Perfectionism: Political Not Metaphysical," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 47, no. 2 (2019): 144–78, at 146.

<sup>39</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 67. See also Paul Weithman, *Why Political Liberalism? On John Rawls's Political Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism Without Perfection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2. Emphasis in original.

legitimately base itself on a "comprehensive moral doctrine," as Rawls argues<sup>41</sup>, it does not follow, for the political liberal, that politics is therefore morally groundless. Political liberalism aims to be as non-foundational as possible, so as to respect disagreement, but this non-foundationalism remains grounded in values that, the argument goes, are less likely to court disagreement. This grounding has most often been formulated as consisting of a duty to respect fellow citizens, or through a moralized notion of state stability.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the literature on public reason, this minimalist, common-ground approach to politics comes out clearly in liberal theories of citizenship and national identity, although the two strands have developed largely in isolation from one another. Liberal theorists have devoted a great deal of attention to what makes national identity political. Concerned by the exclusionary effects of "ethnic" or "primordial" visions of citizenship, theorists have sought to remove many elements of culture and social life from ideal citizenship and to preserve wide latitude for contestation and deliberation over the remaining political norms. On this understanding, what makes an identity "political" is the abstracting away from controversial elements of culture and social life in the name of political equality and inclusion.<sup>43</sup>

This project has been criticized from a number of directions. Theorists have worried that political liberalism and the demands of public reason would leave many public debates unresolved, since resolving them requires appeal to private reasons<sup>44</sup>; would be self-defeating, since public reason is itself subject to rejection by reasonable citizens<sup>45</sup>; and would exclude

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<sup>41</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 90.

<sup>42</sup> For the respect-based defense of political liberalism, see Charles Larmore, "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 12 (1999): 599–625; Colin Bird, "Mutual Respect and Neutral Justification," *Ethics* 107, no. 1 (1996): 62–96; James Boettcher, "Respect, Recognition and Public Reason," *Social Theory and Practice* 33, no. 3 (2007): 223–49. For the stability-based defense, see Larry Krasnoff, "Consensus, Stability, and Normativity in Rawls's Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 95, no. 6 (1998): 269–92; Brian Barry, "John Rawls and the Search for Stability," *Ethics* 105, no. 4 (1995): 874–915; Weithman, *Why Political Liberalism?*

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Arash Abizadeh, "Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation? Four Arguments," *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 3 (2002): 495–509.

<sup>44</sup> John Horton, "Rawls, Public Reason and the Limits of Liberal Justification," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 5–23; David A. Reidy, "Rawls's Wide View of Public Reason: Not Wide Enough," *Res Publica* 6, no. 1 (2000): 49–72.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Wall, "Is Public Justification Self-Defeating?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2002): 385–94; David Enoch, "The Disorder of Public Reason," *Ethics* 124, no. 1 (2013): 141–76; Franz Mang, "Public Reason Can Be Reasonably Rejected," *Social Theory and Practice* 43, no. 2 (2017): 343–67.

certain citizens from public debate.<sup>46</sup> But the most important objection for my purposes concerns the type of moral grounding political liberalism seeks. We might worry that, in its effort to justify the state in a way that avoids disagreement – to be all things to all people, morally speaking – political liberalism ends up with a form of politics that abstains from too much. Perhaps such a state dangerously underestimates the role of other values in public life, and, moreover, makes too much of the rational foundations of our politics, and in virtue of both of these things fails to inspire loyalty and legitimacy. It remains a matter of some controversy – and, to my mind at least, it remains a relatively underexplored question – whether it is possible to admit of deeper, or perhaps just different, moral understandings of the political without attempting to "embody the whole truth in politics"<sup>47</sup> and so conflict with the nonnegotiable starting point of modernity: free persons will inevitably disagree.

So, the insistence that there is or should be a uniquely "political" realm of life is fairly common across some prominent yet diverse strains of theory. What is clear from this brief survey, however, is that what the political signifies is by no means obvious or uncontested: "What is, and what ought to be, political," Frazer writes, "is one point on which liberals, libertarians, socialists, communitarians, conservatives, anarchists, feminists, and adherents to other isms part company."<sup>48</sup> It is that *what politics is* is understood differently. This helps clarify that the semantic dispute is not as interesting as how the conceptual choice signified by a focus on "politics" reveals that which is most urgent an object for political theorizing, per these theorists, and what concerns should ultimately, perhaps, influence public policy.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lynn M. Sanders, "Against Deliberation," *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (June 1997): 347–76; Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 442; cited in Tahzib, "Perfectionism: Political Not Metaphysical," 145.

<sup>48</sup> Frazer, "Political Theory and the Boundaries of Politics," 192. Frazer gives further analysis of the many more ways in which "the boundaries of politics" figure across political theory and other disciplines.

<sup>49</sup> That said, the semantic question here is surely interesting in its own right, though beyond the bounds of the present discussion. It is interesting, that is, that such methodologically diverse theorists should be concerned that their theories be properly "political." I shy away from a cynical reading of disciplinary turf wars – whose research agenda is more faithful to the core spirit of "political theory"? – and tend to think each captures something important of the endlessly complicated topic of politics.

With this lesson in mind, I declare that my own realist concern to identify the autonomy of the political is motivated by a belief that polarization and other pathological forms of partisanship – the urgent problems that ought to be objects of political theorizing – can be profitably understood as failures to maintain the properly political nature of partisan identity. Despite their efforts to hew closer to the spirit of real-world politics, realist thinkers have hitherto been just as neglectful of partisanship as their mainstream targets. Yet many of the themes of a realist understanding of politics just considered lend themselves quite naturally to a study of partisanship, and especially well to my own study of partisan identity. First, there is the sober contention that politics is fundamentally about conflict, and that this conflict takes the form not just of principled disagreement or divergent interests, but of clashes of identity as well. And second, there is the more positive insistence that politics is a distinctive realm of participation, and that participation and politicization, at least of certain kinds, are valuable. These dual concerns constitute the basis for a realist republican account of partisan identity.

The idea that polarized partisanship is in some sense non-political finds repeated expression across the relevant empirical literatures, with a distinction between "the context of politics" and "nonpolitical domains" operative in many analyses of partisanship and polarization.<sup>50</sup> A good deal of the intuitive force of empirical diagnoses of affective polarization trades on the image of politics and social life collapsing together. I share the intuition, but caution that, without more theoretical explication, the rather crude distinction between the two obscures more than it illuminates, and also risks imposing a thick wall between the social and the political.

My own view of what ought to distinguish political from cultural partisan identity is motivated by broadly civic-republican ideals. Rather than shielding politics from moral inquiry (as some realists do) or safeguarding private life from politics (as political liberals do), civic

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<sup>50</sup> These terms are from Richard M. Shafranek, "Political Considerations in Nonpolitical Decisions: A Conjoint Analysis of Roommate Choice," *Political Behavior*, June 2019, 1–30. Similar language can be found in many of the studies cited above. For another illustrative example, see also the use of "extra-political identity" in Christopher Claassen, Patrick Tucker, and Steven Smith, "Ideological Labels in America," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2015).

republicans seek to preserve the autonomy of the political to further the values of active citizenship, including political agency, motivation, democratic culture, and participation.<sup>51</sup> Whereas some advocate protecting the autonomy of the political in order to demote its importance or debunk its romanticization<sup>52</sup>, I seek a robust recommitment to political life. In what follows, I set out two normative criteria that distinguish political from cultural forms of partisan identity. Conforming to these criteria will, I argue, help mitigate the dangers of affective polarization, while, more positively, enabling partisan identity to promote civic-republican values.

Advocating for the autonomy and importance of political identity in a civic republican key is not to argue that political identity – our relationship to politics, the role of politics in our lives – need necessarily always take center stage. As will become clear, part of my diagnosis of the pathologies of contemporary polarization is its tendency to "tyrannize" some of what is valuable in personal, social, and cultural – that is, non-partisan and non-political – life.<sup>53</sup> There is sometimes a tendency in spirited defenses of democratic citizenship and participation such as my own to predicate citizenship's value on an implicit or even explicit disdain for private and social life. Benjamin Barber, for instance, whose "strong democracy" contains much to admire and will be an important source for my account of citizenship as shared action in Chapter 4, frequently betrays an overzealous emphasis on citizenship as "sovereign over other roles."<sup>54</sup> Barber also seeks "the autonomy of politics," but he means by this a realm almost entirely "self-sustaining"<sup>55</sup> and "independent"<sup>56</sup> from the distracting dictates of the private, where "values and ideas...drawn from religious and metaphysical systems...acquire their legitimacy from their political fecundity

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Nationalism and Patriotism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> Michael Oakshott, *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*, ed. Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> Walzer uses the language of "tyranny" in this sense throughout his Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 208.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

– from acceptance into and transformation through the democratic political process."<sup>57</sup> The supremacy of political identity provides, for Barber, "a political means by which the multiple identities of the individual in the private marketplace can be ordered and made consistent with political judgment" – a "psychic integration" of what can otherwise be conflicting interests stemming from one's manifold identities.<sup>58</sup> I do not think this is the right way of conceiving political identity or the autonomy of the political – indeed, as I shall soon suggest, this sort of highly integrationist view is a prime symptom of polarized politics.

To address one common criticism of this move in advance, I acknowledge that when attempts to specify the political take the form of covert shielding of unjust social practices from political inquiry, or to maintain an elitist view of participation, they are rightly criticized. We cannot dictate a priori what concerns may legitimately be raised in public discussion; in liberal democracies, what is political is in large part what we *decide* is political.<sup>59</sup> I follow Max Weber and Michael Walzer here, for whom the boundaries among spheres are permeable and shifting, even as they retain an identifiable social and moral logic according to which they are differentiable.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, my analysis proceeds at a level above, analyzing general patterns of identity formation and connection rather than passing substantive judgment on the merits of any particular one. So the theoretical space I am exploring is whether it is possible to advocate some kind of "art of separation" and "autonomy of the political" from social life without reifying an impermeable distinction between the two.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 208. Barber does, admittedly, try to distance himself from more extreme versions of these claims, stating that his account "does not quite envision politics in the ancient sense of a 'way of life,' and it is explicitly hostile to the still more extravagant claim that politics is *the* way of life" (118). He also spends significant time distinguishing his account from "unitary" conceptions of democratic community (Chapter 9). But his preference still seems clearly for the "sovereignty" of citizenship "over other roles" (208). Further, in critiquing the liberal view of the self's relation to politics, he quotes Rousseau's *Confessions* with approval: "I had come to see that everything was radically connected with politics, and that however one proceeded, no people would be other than the nature of its government" (213).

<sup>59</sup> Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Weber's discussion of the differences among "value-spheres" in Max Weber, *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edward Shils and Henry Finch (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949), 15-16; Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), Chapter 1. See also Elizabeth Frazer, "Max Weber on Ethics and Politics," *Politics and Ethics Review* 2, no. 1 (April 2006): 19–37.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (August 1984): 315–30.

### 3. Identity: Preliminary Comments

A few basic points about the concepts of identity and identity groups are needed. Part of the purpose of my analysis is to emphasize that identities importantly differ from one another along many dimensions, and so theorizing partisanship as an identity is the beginning, rather than the end, of the conversation. But it will be helpful to show what they share at a very basic level.

As is perhaps inevitable of a concept used throughout empirical social science, philosophy, and political theory, identity is notoriously hard to define.<sup>62</sup> A common denominator, though, and one I follow, is a focus on mutual recognition among a group of people and a shared understanding that they are members of the same kind. This sense of "we" is almost always demarcated from others using a label, and it carries meaning, to varying extents, both for the members of the group and for how others see them.<sup>63</sup> The content of this mutual recognition can be filled out in various ways, corresponding to the diversity of forms of identity; it can be based around race or disability status (unchosen characteristics), experiences or comprehensive ways of life (cultures), beliefs or principles, or interests. Whatever the identity is based on, once formed, it frequently helps individuals make sense of the underlying content (interest, experience, etc.) that gives rise to it; that is, identity partly conditions interest.<sup>64</sup> This is what distinguishes identity groups from interest groups: people join not just for "the pursuit of [prior] self-interest" in an instrumental sense, but based partly on mutual recognition.<sup>65</sup> This is because the mechanism of attachment is not merely cognitive, but significantly involves symbolic

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<sup>62</sup> For a recent discussion of identity's conceptual expansiveness just within political science, see Scott Weiner and Dillon Stone Tatum, "Rethinking Identity in Political Science," *Political Studies Review*, May 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 83-85.

<sup>64</sup> Marc Howard Ross, "Culture in Comparative Political Analysis," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality Culture and Structure, Second Edition*, ed. Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), at 136-139.

<sup>65</sup> Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 9, 9-15. Gutmann briefly acknowledges that "mutual identification is a central part of party politics" (3), but her analysis focuses on non-political identity groups. See also Leonie Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology (Second Edition)*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

and relational motivations as well.<sup>66</sup> In sum, identities are mixtures of cognitive attachments (to do with propositions or beliefs characteristic of the identity group); relational attachments (to do with affiliative concerns such as social solidarity and belonging); and symbolic attachments (to do with the interpretive landscape) to markers of social recognition.

Fortunately, there is a rich tradition in normative theory of the study of identity. The category of "identity politics" received considerable attention from democratic theorists in the 1990s and early 2000s as part of inquiries into the "politics of difference" and multiculturalism. These theorists were concerned that liberal-democratic theory (and practice) had not yet paid sufficient attention to identity, difference, and culture. Scholarship on the nature and value of social and cultural identities such as race and sex, and the tensions between them and citizenship, occupied a highly influential place in the discipline at the turn of the millennium.<sup>67</sup> Many theorists have argued that there are benefits to treating citizens as bearers of certain politically-relevant identities, rather than as undifferentiated citizens. But these trends also generated significant worries about identity as a basis of political organization, from liberals and more radical critics alike. The result is a nuanced inheritance of thought on the conditions under which various identities can advance, or thwart, various individual and political goods. In the next section, I consider two such challenges as a way of thinking about the harms of partisan identity under conditions of affective polarization.

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<sup>66</sup> Ross, "Culture in Comparative Political Analysis," 138.

<sup>67</sup> Consider the sweeping statements in the introductions to two edited volumes on the politics of difference. Peter Jones and Simon Caney aver that, although concern with "social diversity" had been an animating theme of Western political philosophy since the Reformation, "there has probably been no period during which the phenomenon of social diversity and the question of how we should provide for it have so dominated the concerns of political philosophy." Peter Jones and Simon Caney, "Introduction: Disagreement and Difference," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (September 2003): 1–11, at 1. Seyla Benhabib describes "the political problem facing democracies on a global scale" as "a new politics for the recognition of collective identity forms" and "the negotiation of identity/difference." Seyla Benhabib, "Introduction: The Democratic Moment and the Problem of Difference," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3–18, at 3-4.

## **4. Partisan Identity and Agency**

### *4.1. Cultural Partisan Identity and Agency*

I begin with the notion of agency. Much theoretical writing on identity concerns its ambivalent effects on agency – how identity is sometimes constraining of, and sometimes conducive to (or even required for), an individual's capacity to lead a self-directed life. The first problem with cultural partisan identity I want to highlight vindicates concerns that identity, particularly when essentialist and comprehensive, impinges on agency.

Many theorists have criticized what they take to be social or cultural identity's tendency toward essentialism. Conceiving of identity as monolithic, incapable of being challenged or reinterpreted, is thought to be unfaithful to the experience of most people, empirically, and detrimental to the ideal of agency (or self-authorship, or autonomy, or independence), normatively. Patchen Markell, for instance, writes that the politics of difference risks reifying a "bound" conception of the self, transforming it into "an antecedently given set of facts about who we are" that fails to account for the necessary element of creativity in agency.<sup>68</sup> We are wrong to assume "that identity precedes action" – a view which does not allow individuals to creatively chart their own way.<sup>69</sup> Essentialist identities constrain agency both because they block individuals in frozen interpretations of the identity marker by those not in that group, but also, as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, due to internal group pressures to conform. Emphasizing the fluidity of identity is therefore important to avoid the privileging of some group members' understandings over others' and the subordination of the individual's prerogative to contribute to the interpretation of their identities.<sup>70</sup> These eminently liberal concerns are echoed, in their own way, by a prominent strand of "post-identity" feminist theory, whose proponents fear

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<sup>68</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. See also Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 110. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

identity politics' isolation of a shared experience misrepresents the process of identity creation, ignores intersectional concerns, and subordinates minorities within minority groups.<sup>71, 72</sup>

A closely related worry is the degree of comprehensiveness of an identity – the extent to which it dictates concerns in other areas of life. Though it is undisputed that identities demarcate characteristics or experiences with political relevance, there is a fear that identities frequently constrict agency by encouraging only one mode of interaction between members of the identity group and others. Seyla Benhabib warns against ascribing a "comprehensive worldview" to identity groups, lest we overlook the inevitable diversity within identity groups.<sup>73</sup> "In the contemporary United States," she notes, "there are gay males who are Republican; there are conservative libertarian lesbians," and so on.<sup>74</sup> Benhabib does not consider it inappropriate for members of identity groups to participate in line with the majority of their members' understanding of its political implications, but she insists that the automatic translation of social experience into political allegiance disrupts agency. Individuals must "be free to establish coalitions and associations with other groups... Cross-cultural and intercultural political associations...should be furthered."<sup>75</sup>

So the critique is that essentialist and comprehensive identities are both forms of dogmatism that render it difficult to reflect on and adapt one's identities, thereby negatively impacting individual agency. These concerns, though, do not require denying the social nature of

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<sup>71</sup> The former claim is associated with poststructuralist critique, such as that of Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); the latter with intersectional theorizing, including that of Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99.

<sup>72</sup> The preceding critiques of essentialist notions of identity occasionally prompt the opposite worry: that the demands of preserving cultural fluidity and disambiguating differential experiences of oppression will eviscerate the foundations for political action and prevent broader solidarity. There seems a perhaps-inevitable tension between the necessity of some degree of essentialism for political organizing and the imperative of recognizing more fine-grained diversity. Susan Heckman writes: "The fixing of identity appears to be an unavoidable byproduct of identity politics.... The challenge of identity politics is how to use these categories to our benefit without losing the equally important benefit of acknowledging differences among women." Susan Hekman, "Identity Crises: Identity, Identity Politics, and Beyond," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (March 1999): 3–26, at 10 and 13.

<sup>73</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 123.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

the self, nor do they suppose that the relationship between identity and agency is wholly suppressive, for "our choices are at once constrained and enabled by existing practices and beliefs."<sup>76</sup>

Here, I want to show how contemporary partisan identities have come to look increasingly essentialist and comprehensive, thereby making worries about impingement on agency increasingly apt. To see how, consider how the American landscape of political contestation has changed over the past several decades. Today, the Republican and Democratic parties each consist, internally, of members who share much more in common in terms of their social identities than they did in the mid-to-late 20th century. This social and political "sorting" consists in the increasing alignment of partisan identity with other identities, especially racial, religious attachment, and educational attainment<sup>77</sup>, but also radiating into social life to include choices less commonly connected to politics, such as where one shops for groceries, what kind of car one drives<sup>78</sup>, what kind of neighborhood one prefers to live in, who one cultivates friendships with<sup>79</sup>, and whom one deems datable.<sup>80</sup> There is an increasing correlation both among these social identities and lifestyle choices, and between them and partisan identity, such that "a diminishing portion of our personal identities is free from partisan influence."<sup>81</sup> It is now quite clear that partisan disagreements affect "everyday interactions and life choices" to a much greater extent than they used to<sup>82</sup>, and so "the sense of partisan identification is all-encompassing

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<sup>76</sup> Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 109.

<sup>77</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground."

<sup>78</sup> Timnit Gebru et al., "Using Deep Learning and Google Street View to Estimate the Demographic Makeup of Neighborhoods across the United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 50 (December 12, 2017): 13108–13.

<sup>79</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider," 2017, <http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/>.

<sup>80</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground." See also Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008); Shanto Iyengar, Tobias Konitzer, and Kent Tedin, "The Home as a Political Fortress: Family Agreement in an Era of Polarization," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (September 6, 2018): 1326–38. Talisse also recognizes what he calls the "political saturation of social space" in Robert B. Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4, Chapter 3.

<sup>81</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground," 62.

<sup>82</sup> Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129–46, at 136.

and affects behavior in both political and nonpolitical contexts."<sup>83</sup> The result is that the two parties have become de facto "cultures": "when Democrats and Republicans look at one another, they do not see people who are like them."<sup>84</sup> Polarized partisanship has become a kind of "mega identity," a way of life, in which the contingency of the specific alignment of all component identities is minimized.

There are several causes behind this party sorting, perhaps the most important of which are two monumental political strategies which shifted the ideological emphasis of both major parties. In the immediate postwar era, the parties were relatively ideologically heterogeneous internally, with many liberal (especially Northern) Republicans and conservative (especially Southern) Democrats. But during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Democratic Party embraced a platform of racial justice; after years of activist work, President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This moved the Democratic Party in a significantly more liberal direction, upsetting the many Southern Democrats who held conservative views on race. Because partisan identity is such a sticky identity and so difficult to change, it took a generation for the change in partisan identity to catch up to the changed focus of the parties. But change eventually did come, with a partisan realignment solidifying Republican hegemony throughout most of the South from the 1990s onward. Since then, the parties have been clearly separated on the racial cleavage, with the majority of Democrats now being liberal and the majority of Republicans now being conservative along this divide.<sup>85</sup> A strategic decision on the right also contributed to identity alignment, this time with religious identity. Starting in the 1960s, evangelical Christian Americans began organizing politically. The Republican Party embraced this movement, most notably under Ronald Reagan, in the 1980s. The result is that evangelical Christians are overwhelmingly Republican while Democrats are more religiously diverse (and, increasingly, non-affiliated).

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<sup>83</sup> Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines," 705.

<sup>84</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground," 51.

<sup>85</sup> See Liliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Two points must be made about this brief political history to draw out its lessons for the present analysis. The first is that none of these changes created *new* divisions in American culture and politics. There was always a divide between liberals and conservatives on racial and religious issues. Race, religion, and geography have been highly salient identities arguably since the founding of the Republic. What is new, instead, is the particular *pattern of alignment* – the stacking, or convergence, of religious, racial, geographic, and partisan identity.<sup>86</sup> As Mason writes, "Americans have certainly been severely socially divided by race, religion, and culture in the past, but only now are these divisions coinciding with partisanship."<sup>87</sup> The second point is that, while it is possible to view this story purely in ideological terms, a focus only on the substance of the issues would miss the most important implications of this form of polarization. For along both sides of each of these discrete social cleavages lie not only groups of citizens committed to a principled stance on the issues, but an identity group centered on a recognizable self-conception – a sense of "we." This is what distinguishes the quasi-cultural form of polarization in the US from traditional ideological divides in other mature democracies. After all, the political right and left in most European polities can be distinguished by their views on religion and race (or a proxy, immigration) arguably just as cleanly as the two ends of the American ideological spectrum.<sup>88</sup>

Political scientists usually decry this identity alignment for its deleterious effects on general political or social stability and inter-group relations. But that does not exhaust the dangers of polarized partisanship; I want to isolate an additional, distinctively moral harm here: cultural partisan identity's restriction of political agency. This constraining effect mirrors the constraining effect of essentialist and comprehensive social identities on personal agency.

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<sup>86</sup> However, some political scientists have shown that the liberal-conservative axis of conflict now maps onto more issue domains than it used to previously – a process known as "conflict extension." See, e.g., Christopher Hare and Keith T. Poole, "The Polarization of Contemporary American Politics," *Polity* 46, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 411–29. To the extent this is true, it represents not exactly ideological divergence between partisans, but further chances for their partisanship to matter – and, very likely, further fodder for partisanship to display "cultural" characteristics. But note that this mechanism is distinct from, though complementary to, the alignment of identities.

<sup>87</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground," 49.

<sup>88</sup> Ryan E. Carlin and Gregory J. Love, "Political Competition, Partisanship and Interpersonal Trust in Electoral Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 1 (2018): 115–39.

Political agency is a special kind of personal agency, and requires "that citizens perceive themselves as being able to act and implement decisions" in line with their considered views.<sup>89</sup>

This capacity is threatened when partisan identity converges with many other social identities, increasing what political and social psychologists call identity "convergence": "the degree to which [partisan] groups share similar members or attributes."<sup>90</sup> For example, the identities of "Irish" and "Catholic" are convergent: most Irish are also Catholics. Crosscutting identities are those that situate a person in two (or more) identity groups that do not share many members – for example, the identities of "Irish" and "Jewish."<sup>91</sup> These two patterns of identity interaction produce different consequences in how people relate to those with other identities. Researchers have shown how convergence renders reflection more difficult and less likely. When partisanship becomes a proxy for many of one's other commitments and identities, it raises the stakes involved in every partisan conflict, "hardening" partisan identity in a way that makes it more dogmatic and difficult to reinterpret or reflect on, because doing so requires reflecting on so many aspects of the self.<sup>92</sup> There are several contributory mechanisms: those in groups with highly convergent identities are less likely to encounter or form close relationships with others. They consequently seem more like strangers, and their ideas and interests seem more obscure.<sup>93</sup> The effect is more than just additive; convergent identities "magnify" one another, changing the psychology of intergroup behavior.

In effect, partisan identity has become increasingly comprehensive, instantiating in even more dramatic fashion Benhabib's worry that hewing too closely to one of our various social identities runs the risk of boxing us into a prescribed political allegiance. If what it means to be an authentic or true member of one's multiple identity groups – a good Southerner, a good farmer, a good Protestant Christian – all magnify one another and point in the same direction

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<sup>89</sup> Fabio Wolkenstein, "Agents of Popular Sovereignty," *Political Theory* 47, no. 3 (2019): 338–62, at 338.

<sup>90</sup> Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment," 746.

<sup>91</sup> Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 61.

<sup>92</sup> Marilyn B. Brewer and Sonia Roccas, "Social Identity Complexity," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (May 2002): 88–106.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

when it comes to politics (Republican partisan identity), then that exerts an extremely powerful influence on political involvement. Cultural partisan identity crowds out the role of individual judgment, reducing political agency.

Another way of describing identity alignment's constraining effects on agency is with reference to the components of identity. Recall that identities consist of cognitive, relational, and symbolic components. Another lesson from the psychology literature is that identity convergence increases the strength of the relational and symbolic components at the expense of the cognitive component. When identities magnify one another, then affiliative pressures – such as the desire to maintain harmony within subjectively valued relationships or groups, or to maintain a minimum "shared reality"<sup>94</sup> – become more salient. To return to the example just given, a citizen who satisfies many of the core constituency identities of the contemporary Republican Party will find the people surrounding them – those they see at church, at work, while socializing – to be overwhelmingly Republican; and, given the increasing politicization of these diverse spheres, their Republicanness increasingly *matters* to their associations outside of politics. Cultural partisan identity, then, raises the cost of non-conformism, vulnerable to the same social pressures warned of by Appiah, Markell, Benhabib, and others. Challenging one's partisan identity in such polarized contexts is still possible, of course – but in practice happens only at the margins. If this person has defecting concerns flowing from one of their other identities, or from independent reflection, they are less likely to act on them. Under conditions of polarization, it is the brave or stubborn partisan who risks social isolation to realize their political agency when it is idiosyncratic in their social contexts.

Here one might levy several objections to my argument that polarized partisanship constrains political agency. One objection begins by questioning the claim that essentialist and comprehensive identities necessarily constrain agency. One might argue that, indeed, political

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<sup>94</sup> John T. Jost, Alison Ledgerwood, and Curtis D. Hardin, "Shared Reality, System Justification, and the Relational Basis of Ideological Beliefs," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 171–86.

agency is only possible given a degree of homogeneity. This argument corresponds with a more corporatist ontology of social groups, and has frequently been made in the context of historically marginalized identity groups.<sup>95</sup> Ismail White and Chryl Laird, for instance, have recently argued that the achievement of meaningful political power for Black Americans has required their support to be consolidated within one party (the Democrats), which has in turn required forms of "racialized social constraint" to discourage defection of Black citizens whose preferences might otherwise lean Republican.<sup>96</sup> Even though there are sizable numbers of conservatives in the Black community, the group has overwhelmingly remained "steadfast Democrats." This is possible due to widespread and salient expectations that consolidating support for the Democrats is good for the broader Black community: "only unity will deliver gains for subordinated groups."<sup>97</sup> But the development and enforcement of these norms was only possible given "the ability of the group to credibly convey" and reinforce support for Democrats as racialized social constraint.<sup>98</sup> And this, in turn, has required visibility and interaction made possible by the fact that "Black Americans [are] uniquely socially integrated with and reliant on each other." As White and Laird explain:

"Closed off from white social institutions such as schools, colleges, fraternal organizations, and churches, black Americans built their own indigenous institutions. Cordoned off from white neighborhoods by policies and social intimidation practices, black Americans built their own communities. Anti-miscegenation laws and social denigration from white society further ensured that black Americans' kinship and social networks have remained characterized by a high degree of racial homophily. In short,

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Maxime Lepoutre, "Democratic Group Cognition," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 48, no. 1 (January 2020): 40–78.

<sup>96</sup> Ismail K. White and Chryl N. Laird, *Steadfast Democrats* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

black Americans remain remarkably social interconnected with each other and segregated from white Americans. And in this social reality, we argue, are the tools for a black politics maintained by racialized social pressure...."<sup>99</sup>

On this view, then, the development of social enclaves and the maintenance of a kind of essentialism and comprehensiveness seems not antithetical to, but necessary for, political agency. Perhaps, in parallel, polarization's disciplining effects on partisan identity might not be such a problem for political agency after all.

I do not deny that the link between social constraint and agency is more complicated in the context of marginalized identities, sometimes justifying sacrifice of individuals' near-term preferences in service of group representation and, ideally, greater individual agency in the long term. But we cannot tell a similar story about partisan identity. For one thing, there is no corresponding social reality or common group interest uniting co-partisans just in virtue of their partisanship that could similarly justify norms of social sanctioning, or lack of reflection. Moreover, this is especially true given identity convergence; it is implausible that there is one historical experience that unites across all of these various identities, such that their agency could only be supported by concentrating plural concerns into support of one party. The link between one social identity and political identity, as in White and Laird's account, is plausible. But the manifold identities individuals possess each constitute chances for intersectional concerns to weaken the link between individual agency and group representation, decreasing the probability that the contingent identity alignments present within either major partisan mega-identity track a given individual's set of identity-based concerns. Cultural partisan identity thus in effect raises the costs of constraint to individual agency in line with a misguided application of social group solidarity and representation to the partisan group.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

Another critic might suggest I have overestimated the similarity between party and culture. While it may be true that both cultural identity and partisan identity reach into many other domains of life, partisanship does so only in a superficial sense. Even if partisanship is *associated* with other identities and lifestyle choices, the objector continues, it does not itself condition involvement in them or provide their meaning, like cultures (or religions, or nationalities) do. And this overstates worries about partisan identity's comprehensiveness.

I would respond by emphasizing that, at least according to the state of the empirical research to date, partisan identity does indeed change the nature of, or provide the meaning for, partisans' involvement in at least some other areas of life. For many, partisanship has become a "litmus test for interpersonal relations" in friendship and dating, influencing the character of one's most intimate relationships to an extent it did not previously.<sup>100</sup> To take another example, there is evidence for unprecedented levels of partisan segregation by church – significant in a relatively religious country.<sup>101</sup> As one churchgoer told *The New York Times*, "The walls of this church just weren't thick enough to protect us from" increasing partisan polarization.<sup>102</sup> Partisanship now shapes, for many citizens, both the degree to which they identify as religious, and the nature of their religious commitment (including frequency of church attendance, affiliation with fellow members of one's religion, etc.).<sup>103</sup> Under conditions of severe polarization, a nontrivial portion of the terms of associational life consists in (partisan) political meaning – evident in either its acrimoniousness or its conspicuous silence, because the unity of partisan feeling has already been achieved by exclusion of others. Still, it is likely true that culture exerts a qualitatively different kind of influence over these sorts of domains than partisan identity does. This is likely so in the realm of seemingly innocuous consumer and lifestyle choices, and so the

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<sup>100</sup> Iyengar and Krupenkin, "The Strengthening of Partisan Affect," 201.

<sup>101</sup> Lydia Bean, *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Casey, "The Walls of the Church Couldn't Keep the Trump Era Out," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/us/politics/evangelical-church-trump-alabama.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Michele F. Margolis, *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). Margolis explicitly argues against the conventional journalistic wisdom, according to which citizens' (prior) religious identity informs their partisanship in a unidirectional fashion.

alignment of partisan identity in these areas seems less objectionable from the perspective of political agency.<sup>104</sup> The degree to which we should be worried that partisanship is aligned with other areas depends on those areas' subjective importance, since it is by that measure that effects on agency are relevant.

#### *4.2. Political Identity, Agency, and Civic Culture*

I have argued that polarization's effects on partisan identity match worries that identity entails dogmatism and thereby constrains agency. In this subsection, I show how this need not be the case. When partisanship displays a degree of contingency, or flexibility, in relation to underlying social identities – something that, in practice, requires crosscutting identities – then it supports a valuable form of political agency important for the development of a civic culture.

Recall that, in response to worries about identity essentialism and comprehensiveness, many identity theorists urged the contingency of identity. To preserve individual agency, there must be space to contest the norms of the identity group and reinterpret its meaning – and, for some identities, space to disavow the identity altogether. In addition to its role in liberal thought, flexibility plays a noted role in more radical theorizing, and combining insights from these two perspectives, I will suggest, yields an attractive framework for theorizing agency-promoting political identity. Some writers, whom we can loosely group under the label of "agonist democrats," have argued for the importance of fluidity and contingency when it comes to identity. This is often explicitly associated with the goal of "respecting the autonomy of the political as a sphere in its own right."<sup>105</sup> In the political sphere, the argument goes, it is all the more important to leave room for contestation and reinterpretation. So for Connolly, politicizing identity entails emphasizing its contingency – its status as the outcome of "democratic

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<sup>104</sup> But this kind of partisan segregation might have other harmful effects, such as its reliable separation of partisans that makes other kind of commonality impossible.

<sup>105</sup> Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, 36.

negotiation" permissive of reformulation.<sup>106</sup> Democratic politics must include the give and take of identity-based interpretation that recognizes "identity's incompleteness."<sup>107</sup> Identifying "the qualities of contingency and unpredictability that necessarily condition political action and identity formation" as common threads across the writings of agonist democrats, Mark Wenman argues that truly political identity is "always under threat from various demands for uniformity and homogenization."<sup>108</sup> Agonists argue that contingency and "ongoing politicization" are core political goals that citizens must activate against the "disciplinary closures of juridical 'virtue' politics."<sup>109</sup> Political theorists must criticize "the desire for political closure" and recognize, instead, that "even the most radical or satisfying identities and forms of rule produce remainders that require engagement rather than displacement."<sup>110</sup> Distinctively political identities, for agonists, are "multiplicitous, contingent, contradictory, and unstable."<sup>111, 112</sup>

In their insistence that political identity remain open-ended in some sense, agonists have something in common with liberal theorists of identity, though the emphasis is different. Liberals emphasize contingency through reflection and exploration – charting one's own path and seeking out new understandings of one's multiple identities, including through idiosyncratic interpretation. As Charles Larmore notes, "from John Locke's time to our own, liberal thinkers

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<sup>106</sup> William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 192. There is a generally poststructuralist, deconstructive cast to his version of contingency, as there is with many agonist democrats, on which my argument does not depend.

<sup>107</sup> Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalization*, 32.

<sup>109</sup> Lida Maxwell, "The Virago as Democratic Exemplar: Honig's Feminist Agonism," *Contemporary Political Theory* 18 (2019): 641–45, at 642. See also Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*.

<sup>110</sup> Cristina Beltrán, "Extraordinary Events and Mundane Maintenances: Honig on the Politics of Sedimentation," *Contemporary Political Theory* 18, no. 4 (2019): 645–49, at 645.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 646. There is an ironic and understudied disjunction between agonists' emphasis on identity fluidity and the more corporatist social ontology of, e.g., Iris Marion Young and White and Laird – that is, a disjunction between the former's resistance of "political closure" and the latter's embrace of a structural perspective on group formation. Both sets of theorists are deeply committed to social justice as the liberation of marginalized identity groups and resisting domination and homogenization, but the agonist insistence on creation and contingency in the public sphere sits in tension with the (amply strategic) demands of solidarity and unity other theorists of the left take to be necessary for political action.

<sup>112</sup> See also the various discussions in Craiutu on identity contingency as a form of pluralism that individuals ought to cultivate (and the state ought to respect): Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Isaiah Berlin, for instance, "unambiguously and courageously affirmed the values of all the 'nooks and crannies of life', in which individuals ought to be left to freely pursue their own ends" (102). Michael Oakeshott, too, defended something like a virtue of contingency and a demand to recognize internal contradiction and our "multiple selves" (154-155).

have generally presented their political philosophy in terms of a full-scale individualism, urging a critical detachment toward inherited forms of belief and cultural traditions."<sup>113</sup> It is this sort of emphasis on self-reflection and autonomy of judgment that partisanship has traditionally been thought to threaten. The agonist understanding of contingency, for its part, follows from a distinctive account of the inevitability and value of conflict and struggle in politics; identity contingency is a condition and expression of this deep political nature. Consequently, agonists think contingency promotes a quasi-liberal "expression of individuality"<sup>114</sup> or "process of becoming,"<sup>115</sup> – but they recognize that the achievement of these values requires satisfying certain inter-subjective, structural conditions to do with the right kind of political conflict. I endorse this insight. Precise formulations of these conditions are lacking in the agonist literature, but in what follows I attempt to elucidate the connection between one such condition (crosscutting identities) and the possibility of political identities that are contingent and therefore agency-promoting.

The relevant sort of contingency that polarized partisan identity needs is contingency among one's various social identities and their relationship to one's partisan identity. When partisans fail to maintain a degree of "independence" from social life, then their partisan identity becomes something immediately entailed by their other characteristics, and so not amenable to reflection or reinterpretation. As Rosenblum writes, there must be "transitional steps" of "loosening, eclipsing, or transformation"; partisanship "alters" social identities and "often transcends them."<sup>116</sup> The value of this sort of contingency may properly be characterized as

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<sup>113</sup> Charles Larmore, "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 12 (1999): 599–625, at 602-603. This classical liberal principle, which Larmore understands as "grow[ing] out of basic features of modern society, particularly the market institutions of a capitalist economy," informs both what political liberals call "comprehensive" liberalism (which prizes individual self-reflection as a goal suitable for state promotion) and political liberalism's commitment to neutrality about such ends (which entails respecting others' capacities for self-reflection).

<sup>114</sup> Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalization*, 54.

<sup>115</sup> Beltrán, "Extraordinary Events and Mundane Maintenances: Honig on the Politics of Sedimentation," 646.

<sup>116</sup> Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*, 346. I am very sympathetic to Rosenblum's passages on partisanship as a form of identity politics (342-348). Her account, though, is largely descriptive; I improve upon it here by suggesting that what is normatively at stake in partisanship's independence from social life is a form of agency. Russell Muirhead also briefly notes research describing the identitarian nature of partisanship in his account of partisan

specifically *democratically* political, since it is essential for the possibility of change under democratic governance that political coalitions (identity-based and otherwise) be able to form and reform. There must be room for creative coalition formation, and this sort of "selective collaboration" requires partisan identity to be held in a spirit of contingency.<sup>117</sup> "Cross-cultural and intercultural political associations...should be furthered."<sup>118</sup> As Benhabib writes of social identities, we must view "processes of group formation" dynamically and "pay more attention to the mobilization of social and cultural cleavages in political movements."<sup>119</sup> By reducing the capacity for identity reflection and the social and political tolerability of heterodox association, polarization threatens the contingency and flexibility in which democratic political agency consists.

In order for identity to become more political in this sense, identity theorists tend to advocate discursive solutions, construing inclusive deliberation as the condition that allows for contingency and thus agency.<sup>120</sup> But even if this were sufficient for social identities (and we might question whether it ever was), there is reason to believe that securing the conditions for partisan identity contingency in polarized contexts will require non-discursive solutions as well.<sup>121</sup> Given polarization as identity convergence, some empirical scholars advocate *crosscutting identities*. Increased interaction with those outside of one's "mega identity" along identity lines that bisect each sorted group humanizes the other and reduces bias.<sup>122</sup> Encouraging crosscutting identities

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loyalty: see Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 114, 119.

<sup>117</sup> William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Markell, *Bound by Recognition*; Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>118</sup> Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 149.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 5; Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition"; Andrea T. Baumeister, "Multicultural Citizenship, Identity and Conflict," in *Toleration, Identity and Difference*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> On deliberation's limits in dealing with entrenched power, which is vulnerable to similarly deep-seated psychological mechanisms (grouped under "motivated reasoning"), see Samuel Bagg, "Can Deliberation Neutralise Power?" *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (October 2015): 257-79.

<sup>122</sup> Marilyn B. Brewer and Sonia Roccas, "Social Identity Complexity," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 6, no. 2 (May 2002): 88-106; Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 62. Here, the psychological analysis of partisanship complements a much older tradition in comparative politics that documents the increasing salience of group identities that result

also enhances the contingency of partisan identity, making it easier to reflect, and licensing the potential reformulation of partisan involvement away from the two master narratives that dominate political life. The ossification of partisan identity (and its accompanying social identities) is due not only to entrenched interpretive patterns, but also to the broader social-structural features of American society across many identity groups. This poses a formidable challenge to any attempt to challenge the deep-rootedness of partisan identity within many partisans today, and this is what crosscutting identities address. To advocate for polarized, highly-aligned identities to be crosscut, then, is to advocate for a kind of social disaggregation or decoupling that underwrites the potential for ossified cultural partisan identity to be creatively reformulated, freeing citizens to assert the claims from aspects of themselves that do not neatly align with those of their partisan "mega identity."

One way of doing this is to increase the salience of identities that are naturally crosscutting. Some identities bisect the partisan divide already, and strengthening them could plausibly provide new sources of solidarity that simultaneously dampen the effects of identity magnification internal to cultural partisan identities. Perhaps the most commonly proposed example here is national identity: the idea that priming the salience of concerns that affect all citizens regardless of partisan group will assuage concerns of identity aggregation.<sup>123</sup> Another mechanism of making identity contingency more likely is new instances of coalition politics. The development of the "Rainbow Coalition" on the progressive left manifested such a dynamic, as diverse racial minorities refashioned their political engagement by associating with one another. New political coalitions among social groups offer moments of rupture that invite reflection on the relationship among one's myriad social identities and their implications for political identity. Importantly, emphasizing the possibility of new forms of coalition politics as a means to break

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from the overlap of party and social cleavage. For a classic statement, see Sidney Verba, "Organizational Membership and Democratic Consensus," *The Journal of Politics* 27, no. 3 (August 1965): 467–97.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew S. Levendusky, "Americans, Not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (October 2017): 59–70. I shall have much more to say about the potential for national identity to play a role in de-polarizing politics in Chapter 4.

down the siloed, aligned identity groups within each party does not require the seemingly-overwhelming task of dismantling the socio-demographic conditions that have given rise to such mega-identities. There presently exist many examples of latent strange bedfellows – the so-called "bootleggers and Baptists" phenomenon.<sup>124</sup> Consider, for instance, the potential association between secular environmentalists (overwhelmingly concentrated in the Democratic Party) and the many Christians who favor natural stewardship on theological grounds (overwhelmingly concentrated in the Republican Party).

I should emphasize that this sense of the autonomy of the political does not require that partisan identity be cleansed of attachments or interests stemming from one's social identities. Still, political identity does not merely reproduce the preferences channeled through social identities, but offers ways for them to be embedded and contextualized in new ways.

It is important to note that the effects of convergent versus crosscutting identities are, strictly speaking, independent of the substance of the disagreement at stake in political competition. As Mason writes, the observed responses of intolerance, animosity, etc. toward outgroups are "based on the strength and alignment of the identities, not the content of the identity-linked issue positions." Consequently, "this type of intolerance does not require partisan identities to correspond to highly extreme policy positions."<sup>125</sup> The distinctive relational harms of polarization, then, are not, at least in the first instance, problems stemming from vigorous principled disagreement. This is why the Moral Partisanship perspective is unconvincing as a diagnostic of the problems: their view of partisanship lacks the resources to capture this kind of conflict, which is inexplicable when viewed from the perspective of whether partisan claims have been sufficiently rendered generalizable rather than factional.

At this point, one may wonder why the effort to make partisanship conducive to political agency should retain any notion of identity, even identity that is contingent. Why not simply

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<sup>124</sup> For an explanation, see Jonathan H. Adler et al., "Baptists, Bootleggers & Electronic Cigarettes," *Yale Journal on Regulation* 33 (2016): 313.

<sup>125</sup> Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 62.

advocate partisanship as a set of principled commitments, as theorists of Moral Partisanship do? The problem is that these perspectives overlook the positive side of the relationship between identity and agency, and thus overlook the positive role of partisan identity (as something more than principled commitments) in facilitating an active civic culture. A key lesson from theoretical stances on identity politics is the thought that social and culture identities are valuable for their facilitation of an enhanced, or especially valuable, form of agency. Will Kymlicka, for example, argues that "the liberal value of freedom of choice has certain cultural preconditions," and that cultures have great value as "contexts of choice."<sup>126</sup> Some of these preconditions are straightforwardly cognitive, as identities give shape to the range of options: "the availability of meaningful options depends on access" to identity.<sup>127</sup> But the agency-facilitating power of identity extends also to the relational and symbolic. Identities constitute "narratives that people use in shaping their pursuits and in telling their life stories" in dialogue with others.<sup>128</sup> Our membership in an identity group provides motivation and encouragement to pursue relevant life projects, and affiliative motives direct us along with epistemic ones. "Whether or not a course of action has any significance for us depends on whether, and how, [the] language [of our identities] renders vivid to us the point of that activity."<sup>129</sup> In other words, there is "vividness" – meaning, value – to choice or action that occurs within the framing boundaries of identity. Agency is not simply lack of external influence.<sup>130</sup>

In the political realm, this expanded understanding of agency is part of what is meant by the robust sense of citizenship at the heart of civic-republican accounts of democracy. Civic republicans have long emphasized that procedural norms and the establishment of just institutions must be supplemented by the cultivation of a robust civic culture and habits of

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<sup>126</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 76, 83.

<sup>127</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 83.

<sup>128</sup> Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 109. See also Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 83.

<sup>130</sup> See also Muirhead's discussion of the "nonrational" elements of loyalty in Muirhead, *The Promise of Party*, 114-128.

citizenship.<sup>131</sup> Citizens are not born, but made, through a process of political "acculturation" and connection through which they are brought to care about participation and its meaning.<sup>132</sup> It is a commonplace of this literature that there exist certain "motivational prerequisites of democratic governance"<sup>133</sup> – that civic culture must somehow empower citizens by inspiring "the moral and civic engagement self-government requires."<sup>134</sup> This sense of democratic agency has largely been formulated as a kind of identity, possessing distinctly relational as well as symbolic bases – hence the strong focus on national identity.<sup>135</sup> Subscription to political-moral principles is insufficient grounding for civic culture. Political scientists and psychologists are clear that it is the mixture of the cognitive, relational, and symbolic bases of agency that "offer[s] emotionally significant connections between the fate of individuals and the group"<sup>136</sup> and yields a "participatory dividend."<sup>137</sup> "Political participation can be a direct outcome of our sense of feeling attached to others" in addition to – and, frequently, in place of – motivation stemming from our issue positions.<sup>138</sup> The authors of one study claim that identity-based partisanship "has its place as a vehicle for democratic engagement, providing partisans with a stake in an election and a reason to get involved."<sup>139</sup> Partisan identity, at its best, is an especially effective source of democratic motivation, inculcating a participative civic culture. We thus have a strong positive reason, contra many normative theorists, to favor partisanship *as an identity*. And so by insisting on the distinctiveness of partisan identity and the dangers of its collapsing into other forms of identity

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<sup>131</sup> Barber, *Strong Democracy*; Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*, 450-452.

<sup>133</sup> Cécile Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 4 (October 2002): 591–612, at 592.

<sup>134</sup> Patchen Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (2000): 38–63, at 38.

<sup>135</sup> See, for example, the liberal-nationalist critique of constitutional patriotism. David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Margaret Moore, *The Ethics of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Gina Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 4 (2019): 693–711.

<sup>136</sup> Ross, "Culture in Comparative Political Analysis," 140. See also Huddy, "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment," 744.

<sup>137</sup> Debra Minkoff, "The Payoffs of Organizational Membership for Political Activism in Established Democracies," *American Journal of Sociology* 122, no. 2 (2016): 425–68, at 428.

<sup>138</sup> Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 103. See also Ross, "Culture in Comparative Political Analysis," 141.

<sup>139</sup> Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe, "Expressive Partisanship," 15.

and association, we shall also begin to see something of its value that I flesh out more fully in the next chapter.

One might worry, though, that premising the development of a civic-cultural identity within the frame of partisanship – even once we have secured the conditions under which identity contingency becomes more likely – comes at too high a cost, dividing the public. The next facet of the distinctiveness of political partisan identity addresses this challenge.

## **5. Partisan Identity and Conflict**

### *5.1. Cultural Partisan Identity, Recognition, and Authenticity*

The second large dimension of cultural versus political identity I explore is that of conflict. The problem with polarized partisanship I identify is its promotion of an expressive and zero-sum form of political conflict that reduces opportunities for compromise. I suggest that the dangers this transformation poses track, *mutatis mutandis*, similar charges theorists have levied against some forms of identity politics. Cultural partisan identity mistakenly seeks recognition in a way that dangerously places dignity and authenticity at the heart of partisan conflict.

It is a common refrain that "identity is harder to compromise than interest," or that "people do not compromise their identities."<sup>140</sup> But why, precisely? One thought locates identity politics' contentiousness in the subjective importance of identities. Since identities often comprise core components of peoples' self-conceptions, their politicization engenders a more divisive politics than the politicization of their non-identity-comprising beliefs does, generating reactions including self-defense and fear or loathing of opponents.<sup>141</sup> Identity-based conflict tracks the components of policy construed as matters of human dignity, making compromise harder here than in other sorts of political disagreements. Another thought is that viewing

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<sup>140</sup> Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy*, 17. See also Peter Jones, "Beliefs and Identities," in *Tolerance, Identity and Difference*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 76.

<sup>141</sup> Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 129-130. This is not to say that cultural identity should therefore be shielded from political contestation; in fact, Benhabib argues the opposite. But she still insists that multiculturalism raises the potential of especially contentious forms of politics. See also Jones, "Beliefs and Identities," 65-71; Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination," *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 9 (1990): 439–61, at 447-449.

opponents not, or not only, as carriers of different opinions, but as people of a different kind whose experiences are necessarily inaccessible, emphasizes our differences at the expense of anything shared and so encourages fiercer competition and prevents broader solidarities (e.g., class politics).<sup>142</sup> Of course, many interest groups can be just as uncompromising as identity groups, and the particular identity and the context matter.<sup>143</sup> And it is true that some identities have unifying effects, if still within the bounds of a narrower category, such as umbrella identities used to unite the historically separate components of those who now, together, identify as "disabled," or "LGBTQ." Still, many have worried that the relational motivations characteristic of identity groups – including desires to maintain harmony and be seen as a team player – raise the cost for individuals to adjust the demands that flow from their identity in the face of opposing demands. More generally, when citizens feel that their very sense of self is the substance of political debate, it is not clear that one even *could* compromise. At the extreme, this transforms the content of political debate from tractable beliefs and claims about the world, which generate preferences one can scale back in the face of opposing pressure, to a clash of "mere characteristics of persons."<sup>144</sup> In an important sense, then, identity-based conflict places the person – their subjective moral status and esteem – at the center of debate.

A prominent site of these dynamics is the politics of recognition. Many have argued that due recognition is a requirement of social justice, grounding duties of acknowledgment of the particularism of social or cultural identity in the importance proper recognition plays to human dignity.<sup>145</sup> Modern social life is full of claims that "people have the right to be acknowledged

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<sup>142</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post-Socialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997); David Miller, "Group Identities, National Identities and Democratic Politics," in *Toleration, Identity and Difference*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Ashok Kumar et al., "An Introduction to the Special Issue on Identity Politics," *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 2 (2018): 3–20; Francis Fukuyama, "Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 5 (2018): 90–115; Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017).

<sup>143</sup> Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy*, 17–18.

<sup>144</sup> Jones, "Beliefs and Identities," 83 and *passim*.

<sup>145</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–74; Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Kompridis understands the moral foundations of recognition not in terms of dignity or justice, but in terms of freedom: Nikolas Kompridis, "Struggling over the

publicly as what they already really are."<sup>146</sup> These sorts of claims qualitatively change the nature of political conflict, further specifying the logic of identity-based conflict as protecting, or promoting, an authentic or integral core which the given identity expresses. Given the reasonable assumption that the lived experience of a social identity is the best (or only) source of relevant knowledge (e.g., a shared experience of oppression), demands for recognition require that the sole arbiters of the adequacy – the authenticity, the integrity – of recognition be members of the concerned group themselves.<sup>147</sup> This is why the idea that there could be two parties to such debates is frequently rejected. Identity, and the policy choices pertaining to it, is more often asserted than offered as a starting point for debate. Thus, even when demands for recognition of our particularist, authentic selves are justified – as they surely often are – they often bring an element of uncompromisingness into political discourse.

Of course, many worry about these properties of identity politics, such as its tendency to be a "conversation stopper," rendering moral and political disagreements more intractable than they might otherwise be.<sup>148</sup> This seems at odds with most ideals of democratic discourse, including deliberation, which are commonly thought to require exposing claims and reasoning to scrutiny by all involved. The higher stakes associated with esteem-promotion and the one-sidedness associated with authenticity-protection seem to frustrate the competitiveness and give-and-take that a successful marketplace of ideas requires.

It is important, though, to nuance these statements, and to push back against the more alarmist concerns about identity corrupting discourse. It is highly unlikely that the progress made for many groups of people with marginalized identities could have been made without these sorts of claims. And this demonstrates a crucial point: Identity-based conflict does not only, or

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Meaning of Recognition: A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?," *European Journal of Political Theory* 6, no. 3 (July 20, 2016): 277–89.

<sup>146</sup> Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 105.

<sup>147</sup> Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>148</sup> Richard Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation Stopper," in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 168–74. Similar forms of critique have been levied against the prominence of the discourse of rights that arose in the latter half of the twentieth century. See, e.g., Jamal Greene, *How Rights Went Wrong: Why Our Obsession with Rights Is Tearing America Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021).

does not necessarily, limit discourse; it also facilitates it. Even when raising the stakes of discourse (by characterizing it as a matter of basic human dignity) and denying some degree of the legitimacy of scrutiny by opposing sides (in order to preserve authenticity), identity claims reveal new information and experiences.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, it is precisely *in virtue of* those characteristics that the content and gravity of knowledge of others is conveyed. Moreover, many theorists have defended the prerogative of members of identity groups to work to preserve the integrity of their identities, especially religious identity.<sup>150</sup> Evaluation of identity politics must remain sensitive to the purposes to which otherwise contentious features of identity claims are put.

The theoretical lens of identity-based conflict, with its associated components of dignity-promotion and authenticity-protection, helps illuminate the contentiousness of polarized partisan politics – and provides resources for evaluating it. For there is no doubt that partisan politics has grown more contentious along many measures of social distance, including reported feelings toward opponents; negative stereotypes; aversion to inter-partisan marriage; and prejudiced behavior.<sup>151</sup> Appetite for compromise with the opposing party has declined as well.<sup>152</sup> This has produced a situation in which "Partisanship for many Americans today takes the form of a visceral, even subconscious attachment to a party group. Our party becomes a part of our self-concept in deep and meaningful ways."<sup>153</sup> Due in part to the identity alignment explained above, partisanship has assumed a different kind of salience in many citizens' lives, prompting the sort of status and esteem protection characteristic of the bitterest identity conflicts.

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<sup>149</sup> Lepoutre, "Democratic Group Cognition."

<sup>150</sup> This is a prominent theme in the political liberalism literature, as some theorists have objected to public reason constraints on the grounds that they unfairly ask religious citizens to sacrifice the integrity of their religious commitments by withholding religious reasons from public discourse. See, e.g., Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kevin Vallier, "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 1 (March 2012): 149–65.

<sup>151</sup> Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines."

<sup>152</sup> Michael R. Wolf, J. Cherie Strachan, and Daniel M. Shea, "Forget the Good of the Game: Political Incivility and Lack of Compromise as a Second Layer of Party Polarization," *American Behavioral Scientist* 56, no. 12 (December 1, 2012): 1677–95.

<sup>153</sup> Alexander George Theodoridis, "The Hyper-Polarization of America," Scientific American Blog, 2016, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/the-hyper-polarization-of-america/>. See also Zachary K. Rothschild, Lucas A. Keefer, and Julianna Hauri, "Defensive Partisanship? Evidence That In-Party Scandals Increase Out-Party Hostility," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 1 (2021): 3–21.

The character and intensity of inter-partisan conflict thus mirrors theoretical concerns with conflict among politicized social identities. As partisan identity becomes increasingly incorporated into the self-concept, it has itself become the central plane of contestation, displacing, for many partisans, the things for which parties positively stand for: “Prior to the era of polarization, ingroup favoritism, that is, partisans’ enthusiasm for their party or candidate, was the driving force behind political participation. More recently, however, it is hostility toward the out-party that makes people more inclined to participate.”<sup>154</sup> Cultural partisan identities encourage partisans to interpret political events through the lens of identity conflict, such that each policy question boils down to a chance for winning or losing – for asserting the superiority of one’s partisan in-group. What has been said of cultures – that they are “the lenses through which the causes of conflict and mobilization are refracted” – is true of polarized parties.<sup>155</sup> Partisan identity becomes a core part of who a citizen is, a synecdoche of self-esteem, that cannot be challenged without challenging the dignity of the citizen and the validity of their inclusion in the political process. As is the case with recognition of social identities, when politics becomes a fight over the integrity of persons rather than more tractable interests, the stakes are raised. Partisan identity’s assertion of self-dignity is connected to an almost existential approach to political life in which, as one commentator puts it, “politics becomes your idol,”<sup>156</sup> mirroring the stakes of social recognition as a “vital human need.”<sup>157</sup>

The particularly pernicious forms of inter-partisan conflict today are due, then, to cultural partisan identity’s reformulation of electoral competition as a kind of struggle for recognition of the particularism of the partisan group, its distinctness from opposing partisans. This theoretical lens comports with the evidence introduced in the last chapter about how

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<sup>154</sup> Iyengar and Krupenkin, “The Strengthening of Partisan Affect,” 202; 212. See also Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven Webster, “The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century,” *Electoral Studies* 41 (March 2016): 12–22.

<sup>155</sup> Ross, “Culture in Comparative Political Analysis,” 136.

<sup>156</sup> David Brooks, “When Politics Becomes Your Idol,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/30/opinion/when-politics-becomes-your-idol.html>.

<sup>157</sup> Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 26.

political disagreement has both an identity and issue-ideological basis.<sup>158</sup> Polarization has made the expressive dimension of conflict increasingly dominant, increasing the extent to which partisanship becomes about protecting integrity – about, to adapt Appiah, being "acknowledged publicly as what [partisans] already really are."<sup>159</sup> The differences across party lines assume a "moral significance"<sup>160</sup> beyond mere policy disagreement. As in the realm of social and cultural identity, the struggle to preserve authenticity seeks to avoid opposing viewpoints and construes counterargument as offensive, encouraging a protective rather than engagement mindset toward politics. This is the sense in which partisanship has become an aesthetic, a plane of realization (or frustration) of a deep-seated sense of sincerity and meaning the modern self has been conditioned at least since the Romantic age to expect.<sup>161</sup> Democratic discourse becomes less about evaluating policy and the merits of argumentation and assumes a different, aesthetic form of judgment of performance of a partisan identity that is taken as given and, at the extreme, inalienable. Aesthetic judgment of partisan integrity and authenticity can be more or less accurate with reference to the standards of "our side," but what is at stake in cultural partisan debate cannot really be disputed or evaluated with reference to the standards of democratic discourse; the aesthetic mindset mediates performances, not policies. (The cultivation and boundary-policing of distinct partisan spheres of lifestyle activity, insofar as they are conscious, assume new meaning in the light of this analysis.) If my analysis of agency above highlighted the ways in which polarization collapses the cognitive elements of partisan identity into the affiliative, the present analysis of conflict shows how cultural partisan identity represents a collapse of the cognitive into the symbolic. Affective polarization is thus partly the result of partisans

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<sup>158</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 3.2.

<sup>159</sup> Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, 105.

<sup>160</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 28.

<sup>161</sup> Lionel Trilling's classic exploration of the ideal of authenticity, which influences Taylor's discussion of the politics of recognition, focuses on authenticity as an *artistic* ideal – the pursuit of the performer. See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (New York: Norton, 1969). For more on the connection between the romantic self and creativity, see Charles E. Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 7-31.

misperceiving, and feeling misperceived, by their opponents, in their joint but counterposed pursuit of confirmation of status.

One might argue here that this is not the same form of misrecognition as that which occurs in the realm of social identity. Surely perpetuating stereotypes about disabled people in virtue of their disability, say – and thereby misrecognizing them – is different, and worse, than perpetuating stereotypes about Democrats in virtue of their Democratic identity. It does not make sense to say that partisan identity is vulnerable, as social identities are vulnerable, to the potential for "nonrecognition or misrecognition" to trap one in a "false, distorted, and reduced mode of being."<sup>162</sup>

I agree, and appreciating this distinction is key to understanding why grafting the pursuit of recognition onto partisan politics is dangerous. The lack of compromise regarding recognition of social or cultural identity is justified (when it is justified) because of its link to human dignity. Members of identity groups demand respect on the basis of their (authentic) understanding of their identity – *as* disabled, *as* gay, etc. – because doing so is essential to living a flourishing life in which prejudice is minimized. But no parallel argument can plausibly be made regarding partisan identity; partisans cannot legitimately demand positive recognition just on the basis of their partisan identities in a similar way. It would be absurd to approve of liberation movements for Tories or Democrats on the basis of their partisan identity the way we approve of similar movements for marginalized identity groups on the basis of their marginalized identities. While partisan competition legitimately channels debate about matters of justice, including justice considerations relating to recognition of social and cultural identities, the (mis)recognition of partisan identity itself is not a matter of justice.

Now, clarifying the reason for approving of particularized recognition claims in the realm of social identity and disapproving of them in the realm of partisan identity is not as straightforward as it may first appear. The difference cannot be that recognition only legitimately

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<sup>162</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 25-26.

applies to identities that are subjectively important, since, as we have seen, many partisans rate their partisanship as highly important. An appeal to the relative roles these identities play in maintaining basic dignity gets us part of the way there, since, as the last paragraph suggested, proper recognition of partisanship seems only dubiously connected to dignity as compared with social and cultural identity recognition demands, with their grounding in (often) historical experience. But this answer also looks dismayingly stipulative, and is vulnerable to the counterargument that perhaps no one can really say which forms of misrecognition are most damaging to the self-concept.

But there are, I argue, better bases for objecting to partisan recognition – and thus better diagnoses of what is wrong with this form of cultural partisan identity. The first stems from the different forms of authenticity at the heart of these different forms of recognition. In place of the authenticity of a particular lived experience, the relevant form of authenticity partisans substitute is competing views of national identity. When polarized partisans compete on the terrain of identity integrity, they assert rival claims to exclusive interpretation of the body politic – what is properly the object of all members of the polity. Such exclusivist assertions, again, can be legitimate when it comes to social identities like race and gender, since their exclusive possession of certain characteristics lends at least *pro tanto* exclusive ownership over their elaboration. But at the level of democracy, this form of politics encourages a destabilizing battle of which subset best represents the "true" citizenry, and construes rival interpretations as status threats. The partisan "battle for the meaning of America"<sup>163</sup> is thus, through the roping of partisan fortunes to personal fortunes, at once a battle for the soul of the partisan and a battle over the most "authentic" understanding of the country's character.<sup>164</sup> The pursuit of partisan

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<sup>163</sup> John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>164</sup> I will have much more to say about contestation of national identity, including the role of partisanship, in Chapter 4.

recognition thus invites a populist form of conflict.<sup>165</sup> Status-based conflict also presupposes a strange and ironic relationship across party lines: Even as one defines oneself against partisan opponents, one also seeks recognition from them. The cultural partisan thus enlists the adversary in the pursuit, making them party to the desired acknowledgment, while at the same time refusing to reciprocate.<sup>166</sup>

Second, cultural partisan identity obstructs democratic discourse, both by encouraging more inter-partisan animosity and preventing debate on the issues. Unlike social identities, partisan identities are necessarily competitive, turning recognition into a positional good the satisfaction of which depends on opposing partisans losing; the effect is to "increase the relative importance of winning over the greater good."<sup>167</sup> Recognition of social and cultural identities also has an important intersubjective aspect<sup>168</sup>, of course (because we must be recognized *by others*), but it does not necessarily entail a competitive, zero-sum logic in the way partisan identity does. Competitiveness matters because it introduces a notion of scarcity, or at least perceived scarcity, into the equation: not every partisan can win every election. When groups feel "perceived status threat," it "triggers defense of the dominant ingroup, a greater emphasis on the importance of conformity to group norms, and increased outgroup negativity."<sup>169</sup> Diana Mutz argues that these "defensive reactions" are especially powerful and pernicious in the case of dominant groups who perceive threat to their historical economic and cultural power, as in the case of many on the political right in Western democracies.<sup>170</sup> And assertion of identity and denial of the legitimacy of opposing views prevents democratic debate. I noted earlier that this form of "conversation

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<sup>165</sup> For more on the logic of populist conflict, especially on competing and exclusivist definitions of "the people," see Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>166</sup> Appiah makes a similar point about countercultural identities, or "the Bohemian ideal – in which authenticity requires us to reject much that is conventional in our society [and is then] turned around and made the basis of a politics of recognition." Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 153.

<sup>167</sup> Mason, "Losing Common Ground," 56.

<sup>168</sup> See Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 31; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso Books, 2003), 145.

<sup>169</sup> Diana C. Mutz, "Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 19 (2018): E4330–39, at E4331.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

stopping" is often justified when it comes to social and cultural identities because, in reality, it serves to further the broader conversation of advancing justice. But at the level of partisanship, identity's intransigence prevents democratic debate from occurring. Insofar as successful recognition of partisan identity depends on the elusive pursuit of positive regard or endorsement by members of other groups (parties), cultural partisan identity mistakenly demands of competitive politics something it cannot provide. Such status-based conflict reinforces out-group animosity, fanning the flames of affective polarization.

Finally, transposing the logic of identity-based conflict into the domain of partisanship risks distorting the pursuit and fulfillment of recognition of social and cultural identities, and thus poses a threat to the fulfillment of esteem and dignity (insofar as identity recognition is required for those). As political conflict has spread to further domains, it has lent a political cast, as mentioned earlier, to some of the terms of associational life. But when successful recognition of one's self-concept depends, at least in part, on partisan political recognition, then one's esteem becomes assimilated into the logic of party competition, rendering it vulnerable to misrecognition through electoral loss. Pressing one's various social identities and associations into the service of partisan competition distorts their meaning in important senses, as other social identities begin to matter in part because they track partisan identity. It is a shaky foundation on which to rest one's esteem.

Before closing this subsection, let me consider a complication with my argument that polarized partisan identity has taken on some of the properties of identity-based conflict, and that this is inappropriate. I noted earlier that partisan authenticity is inappropriate because there is no similar link between recognition of partisan identity and dignity. But one might contest this. It is no stretch to say that the Democrat marooned in a rural community or the Republican within certain corners of the academy faces some discrimination in virtue of their partisan identity. There is increasing experimental evidence to support this supposition, including partisan

discrimination in ostensibly apolitical settings such as applying for jobs<sup>171</sup> and purchasing stadium tickets.<sup>172</sup> In light of these forms of discrimination, is it not reasonable for partisans to feel an affront to their dignity requiring, or justifying, status protection or the pursuit of positive recognition? Are these partisans not engaged in the same project of reformulating or "taking back" the meaning of their embattled identity just as members of marginalized identity groups have sought to do? In this way, polarization seems to have created the conditions in which preserving, or reaffirming, the dignity of one's partisan identity becomes a rational response.

I maintain that this response is still mistaken and ultimately counterproductive. In fact, it merely reveals the deep extent of the problem. Imbuing one's partisanship with the potential for recognition does not make it safe from status threats, but only guarantees that they happen when, not if, one's party loses. More broadly, it further entrenches the conditions that make it necessary to seek such recognition. The partisan search for recognition and status protection indicates an unhelpful and dangerous mode of relating to partisan opponents. A better one is needed.

## 5.2. *Political Partisan Identity and Democratic Recognition*

I have argued that polarization has caused partisan competition to increasingly assume the logic of conflict over recognition, as a significant part of the substance of partisan contestation concerns the esteem and authenticity of partisans. One important root of today's dysfunctional partisan politics, then, is the transformation of partisan identity into a vessel for seeking the sources of human dignity citizens might otherwise fulfill through recognition of their social identities. A natural response to this tendency would be to seek to avoid identity-based conflict, to seek to lessen the sense in which politics is a source of quasi-aesthetic meaning in

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<sup>171</sup> Karen Gift and Thomas Gift, "Does Politics Influence Hiring? Evidence from a Randomized Experiment," *Political Behavior* 37, no. 3 (2015): 653–75. For more on the effects of partisan polarization in (nonpolitical) economic life, see Christopher McConnell et al., "The Economic Consequences of Partisanship in a Polarized Era," *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 1 (2018): 5–18.

<sup>172</sup> Andrew M. Engelhardt and Stephen M. Utych, "Grand Old (Tailgate) Party? Partisan Discrimination in Apolitical Settings," *Political Behavior* 42, no. 3 (2020): 769–89.

people's lives by discouraging intense identification with the political sphere. Indeed, centering partisanship exclusively on policy- or ideology-based concerns seems to be what some empirical scholars have in mind by a more "political" partisanship.<sup>173</sup> In my view, however, attempting to rid politics altogether of this expressive dimension would be a mistake. While Political Partisanship eschews the collapse of electoral politics completely into status-based competition, and thus demands partisan identity be less about who partisans are and more about what they believe, it retains a role for recognition. But Political Partisanship commends *recognition without authenticity* – or, more specifically, without the particularized form of authenticity undergirding claims for recognition of social identities. In this subsection, I motivate the general theoretical underpinnings of such a view; further elaboration of the precise objects of recognition comes in Chapter 4.

To see how this is possible, we need to distinguish two modes of the politics of recognition. The more familiar mode is the politics of difference – the demand to be treated particularly, in which "what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else."<sup>174</sup> This is the form of partisan identity politics I have objected to. But there is another mode of recognition, which Taylor calls the "politics of universalism," which is based on a "principle of equal citizenship" emphasizing "the equal dignity of all citizens."<sup>175</sup> As such, this politics seeks to avoid "difference-sensitive" policies<sup>176</sup> – recognition of particularity – in favor of recognition of "universal human potential."<sup>177</sup>

The politics of equal recognition offers, I suggest, a promising foundation for Political Partisanship. Political Partisanship rejects partisanship as expression of authentic private experience deserving of particular recognition, based on a politics of difference, and embraces,

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<sup>173</sup> Shafranek, "Political Considerations in Nonpolitical Decisions"; Claassen, Tucker, and Smith, "Ideological Labels in America."

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 38.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 41. This more general and basic form of recognition is similar to what Darwall calls "recognition respect"; see Stephen L. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977): 36–49.

instead, partisanship as expression of a more general form of shared experience, based on a politics of universalism. More specifically, the object of recognition at the heart of political partisan identity is acknowledgment of co-participation in the project of collective self-governance. Insofar as partisanship tracks inclusion and commitment to the shared endeavor of making democracy work, recognition of partisan identity can facilitate recognition of political equality. When citizens advance "out into the bright light of the public stage" through the efforts of partisanship and engage in the "self-revelatory character of [political] action," they receive and return the equalizing gaze of their fellow citizens similarly committed.<sup>178</sup> Whereas the politics of difference demands that we "give acknowledgment and status to something that is not universally shared"<sup>179</sup> – and that, given the partisan desire for status through winning, *cannot* be universally shared – the politics of universalism underwrites a shared political status. It is only the latter form of identity affirmation that is appropriate to the partisan political realm.<sup>180</sup>

The democratic recognition of political partisan identity differs, then, from recognition in the social sphere in both its content and moral foundations. The content of inter-partisan recognition – that is, what it is appropriate to strive for in politics and to demand of other citizens – ought not be acknowledgment of the kind of authentic individuality at stake in relationships of deep friendship and love (even though partisan competition is a legitimate mechanism for securing the conditions under which those can be achieved in the social sphere). Rather, the content is a generalized, undifferentiated affirmation of democratic participation and acknowledgment of every citizen's standing in the ongoing (re)formulation of the meaning of citizen identity. This contrasts with the content of cultural partisan recognition I diagnosed earlier. The kind of recognition at stake there demands the safeguarding of the integrity of the

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<sup>178</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," *History of Political Thought* 6, no. 3 (1985): 617–42, at 628.

<sup>179</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 38.

<sup>180</sup> I provide a more extensive account of the precise nature of political interdependence, and how it grounds an attractive view of political cohesion, in Chapter 4. For now, I wish to provide initial motivation for the thought that a certain kind of mutual recognition of partisan identity can play a productive role in democratic politics while avoiding the pitfalls of polarized, cultural partisan identity.

partisan's relationship to politics and its role in the self-concept of the partisan, positing a sectarian and incontestable view of national identity. Democratic recognition of political partisans does not seek to shield the content of recognition from the valid contributions of others, because political identity, unlike social identity, is properly under common ownership. This explains why we generally think it is inappropriate to ask someone to change, or revise their understanding of, their social identities, whereas querying someone's partisan identity is fair game – required, even, in open democracies.

Demands for recognition of social and cultural identity, recall, are grounded in (or justified by) their link to human dignity or flourishing. The demand for equal democratic recognition, by contrast, is grounded in the place of active citizenship in the maintenance of democratic life, and the role positive affirmation of our interdependent contributions to this project plays in supporting it. This defense is neutral with respect to the particular contributions of partisans, and, as such, encourages an undifferentiated form of recognition that applies equally across the partisan citizenry. Partisan identity is a kind of participative shorthand or vehicle for democratic identity, for membership in the public. Partisanship is conceived as an especially visible way of enacting the duties of active citizenship. Note, though, that partisan recognition is not quite as universal or undifferentiated as recognition of basic human dignity such as that which grounds most accounts of human rights, since it is still predicated on particular actions (partisan contribution to democracy) rather than granted simply in virtue of humanity, or even citizenship. But this predicate of recognition is, at the same time, meant more inclusively than more restrictive notions of, e.g., meritocracy, or economic contribution.

A key advantage of this account is its potential to reframe partisan conflict to lessen the zero-sum competitive logic that polarization has imposed, while retaining the participation-affirming qualities of recognition. When partisanship is no longer conceived as a core aspect of the self bound up with the vicissitudes of elections, constantly vulnerable, then the stakes of each individual partisan debate are lowered. This helps debate become more tractable. Compromises

stand a better chance of occurring when partisans are relieved of the demand to remain true to themselves at all costs – when the source of meaning, value, and pride they get from the political sphere attaches to an enduring feature irrespective of the fortunes of their party. In a similar fashion, the meaning, value, and pride partisans derive from their manifold other social identities is not tied so tightly to the partisan contest, and so due recognition of those identities does not depend on defending partisanship at all costs. These are the senses in which partisan conflict and recognition become quarantined from conflict and recognition in other areas of life. Political Partisanship mandates a separation of social-cultural authenticity, following Weber's insight: "it is not true – as many people have insisted – that the 'personality' is and should be a 'whole' in the sense that it is injured when it is not exhibited on every possible occasion."<sup>181</sup>

Shifting recognition onto more universalist terrain does not empty, but only changes, the meaning and force of the concept. It may seem oxymoronic to advocate an equal form of recognition; perhaps recognition always requires recognizing *as different*. I do not think this objection stands, however. Imagine a company that encourages a culture of mutual affirmation on the basis of every employee's efforts to advance the company mission. There is a norm of employees genuinely acknowledging the contributions of their colleagues without regard to the particular role they occupy in the organization, from the management suite to the environmental services staff. I do not think it is incoherent to call this mutual affirmation, which is relevantly similar to the generalized democratic recognition among political partisans I am advocating, a form of recognition. Moreover, though positive in valance, inter-partisan recognition does not require personal relationships or intimacy any more than recognition of social identities demands or requires those things. As such, it remains a relatively morally minimal concept.

The different form of partisan conflict I am advocating remains faithful to the agonist impulse identified in the previous section, while identifying a more promising normative footing

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<sup>181</sup> Weber, *On the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, 5.

for promoting "the perpetuity of political contest."<sup>182</sup> Agonist theorists have stressed ongoing politicization and creation and reformulation rather than expression of what is already there. Avoiding partisan integrity and authenticity represents a similar move toward a politics of engagement rather than protection. In this way, Political Partisanship helps create the conditions to realize the agonist promise of productive and valuable conflict.

Now, advocating a form of politics of universalism might seem an uphill battle, given the deep skepticism of difference-blind politics on the left. Many theorists and activists have thought that upholding genuine equality requires "the acknowledgment of the particular needs of individuals as members of specific cultural groups" – a perspective from which universalism has long been thought naïve, to say the least.<sup>183</sup> Whatever the merits of this critique as regards social and cultural identities, however, I do not think it is a worry for recognition when it comes to Political Partisanship. For one thing, even if recognition is owed to someone in virtue of one or more of their differentiated social identities, it does not follow that recognition is similarly owed to them in virtue of their partisanship. For another, differential treatment and particularized recognition of social identities are perfectly compatible with the more general form of recognition I am advocating for partisan identity. Along similar lines, democratic recognition does not require citizens to rid themselves of particulars when entering partisan politics. Nor does it require substantive agreement or homogeneity of the kind associated with Rousseau-style universalism.<sup>184</sup>

Still, one might argue that we would do better to drop notions of recognition, status, and meaning from our view of partisanship altogether. I suspect most normative theorists as well as empirical scholars would take this position. Should we not still try, as far as possible, to continue that great and characteristic modern liberal project, "the strict relegation of projects of idealized

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<sup>182</sup> Bonnie Honig, "What Is Agonism?," *Contemporary Political Theory* 18, no. 4 (2019): 661–69, at 661.

<sup>183</sup> Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–23, at 7.

<sup>184</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 44–50.

self-making to the private sphere"?<sup>185</sup> But besides their contributions to an account of active citizenship, and their contribution to realizing ideals of political equality, attempting to suppress the aspiration to broader forms of recognition and expression in political life would be a dangerous mistake, liable to push them into more pernicious avenues. So perhaps the most compelling reason is political and strategic. There are "fundamental political imperatives" to develop views of civic life attentive to notions of solidarity and belonging.<sup>186</sup> When theorists "do not consider how [their political theories are] likely to fair in competition with other perspectives as a basis for defining a compelling sense of membership and civic identity, they neglect politically inescapable necessities and risk utopian irrelevancy."<sup>187</sup> We must never "underestimate the psychological sources and strength" of the chance "to lose ourselves in something more general, more abstract and more noble than our own lives."<sup>188</sup> The centrality of identity as locus of acknowledgment in modern life is not going away, and the "human dependency on evaluative horizons of esteem" extends to political life.<sup>189</sup> The civic republican tradition that inspires my account of political partisan identity has long recognized these passions, in such guises as civil religion and political theology. Rather than seek an elusive partisanship of pure principle, we should seek to channel the impulses that inspire political recognition in other-oriented directions rather than just into the partisan team. For recognition and the expressive dimension of politics are not in and of themselves the core problems of partisanship today; rather, it is the ways in which they have been distorted through polarization.

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<sup>185</sup> Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 57.

<sup>186</sup> Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 474.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. See also Elizabeth Kiss, "Five Theses on Nationalism," in *Nomos XXXVIII: Political Order*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Russell Hardin (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 314.

<sup>188</sup> Bryan Garsten, "Behind the Nostalgia for Ancient Liberty," *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no. 3 (2009): 401–11, at 409.

<sup>189</sup> Mattias Iser, "Recognition," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/recognition/>.

## Chapter 3: Partisan Community

*"The thing is, people want community. They want to belong to something that helps them make sense of the political world."*

— Alejandra Gomez and Tomás Robles Jr.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I insisted that partisan identity is a complicated web of interest, moral positions, and identity, and that it is incumbent upon normative theorists to take account of this Political Partisanship. It is not possible to fully grasp what is at stake in the crisis of partisan democracy – especially the distinctive challenges of polarization – without dealing with partisan identity politics. In Part II, I continue the normative analysis of partisan identity I began in the last chapter. The arguments of this chapter and the following are tightly connected, so I will here introduce the main claims of both.

In this chapter, I defend an ideal of *partisan community* according to which parties serve as uniquely effective schools of important virtues of active citizenship.<sup>2</sup> At their best, parties inculcate a morally valuable form of civic friendship among co-partisans (that I call "solidarity") and a moralized form of attachment to the state ("belonging"). My argument joins accounts that defend partisanship for its role in connecting or linking the citizenry and the state, and this chapter contributes to an understanding of what is at stake, normatively speaking, in partisan linkage.<sup>3</sup> But I do so in a different way. My ideal of partisan community draws on a family of broadly republican and communitarian accounts of citizenship, capturing much of what those

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<sup>1</sup> Alejandra Gomez and Tomás Robles Jr., "How to Turn Anger and Fear Into Political Power," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/21/opinion/sunday/latinos-arizona-battleground.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Muirhead also uses the term "partisan community," but by that he means to re-characterize public debate in the polity as a whole by encouraging acknowledgment that even our fundamental principles are open to partisan interpretation. See Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "The Partisan Connection," *California Circuit Law Review* 3 (2012): 99–112; Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Speaking Truth to Conspiracy: Partisanship and Trust," *Critical Review* 28, no. 1 (2016): 63–88; Fabio Wolkenstein, "A Deliberative Model of Intra-Party Democracy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2016): 297–320; Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Fabio Wolkenstein, "The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 97–109.

arguing for the values of active citizenship and substantive notions of civic community have thought important. I submit that insofar as we value solidarity and belonging – two compelling citizen virtues – we have strong reasons to value partisanship. But the relationship between partisanship and citizenship I articulate is not one of unambiguous support. I flag the ways in which the very mechanisms that allow partisanship to foster important citizen virtues so effectively always risk undermining those same virtues. In this way, I do not defend parties as they everywhere exist as supportive of democratic citizenship. Rather, I show how parties can – and often *do* – facilitate powerful forms of solidarity and belonging in a way consistent with the view of parties, and the idealization strategy, for which I argued in Part I, while also recognizing that parties frequently fail to live up to this vision.

Still, it remains to be seen what my defense of partisan community means for relationships *across* parties and the question of what citizens of diverse and polarized societies must share. I consider this question in Chapter 4, moving more directly onto the terrain of mainstream theories of citizenship to ask what citizens of diverse democracies must share, and why. I argue that citizenship, or democratic cohesion, in divided times is best conceived in terms of shared action, including, notably, the action of engaged partisans. Other prominent conceptualizations of citizenship – such as shared identity and shared agreement – run into serious problems, and are frequently counterproductive, I will show, in contexts of polarization. But I deny the claim that therefore citizens cannot be said to meaningfully constitute a community rich in other ways. When citizens share a sense of belonging – with its strong identification with the state and critical attachment, and supported by partisan solidarity – this makes available an attractive notion of achieving cohesion through the contributions of politically interdependent, active citizens.

Defending partisanship for its support of a broadly communitarian account of citizenship may seem counterintuitive; parties' oppositional nature seems inherently to threaten communitarian ideals. Democratic theory's general aversion to partisanship would seem

particularly acute among these most ambitious accounts of civic virtue. While this may be true of certain historical instantiations of communitarian or republican argumentation, my two-tiered approach to political community should give defenders of solidarity and belonging strong reasons to take partisanship onboard. Relaxing the standard assumption that communitarian goods can only be achieved given a certain *citizen-wide* identity reveals a readily-available mechanism – political partisanship – for achieving the virtues of solidarity and belonging, albeit of slightly different kinds.

In the course of defending partisanship in this way, my two-tiered approach to democratic identity provides a new way of addressing the long-standing tension in normative theories of citizenship between community and pluralism. On the one hand, it provides ample room for the importance of robust notions of community, public spiritedness, and demanding notions of active citizenship and self-rule. In line with communitarian citizenship, I argue that solidarity and belonging are indeed crucial democratic values – values often relegated too quickly to the private realm of the good.

But on the other hand, my theory's crucial move – the argument that political community can and ought to be *partial* in important senses – insulates it from a common criticism those sorts of theories has faced – that they are anti-pluralist, exclusionary, or unduly conservative. I agree that predicating good citizenship on potentially exclusive identity markers – "ethnic" or "cultural" – is inappropriate in the context of contemporary democracies. Relegating strong notions of political community down a level, to party, also allows us to account for the insight that democratic politics needs contestation; the classical communitarian impulse that "private" or "factional" interests must be abandoned in favor of some public-spirited common good is neither feasible nor desirable. Understanding the value of partisan community yields a theory of citizenship that is at once more oppositional – more sensitive to disagreement and contestation – and more faithful to optimistic ideals of an engaged and participative democratic public.

But first, we need an account of why solidarity and belonging are valuable, and how parties instantiate them – the purpose of this chapter. The argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 briefly surveys recent attempts to theorize parties' role in connecting citizens to the state and shows why more work is needed. Section 3 elaborates the virtues in question – solidarity and belonging – and shows why communitarians and others have thought them indispensable. In Section 4, I show how parties can foster these values in powerful, distinctive ways.

## **2. A Promising Start**

The first recent attempt to articulate the positive ideal behind parties' linkage function is that of Rosenblum & Muirhead, who argue that the core achievement of parties is to "bridge" the "gap" between citizens and government – a gap they suggest is partially epistemic and partially a matter of legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> Epistemically, parties render the workings of government intelligible to the "self-understandings of ordinary citizens, who might never serve or personally encounter someone who served in the national legislature."<sup>5</sup> Just as important, they suggest, is the role parties play in fostering support and faith in the state: "Without parties, the formal polity might seem too remote, too uncontrollable, to elicit either trust or affection."<sup>6</sup> Muirhead further specifies this as a kind of "sociological legitimacy" which he argues is essential for democracies to obtain from their citizens, else the citizenry feel "progressively disempowered" and "lose faith in their government."<sup>7</sup> Parties are uniquely capable of connecting citizens to politics in this way because they are "at once local (embedded in the city, town, and neighborhood) and national (the organizing principle of the national legislature...)." <sup>8</sup> This clearly speaks to the political-science concept of linkage, and their suggestions seem attractive in light of the precipitous

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<sup>4</sup> Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum, "The Partisan Connection," 102.

<sup>5</sup> Russell Muirhead, "Partisan Justification," *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 82–89, at 86.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Speaking Truth to Conspiracy: Partisanship and Trust," *Critical Review* 28, no. 1 (2016): 63–88, at 68.

<sup>7</sup> Muirhead, "Partisan Justification," 85–87. For another account with a largely similar view of sociological legitimacy, see also Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, "Speaking Truth to Conspiracy: Partisanship and Trust," 69.

decline in trust in democratic governance across the Western world.<sup>9</sup> My argument shares much of the spirit of Rosenblum and Muirhead's account, but I attempt more precise specification of what it means for citizens to be "connected" to democratic politics in this way and in what the value(s) of such connection consists.

Two other accounts expand on the value of connection in more detail – both specifying it as a way of making democracy's promise of self-rule meaningful. The first is Wolkenstein's, which considers the partisan connection a form of popular sovereignty. Wolkenstein is concerned with the collapse of party linkage: "since traditional representative mechanisms are widely failing, what we need is a more robust mechanism for connecting citizens to government."<sup>10</sup> The connection, for Wolkenstein, consists in the ability to get citizens involved in the political process and "act." More specifically, parties help satisfy two desiderata surrounding democratic decision-making – perception and causality. Citizens must *feel* like they can make an impact – "must perceive the content of those laws and policies as traceable to themselves." But so too must they actually *make* an impact – "causally contributing to decisions."<sup>11</sup> This is the great achievement of parties. The practical avenues and know-how parties furnish allow citizens to influence, and perceive to influence, state action. Both "radical" (i.e., direct) and representation approaches to popular sovereignty are inferior for being episodic and prone to elite capture. At least in our non-ideal world, parties are our best way of "transforming [citizens] from passive recipients of others' decisions into agents of popular sovereignty."<sup>12</sup>

The mechanism by which Wolkenstein thinks parties connect citizens to the state, however, is unduly restrictive. He (together with Invernizzi-Accetti) advocates for intraparty

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<sup>9</sup> See, generally, Geoffrey Hosking, "The Decline of Trust in Government," in *Trust in Contemporary Society*, ed. Masamichi Sasaki (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019); Patti Tamara Lenard, "The Decline of Trust, The Decline of Democracy?," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (September 2005): 363–78; Mark E. Warren, ed., *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Fabio Wolkenstein, "Agents of Popular Sovereignty," *Political Theory* 47, no. 3 (2019): 338–62, at 339.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 341. See also Fabio Wolkenstein, *Rethinking Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> Wolkenstein, "Agents of Popular Sovereignty," 340.

democracy understood as *deliberation*; they cash out the value of partisan participation in terms of dialogue.<sup>13</sup> No doubt democratic institutions perceived as more open to everyday citizens' opinions would help, but pinning parties' hopes to reengage the citizenry and relegitimize government on an invitation to talk minimizes powerful other motivating resources parties have. More fundamentally, their deliberative notion of participation neglects real tensions between deliberation and participation evident in social and political life, as empirical work has shown. When citizens deliberate, they commit to a kind of political tolerance and open-mindedness to listen to those with whom they disagree. There are benefits to this, but, as Diana Mutz has shown, the habits of deliberative communication are usually not ones that encourage an active stance toward politics – nor a partisan one. Deliberative theorists preach the benefits of "hearing the other side" in the company of diverse others, when it is homogeneous networks that often encourage "citizens to have more intense views" that best move people to participate.<sup>14</sup> The most politically active citizens are very often not the most deliberative ones. Mutz concludes that "there are fundamental incompatibilities between theories of participatory democracy and theories of deliberative democracy" – "it is doubtful that an extremely activist political culture can also be a heavily deliberative one."<sup>15</sup>

The tension between deliberation and participation is not sufficient to argue that we should not encourage partisans to be more deliberative, but it does put pressure on a normative theory of partisanship – like Wolkenstein's and Invernizzi-Accetti's – that tasks quintessentially deliberative virtues with reenergizing and remobilizing citizens in order to address trends of

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<sup>13</sup> Wolkenstein, "A Deliberative Model of Intra-Party Democracy"; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, "The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative."

<sup>14</sup> Diana C. Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134-136. On the polarizing consequences of homogeneous participation, see also Cass R. Sunstein, "The Law of Group Polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (June 2002): 175–95.

<sup>15</sup> Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, 2-3. Mutz further argues (126) that "if the nature of people's political networks involves important trade-offs, it seems incumbent upon political theorists to take this into account" – trade-offs that, to my knowledge, remain underappreciated in normative theory. Work on deliberative "counterpublics" is a notable exception, with its insight that homogeneous enclaves are important, for marginalized groups especially, precisely because homogeneity has clarifying agenda-setting and motivating effects. See, e.g., Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

disconnection. It points to the importance of contextualizing an account of the benefits of partisanship within a broader theory of citizenship, and militates against any easy overlap between the two.<sup>16</sup>

The other specification of the partisan connection – Lea Ypi's – scores better on this count. She values parties for facilitating "commitment" – "car[ing] about the public good and actively seek[ing] to promote it."<sup>17</sup> Partisanship provides both motivational and epistemic resources for making commitment feasible when partisanship enables like-minded citizens to associate with and encourage and comfort one another.<sup>18</sup> This goes beyond Wolkenstein's primarily deliberative understanding of the mechanism of connection, but Ypi ultimately defines connection's value in similar terms. Commitment (and, by extension, partisanship) is valuable as a form of political "authorship" and avoiding citizens' becoming "mere recipients of the decisions of others."<sup>19</sup> This aligns with Wolkenstein's conception of popular sovereignty: both views understand partisanship as addressing a problem in theories of representation in modern, large democracies, which make the promise of actually influencing government seem illusory; partisanship is an especially effective vehicle for influencing policy in accordance with citizens' wishes.

I agree that feeling causal connection over legislation is an important goal, and I think there is something importantly right about valuing parties for furthering it. This was part of my discussion of the preconditions for partisan agency in the last chapter. To this extent, my argument joins the ones considered here in criticizing prior democratic theorizing that ignored the role of partisanship. But my account in this chapter is ultimately distinctive in two major

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Mutz writes that her work "is an argument for promoting partisanship, as well as one for discouraging it." Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Lea Ypi, "Political Commitment and the Value of Partisanship," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 3 (2016): 601–13; see also Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> This is an interesting twist on Ypi's (and White's) main argument that partisanship is valuable for furthering liberal political justification, and her theorizing partisanship as an associative practice represents a step in the direction of the argument I make. It does not, however, invalidate the critical remarks I made in Part I, for Ypi's commitment argument relies on the same understanding of partisanship as channeling prior "principles, aims, and policies concerning the public good." Ypi, "Political Commitment and the Value of Partisanship," 602.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 604, 602.

ways. First I expand on the value of partisanship for partisans, theorizing in what precisely the associative value of partisanship consists. Fully appreciating this value – what I call partisan community – requires the more complicated, identity-based view of partisanship from which many current theorists idealize away, as we have seen. Second, these accounts largely neglect the relationship between partisanship and citizenship. Wolkenstein's tethering of partisanship to the general democratic ideal of popular sovereignty implies strong overlap between being a good partisan and being a good citizen – collapsing partisanship into citizenship. He might reject the congruence, but if so, why? An account of the ways in which partisanship satisfies general democratic values begs the question of what it means to be a good citizen. I will argue in the next chapter that the relationship is far more complicated than that. By failing to contextualize the role of partisanship in a broader normative theory of citizenship, the most sophisticated views on the partisan connection do not respond to the other great crisis of partisanship – that of polarization.

### **3. Solidarity and Belonging**

The virtues in which my ideal of partisan community consists find expression across a range of contemporary political theory. They have enjoyed support, in various forms, from theorists in a number of literatures.<sup>20</sup> As will soon become clear, I draw on work by liberal nationalists, political liberals, and civic republicans in making my case. The advantage of my virtue-centric rather than literature-centric approach is that, if done carefully, I avoid semantic disputes – nothing hangs on whether some such theorist is really a communitarian in disguise – and synthesize what are often cross-cutting debates on citizenship's normative dimensions. I want only to isolate the virtues of solidarity and belonging common enough to diverse theorists in a way that they could plausibly recognize them as valuable.

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<sup>20</sup> For a survey of some of these communitarian notions across a range of contemporary theory, see Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging: Levels of Community and Their Normative Significance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

But why solidarity and belonging, specifically? There are two reasons. First, something like these virtues is often discussed in public commentary on democracy, especially in discussions over polarization, as well as implied by the idea of party linkage. There is a decidedly communitarian cast to the public rhetoric around partisanship's dangers and the dangers of polarization; a common refrain, particularly in the United States, is that citizens need to minimize partisan differences and "come together" in some sense around a prior, or overriding, civic identity or project. These concerns echo the spirit of communitarian (and related) arguments, and my goal is to give analytical rigor to often vague notions that nonetheless importantly respond to contemporary democratic anxieties. And second, solidarity and belonging represent the most communitarian end of the spectrum of possible values achievable through political community – the hardest to "liberalize" – and so the first to go in the face of arguments from pluralism. If I can show that even these values have a positive role to play in democratic politics, then I will have gone further in making good on the promise to reconcile the values of community and pluralism than if I had chosen "easier" desiderata.

Still, I acknowledge the potential worry that "communitarianism" comes with some significant semantic baggage, so let me say upfront that I will not be defending communitarianism as a comprehensive alternative to liberalism.<sup>21</sup> Nor do I endorse the first wave of communitarians' (1970s-1980s) tight assimilation of (often ethnic) culture with political identity.<sup>22</sup> But there is a world of nuance between a position that demands the insulation of culture from politics, on the one hand, and one that affords no role for discussions of democratic culture, on the other. There are many ostensibly plausible views about the character

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<sup>21</sup> Many have argued that communitarianism never amounted to anything like an alternative to liberal political philosophy on its own terms, with communitarian critiques failing to find a target in academic liberalism. At best, communitarians pointed to areas liberal theory had neglected only as a matter of emphasis. See, e.g., Simon Caney, "Liberalism and Communitarianism: A Misconceived Debate," *Political Studies* 40, no. 2 (1992): 273–89; Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*; Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> For a canonical example of this more conservative end of communitarianism, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1984). For a more recent example, see Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

and value of democratic identity – views that, more to the point, contemporary worries about polarization raise.

### 3.1. *Democratic Solidarity*

By solidarity, I have in mind a virtue that can obtain within citizen relationships. Solidarity is a horizontal virtue in that it describes the moral aspects of relationships among citizens (or citizen identity) in virtue of which they stand in a valuable form of community with one another. Solidarity captures the intuition that although one's fellow citizens are destined to remain strangers, there is something important about the citizen relationship being morally valuable in some sense – about one's citizen identity describing more than just a legal relationship. In articulating the value of solidarity, I here lean most heavily on recent accounts of "civic friendship" defended by a group of communitarian-minded political liberals. These theorists have developed particularly clear accounts of the moral value of citizen relationships that other theorists have also thought important.<sup>23</sup> By referencing some characteristics common to these accounts of civic friendship, I hope to provide a plausible sketch of what the value of solidarity consists in that would be familiar to other theorists of the intrinsic value of political community.

The first characteristic of solidarity is cooperation. As R. J. Leland writes, "the ideal of civic friendship begins from the thought that citizens value cooperating together on fair terms to advance the interests of others who are likewise committed to such cooperation."<sup>24</sup> Cooperation among friends is distinct from mere strategic coordination, and it does not reduce to citizens conforming their behavior to some set of norms. The idea that cooperation has moral value

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<sup>23</sup> These theorists' broader project is to justify public reason liberalism for its role in supporting the value of civic friendship. They argue that because civic friendship is valuable, and because public reason constraints are necessary to achieve it, the virtue of civic friendship requires public reason. Here, though, we can focus only on the characteristics of civic friendship they identify, without worrying whether they are sufficient to justify public reason liberalism. See Collis Tahzib, "Perfectionism: Political Not Metaphysical," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 47, no. 2 (2019): 144–78; R. J. Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2019): 72–103; Andrew Lister, *Public Reason and Political Community* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," 75.

gains plausibility by considering that ordinary friends value doing things together and cooperating on shared projects. "Friends engage in joint pursuits," as Bennett Helm writes; "never to share activity with someone and in this way to interact with him is not to have the kind of relationship with him that could be called friendship."<sup>25</sup> A neighborhood association whose members gather to paint a mural, say, or root for a local team together experiences more solidarity than an adjacent neighborhood association whose members do not. This holds even if we stipulate that no additional moral value could be gained by the greater degree of familiarity members of the former group would have over the latter. Citizens experience a deeper quality of solidarity when they act and *do things* together.<sup>26</sup>

A second component of solidarity is mutual sympathy or "non-prudential concern," which Leland and Han van Wietmarschen take to be the "core feature" of civic friendship.<sup>27</sup> Civic friends exhibit a measure of positive regard for one another, "appreciat[ing] the efforts of their fellow citizens" and "tak[ing] satisfaction in doing their part" in collective efforts.<sup>28</sup> Importantly, though, this affective element of the citizen relationship is not intimacy or emotional closeness of the kind ordinary interpersonal friendships display. This is part of what distinguishes *civic* friendship: citizens exhibit non-prudential concern for anonymized others "conceived merely as citizens belonging to the same polity," not as individual persons.<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to say how much mutual sympathy must obtain among citizens who are destined to be, in large societies, essentially strangers. The impossibility of a personal relationship among citizens disqualifies it, for some, from being able to lay claim to the title of friendship.<sup>30</sup> This is

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<sup>25</sup> Bennett Helm, "Friendship," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall Edition 2017.

<sup>26</sup> I am pushing the notion of cooperation in a slightly more colloquial understanding of cooperation as "action," as opposed to the tendency of political liberals to understand it as a kind of "reasoning together." See especially Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 238 (2010): 50–71. I further develop the distinction in the next chapter.

<sup>27</sup> R. J. Leland and Han van Wietmarschen, "Political Liberalism and Political Community," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (2017): 142–67, at 158.

<sup>28</sup> Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," 79–80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. See also Sibyl Schwarzenbach, "Democracy and Friendship," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2005): 233–54, at 234.

<sup>30</sup> Iseult Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen? The Ties between Citizens as Colleagues," *Political Studies* 49, no. 1 (2001): 51–69.

not by itself an argument against mutual sympathy as an asymptotic ideal; perhaps it is still true that solidarity is realized to a greater degree the more mutual sympathy citizens feel for one another. As a normative ideal, the more citizens exhibit mutual sympathy, the better.

Third, solidarity consists in shared values and commitments. A group united by a shared sense of normative goals – of what is valuable and important – is to that extent more of a moral community. The nature of the values shared by a community varies: those shared by a religious group differ from those of a recreational club or a group of researchers – but the point is that the relationships within such groups are more morally valuable than those in groups united by merely strategic relationships (to say nothing of relationships of coercion).<sup>31</sup> Tahzib, for example, argues that civic friendship is characterized by "a fairly thick set of shared substantive values and commitments."<sup>32</sup> In order for civic friendship to be valuable, Tahzib continues, civic friends must share a "joint perspective and common evaluative ground" and "some kind of shared horizon of substantive values."<sup>33</sup> This proceeds from the intuition that friends are closer when they have values in common.

The final characteristic of solidarity is a collective identity, a sense of "we" that unites members of a political community in a common narrative. The importance of collective identity finds clearest expression in the intrinsic argument for the value of national identity. David Miller, for example, argues that for a community identity to be meaningful, there has to be a story for why this identity – *this* group of people, rather than any other – is significant enough to organize with politically. Communities need "a feeling of like mindedness...a sense of having participated in some common project which might now be regarded as a source of pride."<sup>34</sup> In virtue of such aspects of a community as its history, geography, traditions, and myths<sup>35</sup>, a community responds

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<sup>31</sup> Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging: Levels of Community and Their Normative Significance*, 20-22.

<sup>32</sup> Tahzib, "Perfectionism: Political Not Metaphysical," 154.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155. I note that Tahzib's formulation is the most demanding; many of the other theorists considered here refrain from building in substantive agreement over values and commitments.

<sup>34</sup> David Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 133–58, at 144.

<sup>35</sup> David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

to the question "why should I engage politically with this group of people rather than other groups?" with the simple answer, "these are *your* people, even though you may not have seen or known many of them as individuals."<sup>36</sup>

Taken together, these elements – cooperation, mutual concern, shared values, and collective identity – define a virtue of solidarity as an ideal of the moral value of citizen identity. But precisely what kind of value is solidarity? Some advance an argument for intrinsic value. This position can take an almost existential cast, beginning from the premise that humans have a deeply-ingrained need for community and that community is good wherever we find it.<sup>37</sup> In this vein, John Dewey held that "the habit of amicable cooperation – which may include, as in sport, rivalry and competition – is itself a priceless addition to life."<sup>38</sup> Solidarity would then be a particular fulfillment of this generic value. Another variant of the intrinsic argument is more contingent on its being fulfilled specifically by the nation – that there is something valuable for its own sake about experiencing a moral relationship according to the features above despite all that might divide a citizenry. This looks like the liberal nationalist and civic friendship argument.<sup>39</sup> Both of these versions of the intrinsic argument for solidarity capture the "e pluribus unum" intuition common in public discourse – that, at the end of the day, we should focus on what unites us, not what divides us. Others argue that solidarity is instrumentally valuable because necessary to achieve other liberal-democratic goods: basic stability and order<sup>40</sup>, in the first instance, but also an effective redistributive politics<sup>41</sup> and interpersonal trust and the

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<sup>36</sup> Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," 142. See also Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 38, 471.

<sup>37</sup> As Caney notes, this is a classic communitarian claim: "that constitutive community is valuable, where this exists, when people identify themselves as members of a community." Simon Caney, "Liberalism and Communitarianism: A Misconceived Debate," 283. For many references exemplifying the claim, see *ibid.*, fn. 77.

<sup>38</sup> John Dewey, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us," 1939.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*; Thomas Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 139–57.

<sup>40</sup> The classic argument here is Mill's: J.S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962), Chapter XVI.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*.

preconditions for compromise.<sup>42</sup> The difference between the intrinsic and instrumental argument will be relevant, below, for how much of the promise of democratic solidarity political parties can fulfill.

### 3.2. *Democratic Belonging*

Many lament citizen alienation from politics, in such manifestations as listless apathy or righteous contempt. What is needed, it is often supposed, is citizens who are engaged in or committed to the democratic project in some sense. But it is not enough to say that democracy needs participative citizens – a moral truism that courts little disagreement across democratic theory.<sup>43</sup> The communitarian ideal calls for a more substantively normative kind of participation: a vertical relationship between citizen and state characterized by a moralized form of motivation, what I call belonging. This virtue captures the aspiration of this chapter's epigraph: citizens "want to belong to something that helps them make sense of the political world." Benjamin Barber puts the point with verve: "when democracy cannot respond to the need for community with anything more than a pusillanimous privatism, other, more oppressive political ideologies will step in."<sup>44</sup> The value of belonging draws from two arguments theorists have proposed for what might make participation especially valuable: the meaning derived from participating with others and the value of a critical stance.

The first component of belonging emerges directly from the liberal national idea of collective identification just considered, but is analytically separate. Miller, for example, defends the idea that one of the goods collective (horizontal) identification helps realize is motivation to participate politically. In my terminology, Miller thinks solidarity is both intrinsically good (like the civic friendship theorists) and instrumentally valuable for supporting belonging. Miller's ideal

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<sup>42</sup> Brian Barry, "Self-Government Revisited," in *The Nature of Political Theory*, ed. David Miller and Larry Siedentop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> Caney, "Liberalism and Communitarianism," 282-285.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 118.

of participation involves citizens who are "motivated to play their part in achieving collective goals" and experience an important sense of non-alienation, or connection, to the state because one engages in self-rule with others one can recognize as one's own.<sup>45</sup> I doubt Miller is arguing that citizens will not participate when they do not share the relevant kind of collective identification; the argument seems to be that there is an *especially valuable form* of participation available to co-nationals. This implies that Miller's version of belonging is not just about motivation if we understand that term to mean a nagging sense of obligation. It is more about enthusiastic recognition of shared fate.

Why is solidarity necessary for belonging? As Arash Abizadeh notes, there are two arguments, both concerning the motivating effects of particularism: one metaethical and one sociological.<sup>46</sup> Miller argues that exhortations to participate grounded only in some weightless deontological duty rely on an implausible "ethical universalism."<sup>47</sup> And sociologically, Miller relies on the empirical claim that what is required to motivate people to act together politically in the contemporary world is national identity.

These arguments are controversial, with some theorists questioning the necessity of the linkage between horizontal attachment and vertical attachment. Mason, for instance, deeply believes in the importance of belonging *to the state*, but denies that this requires a sense of belonging *together*, or solidarity. The core of Mason's account is a subjective sense of identification with the state, meaning that citizens feel that they are bound up with the fate of their society. Mason writes of the value of "a widespread sense of belonging" when citizens "feel at home" in and "identify" with "most of the polity's major institutions (especially its legal and political institutions) and some of its central practices."<sup>48</sup> Belonging means feeling that citizens

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<sup>45</sup> Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," 142.

<sup>46</sup> Arash Abizadeh, "Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation? Four Arguments," *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 3 (2002): 495–509.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*, 57–58, quoted in Abizadeh, "Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation?". For more discussion of the metaethical issues in the nationalist debate, see Margaret Moore, *The Ethics of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 2.

<sup>48</sup> Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, 138–139.

have "a stake in the flourishing of" their society.<sup>49</sup> Mason mentions that citizens' ability to experience belonging is partly a matter of substantive justice: basic rights must be protected, and the state would need to guarantee a "minimum equality of opportunity;" further, citizens "must not feel marginalized in relation to its institutions and practices."<sup>50</sup> Still, it seems Mason's notion of belonging is valuable for more than its (possible) instrumental role in securing substantive justice; to say that there is an objective (substantive or material) element to belonging is not to say that belonging reduces to that. It is more, I think, about the potential to change things – about having one's voice be heard, and feeling that this is the case. This implies that belonging is compatible with criticism – with holding the state to account.<sup>51</sup>

The role of criticism is central to the other broad articulation of the virtue of belonging – that of civic republicanism. These accounts understand taking a critical stance towards one's state as a "constituent part" of ideal citizenship.<sup>52</sup> As Cécile Laborde and Lior Erez argue, ideal citizens "subordinate their allegiance to a country to their love of liberty" – a normative commitment understood as prior to national attachment, even as the normative commitment can be given particular shape by virtue of the nation's (contingent) history and culture.<sup>53</sup> To be a good citizen is to be critical – ever "vigilant" of the ways one's state falls short.<sup>54</sup> This view has much in common with "redemptive constitutionalism" – a long tradition on the American left according to which the most authentic patriots are those who call the country to live up to ("redeem") its founding but as-yet unrealized ideals of liberty and equality for all. Frederick

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 139. Mason argues that this merely constitutes a threshold condition of equality, in an effort to avoid requiring substantive agreement among citizens in a way that he argues would make his theory unfeasible in diverse democracies (– note the difference with theorists of civic friendship like Tahzib). Given that what it takes for citizens to not feel marginalized is both a matter of public policy and the subject of some of the most contentious contemporary political debates, I doubt he can have it both ways here.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>52</sup> Lior Erez and Cécile Laborde, "Cosmopolitan Patriotism as a Civic Ideal," *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 1 (2020): 191–203, at 197.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 196–197. The latter clause distinguishes civic republicanism most clearly from constitutional patriotism, which, in its pure or "neutralist" form, premises patriotic allegiance on rational attachment to liberal principles without regard for local particularity. See Cécile Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 4 (October 2002): 591–612.

<sup>54</sup> Erez and Laborde, "Cosmopolitan Patriotism as a Civic Ideal," 196. See also Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), Chapter 8.

Douglass, who fought against slavery using the terms of the American founders, is a touchstone – one of the “prophets of a possible America [who seemed] more American, sometimes, than the defenders of the country that actually existed.”<sup>55</sup> For these theorists, motivation is supplied by the need to keep the society of which one is a member accountable and the altogether appropriate sense of responsibility one feels for state action.<sup>56</sup>

This sounds much like the kind of vertical identification Miller is aiming for; the sticking point of disagreement concerns what citizens must share on the horizontal dimension, with liberal nationalism's answer (akin to my account of solidarity above) more substantial than civic republicanism's negative attachment to critique. For now, though, the similarities are more important. I claim that both Miller's account and civic republicanism's critical patriotism are legible interpretations of the partisan connection. These accounts agree that democracy needs actively participative citizens, and they leaven this basic claim with extra sources of normativity: collective identification and critique. In any case, the differences between the two accounts can be overstated: liberal nationalism affords significant room for criticism and contesting the national culture<sup>57</sup>, and civic republicans take seriously the need for a degree of ethical particularism in grounding collective identification and ultimately motivation.<sup>58</sup>

What kind of value is democratic belonging? Again, we can distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental arguments. Intrinsically, some have argued that enthusiastic participation is an essential part of living a flourishing life, and that democratic societies characterized by enthusiastic participation – whatever outcomes this helps yield – are better in a meaningful

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<sup>55</sup> Jedediah Purdy, *A Tolerable Anarchy: Rebels, Reactionaries, and the Making of American Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 24. See also Jack M. Balkin, *Constitutional Redemption: Political Faith in an Unjust World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Erez and Laborde, “Cosmopolitan Patriotism as a Civic Ideal,” 192-193.

<sup>57</sup> This separates *liberal* nationalism from more straightforwardly conservative exhortations of obedience to national culture – e.g., that of Roger Scruton, “In Defence of the Nation,” in *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Derek Matravers and Jonathan Pike (New York: Routledge, 2002), 271–85.

<sup>58</sup> This separates their civic republicanism from constitutional patriotism, as mentioned.

sense.<sup>59</sup> Others take a more instrumental approach that is also democracy-wide, not individual-specific. One form of instrumental argument holds that democracy cannot function, or function long, without a participative citizenry characterized by belonging.<sup>60</sup> Another, as with solidarity, holds that other kinds of liberal-democratic goods are not possible without engaged participation – for example, any kind of meaningful social change.

#### **4. Partisan Community**

This section considers the role of Political Partisanship in these visions of citizenship, and argues that it is possible to achieve meaningful versions of the virtues of solidarity and belonging within parties. To summarize upfront, I argue that parties can foster especially powerful forms of solidarity and belonging in a way that recognizably fulfills much of the spirit of the active vision of political community. "Much," but not "all": I flag places where partisan community – the particular ways in which parties fulfill solidarity and belonging – diverges from, and even cuts against, what many of the theorists considered above intended. Precisely what degree of danger this poses for those accounts of citizenship on their own terms is the question I address in the next chapter. For now, the important thing is to see how parties – a quintessentially competitive institution usually ignored by theorists of community and active citizenship – play a surprisingly strong role in furthering ideals of solidarity and belonging.

##### *4.1. Partisan Solidarity*

Can parties promote the first component of solidarity, cooperation? I think yes. It seems straightforwardly true that whatever kind of cooperation we could plausibly attribute to the citizenry at large, we can attribute to a greater degree to partisan communities. Partisans act together – both deliberately and in non-deliberative action. This is perhaps most obvious when it

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<sup>59</sup> This essentially Aristotelian view has been expressed most forcefully by the "neo-Athenian" school of neo-republicanism. See, e.g., Barber, *Strong Democracy*; Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> This is similar to Muirhead's argument for "sociological legitimacy." Muirhead, "Partisan Justification."

comes to the work of elections, where partisans help select candidates (or stand as candidates themselves) through primary campaigning and voting, and participate in frenzied conventions. Partisans petition neighbors and collect signatures to get candidates on the ballot; they stuff envelopes and produce and distribute campaign advertisements; they canvas the electorate and knock on doors. Partisans can also be said to be cooperating in the formulation of party platforms and in the task of governing, when they have won elections. In these and other ways, partisans cooperate in the work required to promulgate and, if they are successful, enact their vision of society.

Partly in virtue of the intensity of such cooperation, partisans exhibit mutual concern – positive affective bonds. Partisan activity can be emotionally exhausting, both requiring and sustaining bonds of mutual concern. It is again plausible that the degree of affective bonds regarding partisans is much greater than that uniting citizens, due to the nature of what partisans do. Importantly, these bonds obtain among anonymous others, as in the case of democratic solidarity. Membership in a political party is by definition smaller than membership in a nation, but I do not mean for the increased intensity of affect among co-partisans to derive from a greater degree of interpersonal intimacy. Political parties are engaged in a contest, and the crucible of team-based activity commonly inculcates more intense bonds.<sup>61</sup> But this raises tricky issues. Is it bad for citizens to develop mutual concern through a mechanism predicated, to some degree, on *not* cultivating that mutual concern with certain others (i.e., opposing partisans)? That is, is a subnational identity like partisanship an illegitimate basis for cultivating mutual concern?

The answer in the abstract is surely no – we do not think it bad when the bonds among supporters of a football club are predicated on friendly, but sometimes serious, condemnation of other teams. All kinds of particularistic affective attachments to some degree entail them not being directed toward certain others – that is what makes them particularistic. But the case of *civic* bonds is different; it might seem particularly damaging – damaging *democratically* – to

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<sup>61</sup> See the discussion of Tajfel and social identity theory in Chapter 2.

encourage citizens to cultivate mutual concern within a subgroup that comes at the expense of mutual concern for all – which was anyway the goal of the theorists of civic friendship considered above.

One possible response is to argue that the formulation of mutual concern within parties need not necessarily come at the expense of citizen-wide mutual concern. So an appropriate regulative ideal might hold that partisans should limit, so far as possible, the kind of "negative partisanship" which sees partisans mobilize not on positive attachment to their own party, but solely out of enmity for others. This is attractive as far as it goes, but it has limits stemming from the logic of partisan identity, which is inherently oppositional and competitive. The special nature of partisan community enables it to satisfy to an especial degree the requirement for solidarity that relations exhibit mutual concern – but it is this same feature that makes that solidarity conflict with democratic solidarity. Here the mechanism by which parties excel at cultivating solidarity threatens to inflame the core concern of polarization. The tolerability of this tension will be explored further in the next chapter, on the relationships across parties; here I note the trade-off – that encouraging citizens to cultivate mutual sympathy internal to party might come at the expense of citizen-wide mutual sympathy.

The third component of solidarity, that its members share values and commitments, also seems to apply a fortiori in the realm of partisanship. The members of political parties are united by shared values and commitments. But I note three things on the nature of partisans' shared values. First, it is possible to overstate, especially from the outside, the degree of intraparty agreement. Indeed, much of the purpose of parties is to get citizens who agree on some, but certainly not all, issues to agree sufficiently to a platform capable of coherently entering the political arena – and always in a temporary fashion. And some of the most intense political disagreements are intra-partisan – think, e.g., of the fierce battle between Jeremy Corbyn-style British Labour supporters and Tony Blair-style supporters. (No doubt this point applies to the element of mutual sympathy, as well.) Still, there is greater agreement between opposing

intraparty camps than between any one of them and members of opposing parties. Moreover, we need to draw a distinction between the amount of contestation an identity is subject to and that identity's ability to unite a group of people in a common bond. From the fact that the content of an identity is contested, it does not follow that the identity is any less important for those who hold it, or any less able to license fellow-feeling. Subjective interpretation or judgment of the meaning of an identity is distinct from judgment of one's "fit" with those who also share that identity.

The second thing to note about shared partisan commitments is that they include, crucially, the commitment to contesting elections with the goal of taking the reins of government. The *raison d'être* of parties is to win, and partisans are committed to doing so; they share the value of the importance of achieving political power. This is part of what demarcates parties from movement politics, interest groups, and single-issue organizations, who characteristically seek to advance a narrower set of values (environmental preservation, e.g.). As Muirhead observes, partisan politics "is about winning. (To say that partisans want to rule is to say they aim for *party government*, or government under the full control of one party – theirs.)"<sup>62</sup> The values shared by co-partisans are more comprehensive, and form a basis for manifestoes or platforms that typically include positions on all the major politically salient issues of the day.<sup>63</sup> We might conceive of this commitment to winning power as a sort of meta-value that constrains and directs the others, and can sometimes exist in tension with the other values espoused by party members. The imperative of "electability" – and whether it appropriately disciplines party ambition or capitulates core values – is a source of perennial strife internal to parties. But it is at the core of partisanship.

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<sup>62</sup> Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age*, 83, emphasis in original.

<sup>63</sup> It is true that in some party systems, especially parliamentary ones, the boundary between single-issue political organizations and comprehensive political parties is blurry, and is best conceived as a continuum. But it is also true that the further a group moves from a narrower to more comprehensive ethical vision, the more like a proper political party it seems: witness Robert Habeck, co-leader of the German Green party, stating after their significant recent victories that "we are working hard not to be perceived as a single-issue party." "From Protest to Power," *The Economist*, January 2, 2020.

The third point to note about partisans' shared values is that, normatively speaking, the content of party goals matters – within certain parameters. Generally, many have argued that the ends of group association are relevant for determining the value of that association.<sup>64</sup> I take this as given, and argue that the same holds true in the context of parties. Members of the National Socialist party may have fulfilled the same criteria for solidarity included here, but I want to rule out cases of obviously illiberal and anti-democratic parties. This excludes, at least in the context of reasonably just societies, revolutionary parties – parties whose mission includes the goal of upending the political system in a fundamental way.<sup>65</sup> This does not mean that certain aspects of the electoral system (the "law of democracy") or even constitutional essentials are off-limits from contestation, but it does mean that partisans must respect both the state and their opponents in the sense that they recognize their legitimacy.<sup>66</sup> Beyond these basic norms, when it comes to the content of party platforms it is hard to be specific about what kind of shared party values are democratically permissible, for principled reasons. Like normative theories of deliberation and citizenship, my account of partisan participation is second-order, in the sense that it does not seek to provide conclusions for substantive disagreements – about what justice requires, e.g. – but rather regulate those disagreements in a democratic manner. This means, very roughly, leaving as much space as possible for democratic contestation about those substantive disagreements. To premise a "valuable" form of solidarity too narrowly on a substantive account of justice, say, risks excluding reasonable political judgments held by many citizens as illegitimate from the start.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, 50-51.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of the special challenges posed by revolutionary partisanship and "militant democracy," see Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Chapter 9; White and Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship*, Chapter 8.

<sup>66</sup> This rules out, too, certain forms of populist politics. This is because, according to influential definitions in the literature, populist parties and movements deny the legitimacy of their opponents' claims. See, e.g., Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Although it is true that even second-order normative theories, very much including my own, embody certain substantive goals, such as the just-mentioned commitment to legitimacy. On this, see the discussion of methodology in Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 19-22.

Finally, partisan communities foster a sense of identity that fulfills most of the requirements communitarians think necessary for meaningful collective identification. To see how, recall the reasons for which I objected to Moral Partisanship in Chapter 1. Partisans' commitment to their party and to each other cannot be reduced to belief-based or rational adherence to a set of values, but often operates according to the logic of certain social identities, like religion. As Rosenblum writes, partisan identity involves "mutual identification" that "cannot be understood simply as a vehicle or expression of some anterior social identity" or set of beliefs or principles.<sup>68</sup> This is not to say that policy preferences, ideology, and moral judgments do not matter for the purposes of partisan-identity formation and maintenance, but this is only part of the story. The partisan relationship is not exhausted by such intellectual commitments: "relational and epistemic motives are intertwined."<sup>69</sup>

An unacknowledged upside of the identitarian nature of partisanship is that parties are capable of acting as moral communities in this sense. The "social identity" nature of partisan identity supplies exactly the kind of non-rational basis for mutual identification and solidarity that theorists like Miller argue is necessary. It is true, of course, that some of the elements that form the basis of such identification in the case of nations do not apply to the case of parties: partisan community is not usually premised on separate language or geographical territory.<sup>70</sup> And yet, parties have symbols, colors, traditions, moments of triumph and defeat, a narrative about what sorts of people we are – enough of the substance of mutual identification, I suggest, to generate Miller's intuition about what is required to experience the value of "a sense of like mindedness."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels*. 342-348.

<sup>69</sup> John T. Jost, Alison Ledgerwood, and Curtis D. Hardin, "Shared Reality, System Justification, and the Relational Basis of Ideological Beliefs," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 171–86, at 173; Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Leonie Huddy and Alexa Bankert, "Political Partisanship as a Social Identity," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017; John Bartle and Paolo Bellucci, *Political Parties and Partisanship: Social Identity and Individual Attitudes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Ethnic parties are a special case, in that they are more direct expressions of prior social identities than most parties are, often monopolizing electoral support of those of a region, language, or culture.

<sup>71</sup> Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," 144.

It is worth noting that appreciating this insight requires undertaking a revision of a tendency within democratic theory to posit a firm distinction between voluntary and involuntary social groups in a way that obscures the interesting features of partisanship. There are many reasons why this distinction matters for morally evaluating social group membership. One important one is the supposition that involuntary groups are more "identity-determining" – more meaningful for individuals and more liable to immediately differentiate them from non-group members. So Iris Marion Young, for instance, argues that "the person is prior to the association" and that "the person's identity and sense of self are usually regarded as prior to and relatively independent of association membership" – associations including political parties.<sup>72</sup> But parties, and especially the kind I am describing, reveal the shortcomings of this distinction. Although they are, strictly speaking, voluntary – one can always quit one's membership – parties profoundly influence members' senses of self, helping "constitute" individuals in their reasoning and evaluations, but also in how they are perceived in social life. And it is partly in virtue of these identity-defining characteristics – "the recognition of common experiences, history, affinity, and ways of life" – that partisanship generates the kind of solidarity Young attributes (only) to involuntary social groups.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the involuntary/voluntary distinction – which might otherwise be enlisted to downgrade the solidarity-inducing potential of partisanship – does not track the meaningful/less meaningful distinction, as some theorists of social groups have held.

I have suggested that parties are capable of fostering a valuable form of solidarity among their members. Indeed, the special features of parties mean that, according to the elements of the definition of solidarity I have isolated, we have reason to think the moral relationships among partisans are even more valuable than what is likely to obtain among citizens in general. But here an objection arises relating to distinctiveness: that I have not defined anything unique to political parties. We might look at civil society and argue that many other kinds of communities (e.g.,

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<sup>72</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 44-45, quoted in Matthew D. Kuchem, "Young, Gilbert, and Social Groups," *Social Theory and Practice* 46, no. 4 (October 2020): 737–63, at 741.

<sup>73</sup> Kuchem, 741.

churches, community organizations, affinity groups) satisfy similar elements and thereby achieve solidarity. This objection is serious. If it succeeds – if partisan solidarity turns out to be just another garden variety of civil-society solidarity – then the most I will have accomplished is to point out a hitherto-neglected area where we could find, and appreciate, the human capacity for community. Such a claim would have limited bearing on a broader theory of citizenship, beyond what many other accounts of citizenship that afford significant roles for civil society maintain.<sup>74</sup> It would give no special reason to value parties. Moreover, denying the distinctiveness of partisan solidarity would give little reason to trade any substantively normative ideal community at the national level where and when partisan community conflicts with it.

How far a defense of partisanship is distinctive from an account of civil society will depend on precisely which virtue partisan community is meant to further – and I readily admit that there is some overlap. The nearest position to mine is the "existentialist" intrinsic argument for solidarity – that it is just inherently good for humans to be in community with one another. My argument is straightforwardly complementary to that one, and so it does not pose an interesting challenge. Insofar as both political parties and civil society organizations foster moral relationships as characterized above, they are both valuable. Moreover, this parallel holds true at least to some extent for the more challenging (and relevant to our purposes here) argument that solidarity is instrumentally valuable for supporting habits or virtues of citizenship. As many have argued, there are democracy-supporting effects of being a member of one or multiple civil society organizations. For example, one may learn habits of respectful communication and an appreciation of multiple perspectives, and cultivate unselfish commitment to a greater cause

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<sup>74</sup> Classic statements for the importance of a robust civil society for healthy democracy include Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). For more recent statements, see Nancy Rosenblum, *Membership and Morals: The Personal Uses of Pluralism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Stuart White and Daniel Leighton, eds., *Building a Citizen Society: The Emerging Politics of Republican Democracy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2008); Amy Gutmann, ed., *Freedom of Association* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

through membership in, say, a church or sporting league.<sup>75</sup> And in this sense, at least, civil society organizations are democracy-supportive, since those virtues plausibly generalize into general democratic virtues. If labor unions – to take another prevalent example – cultivate cooperation, mutual concern, shared values, and collective identity among their members, then that is all to the good.<sup>76</sup>

But there is a reason partisanship figures so prominently in contemporary worries about polarization in a way that civil society organizations do not.<sup>77</sup> This difference stems, I submit, from two features of parties that double as features in virtue of which partisan solidarity is distinct from civil society solidarity. These are parties' competitiveness and pursuit of the reins of government. Political parties are inherently competitive, and this affects relationships among partisans in several ways. It puts a kind of accelerator on the features of solidarity enumerated above. The fact that co-partisans are engaged in a contest means they are subject to the pressures of campaigning and experience a particularly intense bond, delighting in shared triumphs and commiserating in shared defeats. Insofar as one thinks it is valuable to stand in community with certain other citizens – not just in fulfillment of some existential need, but because it inculcates certain other beneficial democratic dispositions like equality – then we have a special reason to value parties.

But the effects of competitiveness are double-edged. Another relevant fact about the competitiveness of partisan solidarity is that it seems by its very nature to pose a direct threat to citizen-wide community in a way that civil society organizations do not. If it is true, as I have suggested, that the uniqueness of parties allows them to cultivate an especially powerful form of

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<sup>75</sup> Theda Skocpol et al., "How Americans Became Civic," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, ed. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 27–80; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> On the relationship between unions and democracy (both intra-union democracy and the contribution of unions to democracy in general), see Rebecca Gumbrell McCormick and Richard Hyman, "Democracy in Trade Unions, Democracy through Trade Unions?," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 40, no. 1 (2019). A similar line of argument forms a basis for calls for democratizing private workplaces. See, e.g., Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>77</sup> And, insofar as (at least some) civil society organizations count opposing partisans in their membership, they are often cited as important *solutions* to polarization.

solidarity, then what makes parties unique seems to be precisely what is most threatening. To wit: a case can be made that intra-partisan solidarity in the United States has never been higher; but is that a good thing? The worry is that the inherently competitive nature of partisan solidarity – part of what distinguishes it from solidarity found in civil society – represents a threat to an ideal of the democratic whole.

This tension calls for two responses. The first is to consider the role of partisanship in an account of citizen-wide cohesion. This is the subject of the next chapter. But before getting there – before we even have a sense of how dangerous the existence of rival sites of solidarity actually is – it will pay to look at the other feature of parties that distinguishes them from civil society organizations: the fact that they seek the reins of government. Parties compete, and what they compete for is the chance to operate the state apparatus (at least the offices and positions open to electoral competition) and direct policy in their favored direction. This is not something that civil society organizations do.<sup>78</sup> It is this pursuit of power that renders the kind of solidarity internal to parties relevantly similar to democratic solidarity – and supplies partisans with an incentive to limit dangerous forms of internal solidarity that other kinds of organizations lack. Recall that one of the core arguments for why democratic solidarity is valuable is that it gives a reason for citizens to feel connected to the state. I claim that a plausible interpretation of what it is that makes solidarity – rich, horizontal moral relationships among certain groups of citizens – able to facilitate a sense of connection between them and the state is the special magnitude and solemnity of self-rule. Because political parties' *raison d'être* is to direct the ship of state, the moral logic of partisan solidarity is upward-facing. And it is this feature that makes partisan solidarity a potential engine for political attachment of a moralized nature – an engine, that is, for belonging.

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<sup>78</sup> We enter a gray area when we move from associations such as affinity groups to associations such as interest groups, activist movements, and trade unions – organizations that are definitionally political, and display some degree of competitiveness. But even though these latter groups aim to influence policy, they do not typically have as their fundamental goal wielding power over their fellow citizens.

#### *4.2. Partisan Belonging*

Let's consider how partisan participation can ground the two forms of belonging considered above. Miller thinks the most morally valuable kind of participation requires a sense of horizontal collective identification. As suggested, parties can supply just that. Partisans do not participate, in the first instance, in their capacity as a generalized citizen like any other – something comparatively weightless, or less meaningful, for Miller. I think it is faithful to the spirit of many partisans to say that some aspect of their participation stems from feeling called to support their side – their community, in an important sense. Partisan identity supplies the right kind of motivation for participation on the liberal nationalist account.

But there is a twist. Partisan identity supplies the particularism Miller thinks gives participation moral heft, but it is a slightly different kind of particularism than what he thinks nations have (and constitutional-patriotic accounts do not). Co-nationals enjoy a feeling of "likemindedness" generated by the particularity of their circumstances such as traditions, a shared narrative, cooperation, etc. Absent from Miller's list is a kind of particularism crucial to party – that of being oppositional – developing a stance on politics alternative to partisan rivals'. Partisan communities generate belonging in virtue of particularism toward the rest of the state. The particularity of nationalism may at times be directed against other nations (from a friendly to a more chauvinistic manner), but the idea of opposition and contestation is not internal to what makes participation valuable on the liberal nationalist account as it is on my partisan account.

The importance of critique is central to the other account of belonging surveyed above, that of civic republicans. Laborde and Erez write that republicans have long been interested in "the mechanisms of virtue" – that which cultivates civic virtue. Partisan community does this par excellence, and parties are the most promising institutional scaffolding for facilitating the kind of regulated critique civic republicans have in mind. As political scientists have long argued, "the political party is the one agency that can claim to have as its very *raison d'être* the creation of an

entire linkage chain" that facilitates the partisan's critical stance.<sup>79</sup> Parties provide a set of real practices and practical knowledge to motivate critical participation. Indeed, a further claim is warranted: according to this specification of belonging, parties are *more effective* than not having them at generating critical attachment. That is, partisans have available to them an especially powerful mechanism for achieving critical attachment. Laborde, for example, argues that it is permissible – even desirable – for nations to promote a quasi-cultural "understanding of communal membership" that draws on a particularist, rooted understanding of general liberal-democratic ideals.<sup>80</sup> This is part of what distinguishes her conception of political community from thinner versions of constitutional patriotism (even though she does not go as far as Miller in this direction). Laborde writes that "the development of institutions lacking in civic-cultural significance is likely to aggravate the chief symptoms of democratic malaise, namely, cynicism toward democratic rule, reluctance to share the burden of social justice, resentment towards aloof and acculturated elites, decline of civic dispositions."<sup>81</sup>

I agree, and my claim is that if an important way of preventing those ills is to encourage attachment to the state through the particular, meaning-making and motivation-generating mechanisms of a political culture, then this doubles as a reason to value partisanship. Parties supply exactly this kind of motivational substrate. Ypi argues for something similar: that there is a distinctly epistemic value partisanship offers in virtue of its particularity. The fact that partisans are committed to a certain (critical) set of political commitments means one's fellow partisans can help one remain "resilient" in the face of epistemic pressure to change one's mind or abandon course.<sup>82</sup> Her understanding of the value of particularity, then, is as supportive of the courage to not back down from one's principled stance.<sup>83</sup> I am very sympathetic to Ypi's

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<sup>79</sup> Lawson, "When Linkage Fails," 16.

<sup>80</sup> Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," 599-601.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 601.

<sup>82</sup> Lea Ypi, "Political Commitment and the Value of Partisanship," 608-610.

<sup>83</sup> Ypi acknowledges that this is a peculiar sort of epistemic virtue; it is not about finding the truth, but serves a more systemic function. Democratic argument is better when it contains multiple viewpoints, and the development and

argument, but I mean to argue for something slightly different. The particularist stance of party provides more than empowerment to resist opposing beliefs. It also serves a different epistemic role – allowing partisans to make sense of politics and as a precondition, for many, for being able to contribute. This is more characteristic of an ideal of belonging. In the same way Laborde argues that a public sphere infused with particular (cultural) interpretation provides belonging superior to a mere allegiance to abstract liberal-democratic ideals, so partisan particularity gives one an interpretive foothold in the realm of politics.<sup>84</sup>

But here, too, there is a nuance. Partisan belonging entails a more expansive vision of the morality of criticism as a form of participation than at least some civic republican accounts suppose. The value of the critical stance is sometimes formulated in terms of its ability to further "a specific set of values" – in Laborde's case, "republican and social-democratic."<sup>85</sup> A citizen's ability to count as a civic patriot depends, on these accounts, on their commitment to criticism from a certain direction. Applied at the level of party, this would label participation in parties on the left more morally valuable than parties on the right. I do not deny the attractiveness of the social-democratic view of patriotism, and building in these more substantive values may make more sense as a theory of legitimate patriotism, understood as especially emphasizing an account of how a nation ought to relate to its history.<sup>86</sup> But they are less appropriate, I argue, for an account of the moral value of participation as such. To premise the normative value of the

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maintenance of viewpoints – especially unpopular ones, and ones that fight against an unjust status quo – is difficult. Parties are one kind of organization that provides the resources for such maintenance. See *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> The value of partisanship here shares an affinity with a classic communitarian ontological critique of liberal individualism (especially in the thought experiments of John Rawls and Robert Nozick). Communitarians argued that a certain "embeddedness" is a precondition for individuals to make sense of their own lives (and a prerequisite for accurate theorizing about justice). Many have argued that such methodological critiques do not have a target in academic liberalism, but I think it is possible to argue for a more plausible version in the realm of citizenship. The particularity insisted upon by liberal nationalists and civic republicans (among others) serves the role of grounding what is otherwise a weightless and abstract civic identity. I argue that parties do this even more. For a survey of this line of communitarian critique, and a liberal response, see Simon Caney, "Liberalism and Communitarianism: A Misconceived Debate," *Political Studies* 40, no. 2 (1992): 273–89, at 274–280.

<sup>85</sup> Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," 592. This is true, as mentioned above, for some accounts of horizontal solidarity as well, such as Miller's argument for nationhood from "social justice," which he understands in broadly social-democratic terms. Miller, *On Nationality*.

<sup>86</sup> On the relationship between the view of history and the other dimensions along which nationalist views diverge, see Gina Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 4 (2019): 693–711.

critical component of participation on a given stance in the substantive debate is to apply an inappropriate moral standard to the more procedural, second-order norm-sphere of democratic contestation. It is to make the participative ethic itself partisan. The values at stake in the social democratic stance are some of the most contested in contemporary politics. Most conservative citizens disagree profoundly with the ends of social democratic parties, or at least, more shallowly, on the permissible role of the state in advancing these ends. From a purely pragmatic standpoint, immediately discounting thoughtful conservative stances not only at the level of substantive argumentation (something perfectly legitimate within the scrum of party competition), but also at the level of what is even a valuable contribution to make is sure to undermine “sociological legitimacy” and potentially fuel continued populist backlash.<sup>87</sup>

But there are principled reasons as well to resist the equation of moral participation with participation of a particular partisan stance: if partisan belonging’s element of critique is not premised on furthering specifically social-democratic values, what *is* it grounded in? The value of the critical stance on my account is a more generic value of formulating and advancing claims of contestation about what the state should do. This value is less specific and demanding than the civic republican view of critique as social democracy, but in its insistence that standing up for a political stance is indelibly partisan and confrontational, it is still more specific than general paeans to participation as such. What makes specifically partisan participation morally distinctive – including distinct from nonpartisan participation such as jury duty or “deliberation days”<sup>88</sup> – is the courage and commitment it takes to demand that one’s state do better demonstrative of belonging. We want citizens who are more engaged and who take a sense of responsibility for the direction of the public life of their community. On this reading, the social-democratic values of criticism are one (partisan) form of the more general democratic value of belonging; social

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<sup>87</sup> Laborde advances a similar argument elsewhere, writing that certain liberal philosophers have been “immodest” in supposing that “all critics of progressive, secular liberalism are unreasonable” – a “regrettable and dangerous (politically)” move. Cécile Laborde, “Three Cheers for Liberal Modesty,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2020): 119–35, at 119–120.

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Fishkin’s work on deliberative participation. James S. Fishkin, *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

democratic values matter normatively, at the level of participation, to the extent they form part of a spirit of bettering the polity – the same role that center-right values do for, say, Christian Democratic party members.

The great achievement of parties is that they facilitate this public-spirited sense of critical belonging. As a regulative ideal, then, I am less concerned that parties facilitate social-democratic values than that they facilitate the kind of belonging that many kinds of oppositional stances are likely to. This is a value that partisans of most stripes – including mainstream parties of the left and right in most contemporary democracies – are capable of furthering. I still want to rule out, though, illiberal and anti-democratic stances; accepting the legitimacy of opponents remains a threshold criterion. In some ways, this is a less demanding ideal of good citizenship than the civic republican emphasis, but it is one sorely needed in contemporary politics.

My account of partisan identity is far from complete, however. It remains to be seen how or whether the fact that partisans share a vertical sense of belonging to the state could underwrite a vision of community that is normatively attractive and that sufficiently responds to worries about polarization. Those are the tasks I turn to next.

## Chapter 4 – Partisan Citizenship: Democratic Cohesion as Shared Action

*"Democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing."*

— Archibald MacLeish<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

I began this dissertation by considering the problems of polarization in contemporary democracies. In the last chapter, I defended an ideal of partisan community that facilitates a valuable intraparty relationship (solidarity) and sense of attachment to the state (belonging). But the natural worry is that my advocacy of partisan community does nothing to address – and, indeed, potentially exacerbates – polarization. The concern is that partisan community will conflict with the imperatives of the broader political community – that parties' ability to connect citizens to politics comes at the expense of connecting them with one other – and will do so precisely in virtue of the tasks I have assigned to it.<sup>2</sup> Even though my ideal of partisan community contains an internal, vertical relationship to the state – therefore assuaging concerns that allegiance to party will displace allegiance to political institutions – this could be perfectly compatible with having destructive relations across partisan communities in a way that vindicates long-standing concerns with partisanship. What is more, the corrosive effects of partisanship on democratic (citizen-wide) identity seem especially trenchant given the identitarian form of partisanship with which I am primarily concerned. That is, after all, perhaps the most common complaint with partisanship today: that partisan loyalty comes at the expense of loyalty to fellow citizens, preventing any form of unity or cohesion within the democratic public considered as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald MacLeish, *The American Cause* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), 28.

<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, see Putnam's analysis of "The Dark Side of Social Capital," whereby the positive feelings internal to groups are sometimes associated with out-group animosity: Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000), Chapter 22. In Putnam's language, the worry is that partisan "bonding capital" comes at the expense of society-wide "bridging capital."

This chapter, then, addresses the question of the proper relationship between partisan identity and citizen identity, or, put differently, the role of partisanship within an account of democratic cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Given the picture of partisanship I have developed thus far – its nature and its value – how should we conceive of political unity and its appropriate grounding? What form of cohesion is viable and attractive in modern, deeply-divided societies?

The questions of what citizens must share, and why, are timeless subjects in social and political thought. But recent debates in normative theory have centered on the appropriate character of the democratic bond given "the conflicting imperatives of political legitimacy and cultural inclusiveness,"<sup>4</sup> underneath which lie "tensions between universalist and particularistic moral claims."<sup>5</sup> Many of the leading positions in the literature take the form of either advocacy for, or suspicion of, the concept of the nation, and whether an ideal of citizenship consisting in ties among citizens that are "thick," in some sense, proves exclusionary. Broadly speaking, liberal nationalists defend substantive political community centered on *shared identity*, while constitutional patriots distance themselves from what they view as the former view's reification of the dominant culture in favor of *shared belief*. Perhaps the central axis of disagreement in this debate, then, has been social pluralism. Despite the entrance of sophisticated hybrid accounts, the viability of a normative account of democratic cohesion still largely turns on questions of social identity: its ability to accommodate marginalized and minority citizens, or to avoid splintering the public into narrow identity groups (depending on one's position in the debate).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I use "democratic" identity/community and "citizen" identity/community interchangeably. The question of the proper content of democratic/citizen identity ("what it means to be a (good) American, or New Zealander, or Italian") is, strictly speaking, separable from the question of the proper basis for democratic cohesion (what citizens need to share), even though they are often conflated in the literature. Part of my goal in this chapter, though, is to argue that they stand in a close relationship with one another, since the form of cohesion I end up defending (shared action) depends heavily on a particular (participative) understanding of citizen identity.

<sup>4</sup> Cécile Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 4 (October 2002): 591–612, at 591.

<sup>5</sup> Iseult Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen? The Ties between Citizens as Colleagues," *Political Studies* 49, no. 1 (2001): 51–69, at 51.

<sup>6</sup> Some formulations of the shared identity/shared belief dispute frame it as tracking a pre- or non-political/political distinction, insofar as advocates of shared identity emphasize that cohesion principally consists in, or is thought to principally require, unity on matters ostensibly irrelevant politics. These include matters of culture, broadly defined (most notably in the work of liberal nationalists), and also more recent arguments for citizen interaction consciously outside the bounds of politics (e.g., Robert B. Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place*

This focus is admirable, in that it captures one important dilemma of citizenship in the modern age. But the recent literature has not kept pace with the political context I have highlighted in this dissertation, and especially with the threat that partisanship poses to the citizen community. This chapter begins to fill this gap, by addressing the role of partisan identity within an account of democratic cohesion. This is, to emphasize, an investigation into cohesion for specifically divided societies – those already experiencing some significant breakdown in shared democratic identity; my investigation is in this sense non-ideal. Accordingly, a key focus will be the remedial theoretical resources an account of cohesion possesses to address already-existing polarization.

My arguments assess the relative roles of identity, belief, and action in an account of democratic cohesion, and proceed as follows. In Section 2, I discuss desiderata for an account of political unity, tying together several of the threads considered in earlier chapters. In the following two sections, I consider and reject two leading models for failing to adequately fulfill these criteria. Section 3 examines views that premise democratic cohesion on shared (national) identity, while Section 4 explores views premised on shared belief, or agreement on political principles. Finally, in Section 5, I formulate and defend a version of a less prominent model – one based on *shared action* – which improves upon rival models in satisfying the three desiderata. This view emphasizes the interdependent nature of citizen behavior in enacting and sustaining the terms of common government. What I propose is a unity neither of belief nor identity, but of practice. Citizens of divided democracies need to focus less on what we believe and who we are, and more on what we do, together.

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)). A central point of disagreement in cohesion debates, then, and a secondary focus of this chapter, is how optimistic we should be that cohesion is a problem best addressed through the mechanisms of politics itself, or in spite of them.

## 2. What Do We Want from a Theory of Democratic Cohesion?

Public discourse is saturated with concern that partisan polarization poses grave danger to citizen unity, but we rarely consider precisely in what citizen unity should consist. We rarely pause, that is, to ask what the *opposite* of polarization might be, the ideal from which we are deviating, in our divided times. Even participants in academic debates on democratic identity frequently talk past one another, as arguments focus on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of various metaphors for the citizen relationship – friends, colleagues, strangers – rather than always attend to the deeper question of the proper nature and grounds of such relationships. An adequate account of democratic cohesion requires clarity about what it would take to achieve it, and why it is important (morally and/or politically) that we do. This is in no small part to avoid visions of community that appear attractive – such as accounts of civic friendship that extrapolate from interpersonal friendship – but that, on reflection, might prove to be unattainable in modern, diverse societies, or that might have unintended negative consequences if we were to work toward them. Thankfully, we do not need to start from scratch. Throughout this dissertation, I have been concerned with some of the key themes of a theoretical account of cohesion, including pluralism, motivation, and stability. My task in this section is to systematize these concerns in light of the specific issue of how they bear on the democratic bond.

To clarify, I am interested in formulating criteria for democratic cohesion within a polity populated by Political Partisans – those whose partisan identity conforms to the requirements and restrictions I set out in prior chapters. This prescind from aspects of partisan vitriol in the real world, in line with prior idealizing principles I have defended. The question of how real-world partisans view one another is the subject of the empirical literature on affective polarization I have utilized. My purposes, here, are more speculative, and more normative: to develop and evaluate a typology of perspectives on precisely what it means for partisan identity groups to conflict, and evaluate their possibilities under reasonably favorable, though reasonably realistic, conditions.

## 2.1. *Social Pluralism Criterion*

Democratic identity cannot be anti-pluralist. Much of the work in liberal political theory on acceptable forms of political cohesion and the normative basis of citizen community over at least the past three decades has been animated by this central axiom. The conditions of modern, diverse democracies – characterized as they are by deep inequalities and legacy injustices that predictably marginalize certain groups – mean that any acceptable theory of cohesion cannot be exclusionary toward identity groups that deviate from the dominant culture. Any amount of "binding force of identification" that a theory of citizenship advocates needs to be reconciled with "universal norms of modernity," such as equal political membership.<sup>7</sup> We do not have to look deep into history (or the present) to find advocacy of forms of citizenship that have "served a range of unwise causes: foolish and/or unjust wars, racial or ethnic hatred, religious exclusion, distorted norms of masculinity that contribute to the subordination of women, xenophobia and hatred of other nations."<sup>8</sup> Some theorists take the lesson of this sordid misuse to be that *all* theoretical forms of citizen community or political cohesion are intolerable. Iris Marion Young, for example, argues that "the desire for community relies on the same desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism" because it "participates in...a metaphysics that denies difference."<sup>9</sup> For Patchen Markell, the identification and affect associated with any project of cohesion is never far from "intolerance and ethnic cleansing."<sup>10</sup>

I endorse the criterion of social pluralism. But I deny that such endorsement automatically rules out any non-trivial forms of democratic cohesion.<sup>11</sup> As I will show in the

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<sup>7</sup> Patchen Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (2000): 38–63, at 41.

<sup>8</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 211. For a rigorous and exhaustive investigation into the many ways American citizenship has been conceived in narrow, "ascriptive" terms since the founding, see Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice* 12, no. 1 (1986): 1–26, at 1–3. See also Jacob T. Levy, "Against Fraternity: Democracy without Solidarity," in *The Strains of Commitment*, ed. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), at 110–111.

<sup>10</sup> Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," 44.

<sup>11</sup> For a response to Young specifically, see David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 54–57.

following sections, theorists have proposed different mechanisms of ensuring their accounts of cohesion adequately protect social pluralism, while insisting that the sufficiency of such conditions insulates notions of citizen-wide community from liberal (or more radical) critiques.

## 2.2. *Motivation Criterion*

It has long been acknowledged within debates on nationalism, solidarity, and patriotism that there exist certain "motivational prerequisites of democratic governance" for which theories of citizenship must account.<sup>12</sup> Liberal democratic citizenship must, somehow, "inspire the moral and civic engagement self-government requires," and this is often thought to be the province of an account of democratic cohesion.<sup>13</sup> This form of motivation is sometimes thought to be constitutive of political legitimacy, especially of a "sociological" sort: legitimacy that "citizens confer when they think their politics is on the whole worthy of voluntary support."<sup>14</sup> But the motivation criterion can also be formulated generally enough to strike to a core feature – perhaps the central feature – of any claim of a society to be a democracy: "Political participation is a necessary condition of liberty; a self-governing republic requires involvement in the political process."<sup>15</sup>

What unites these concerns is that an account of citizenship must give an answer to the question of how and why citizens are motivated to engage in democratic participation, broadly defined. As I will show, different accounts respond to this criterion differently, identifying

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<sup>12</sup> Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," 592.

<sup>13</sup> Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," 38.

<sup>14</sup> Russell Muirhead, "Partisan Justification," *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019): 82–89, at 84–85. This can be contrasted with modes of legitimacy more common to contemporary liberal philosophy, especially political-liberal legitimacy as justification to all reasonable citizens. See also Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," 599–602, for a similar association between motivation and legitimacy.

<sup>15</sup> David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 43. There are, admittedly, certain republican overtones to this formulation: both "neo-Athenian" equations of liberty with participation and "neo-Roman" worries that abdication of participative responsibility leaves the door open to domination by others. On the importance of patriotism being "motivationally efficacious," see also Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, 207; and Arash Abizadeh, "Does Liberal Democracy Presuppose a Cultural Nation? Four Arguments," *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 3 (2002): 495–509, at 495–496.

sources of motivation that range from belief in political principles, a sense of peoplehood, or a commitment to fulfilling one's role in an interdependent system.

### 2.3. *Stability Criterion*

Finally, a theory of democratic cohesion must possess theoretical resources for explaining how a citizen community can remain stable in the sense that it does not fragment into warring camps, or how it can become stable if it has already done so.<sup>16</sup> This criterion corresponds most closely to the concern that the citizenry achieve some level of "togetherness," and emerges from my focus on cohesion specifically with respect to deeply-divided societies. This is to use a fairly-colloquial understanding of stability, in contrast to how that term has been developed in the Rawlsian literature.<sup>17</sup>

There are two large questions around the stability criterion. First, what does it actually mean to be unified? As we will see, theorists propose different answers to the question of the currency of stability – *unity of what*. But even at this level of generality, we can specify a few more details. We know, right away, that unity cannot conflict with the social pluralism criterion. The goal, nicely put by Danielle Allen, is to theorize "habits of citizenship that can help a democracy bring trustful coherence out of division without erasing or suppressing difference."<sup>18</sup> In other words, "A democratic people should cultivate coherence from within heterogeneity."<sup>19</sup> Further, the answer to the question of what cohesion consists in cannot be nontrivial. I take as given Rogers Smith's observation that, even if only for reasons of political expediency, "a population" must "imagine itself to be a 'people'."<sup>20</sup> It is "civic ideologies, or myths of civic identity," that allow citizens to "see their citizenships as forms of participation in enormously important

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<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, 41-42.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1, Section 2.2, and also Section 2 of my "Does Partisanship Contribute to Stability?," *Philosophy and Public Issues*, Forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20. To capture this difference, Allen prefers what she calls "wholeness" to "oneness." See also *ibid.*, Chapter 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History*, 6.

collective historical enterprises that in fact do transcend their individual lives in time and space."<sup>21</sup> A central contention of this chapter is that there are different ways of conceptualizing this currency, and that some are better than others.

Second, how widespread and secure does this vision of cohesion need to be? An obvious challenge here is that there is no agreed-upon standard of togetherness, or unity, to ensure societal stability. In a sense, that is an experiment societies are currently undergoing. Clearly, we do not want groups of citizens to take up arms against one another. And we do not want (and anyway could never achieve) perfect harmony on all dimensions, a vision of blissful civic cooperation. The goal of a theory of political cohesion cannot be maximal unity, because there are other interests at stake. I therefore reject the view that any detraction from relationships of civic friendship across the citizenry constitutes a democratic loss (though it may constitute other kinds of losses).<sup>22</sup> But there are many ways of understanding the middle ground here – many ways in which citizens can be "opposed" or in tension in some respect (or multiple respects) without collapsing into civil war. Still, my focus on already-divided societies does mandate the inclusion, however generically specified at present, of some way of explaining how citizens who are already deeply divided might come together.

So, to summarize, the contemporary political context calls for an account of citizenship that is sensitive to the concerns of social pluralism, motivation, and stability. I take these criteria to be necessary ones; if a model of democratic cohesion fails to satisfy one of them, it should be rejected.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6, 11. My understanding of stability, and of the normative basis of cohesion, is less expansive than Smith's usage of "civic myths," which encompasses "how a political community originated, who is eligible for membership, who is not and why, and what the community's values and aims are." 33.

<sup>22</sup> This assumption is common in public talk of political unity, and also seems present in the recent civic friendship literature, which fails to theorize any limits to the harmonious citizen bond.

### 3. Democratic Cohesion as Shared Identity

One leading view premises democratic cohesion on shared identity. The most influential formulation, at least in contemporary liberal theory, is liberal nationalism: the thesis that a strong national identity that is nonetheless sensitive to difference to at least some extent is the best way of conceiving of the bonds among citizens and uniting the citizenry. The primary goal of liberal nationalism is to reconcile the social pluralism criterion with the motivation criterion. As Gina Gustavsson and David Miller have recently put it, the aim is to "develop an open culturally-based nationalism that creates a strong enough sense of common identity to support democracy and social justice, while not excluding minorities, especially immigrants, whose cultural roots may be different from those of the national majority."<sup>23</sup> Liberal nationalists, in short, understand democratic cohesion in terms of a joint understanding of membership in a community characterized by such features as language, geography, history, and traditions.<sup>24</sup>

I argued in the last chapter that some of the goods liberal nationalists think strong national identities (and only strong national identities) facilitate – most notably a sense of vertical attachment to the state and sense of solidarity with fellow citizens who are nonetheless strangers – can be realized through partisan communities. In so doing, I have argued that national identity is not as essential or unique as liberal nationalists have supposed. For example, Charles Taylor's claim that democratic "mobilization" and participation require "a special sense of bonding among people" across the whole nation to get off the ground looks false when we take into

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<sup>23</sup> Gina Gustavsson and David Miller, "Why Liberal Nationalism Today?," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Other important accounts of liberal nationalism include Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Nationalism and Patriotism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Will Kymlicka, "From Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism to Liberal Nationalism," in *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, ed. Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996). For more recent examples, see Patti Tamara Lenard, "Inclusive Identities: The Foundation of Trust in Multicultural Communities," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Steven Smith, *Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021); Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2019).

account the considerable motivating force of partisan identity.<sup>25</sup> My arguments, though, even if successful, are not sufficient to disprove the liberal nationalist thesis on its own terms – that is, as an account of democratic cohesion. And this is, after all, the core aspiration of liberal nationalism: to answer "one of the most pressing needs of the modern world, namely how to maintain solidarity" among large and diverse populations.<sup>26</sup> If accepting the role of identity so heartily into the sub-national domain of partisan association conflicts with other liberal nationalist aims, and if we have compelling reason to favor those latter aims, then perhaps we would do better, after all, to predicate citizenship on strong national identity. Our questions then become: In what ways, if any, does the ideal of partisan community conflict with the ideal of national identity? If there is such conflict, are we better to abandon the former or the latter? I will attempt to show that the issues surrounding partisanship emphasize in dramatic fashion tensions inherent in the liberal nationalist account, and that these tensions warrant the abandonment of shared identity as the basis for cohesion in divided contexts.

At first glance, encouraging (or perhaps, less ambitiously, tolerating) the pursuit of thick, meaningful forms of identity through political parties seems easily compatible with predicating democratic citizenship on national identity. These are two different forms of identity, with different contents and goals; liberal nationalists have not claimed that national identity is meant to apply in every domain of life.<sup>27</sup> One could plausibly enjoy deep attachment to one's fellow partisans while also experiencing, with partisan opponents, a common feeling of togetherness, as embodied in appeals to, for example, shared cultural history and national homeland. Partisan identity can be "peripheral, or at least amenable, to overarching ideologies that can encompass all of the citizenry."<sup>28</sup> A partisan could subscribe to the feeling that "I am indelibly a member of my political party; it forms an important part of my self-concept, and I profoundly associate with my

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, "Why Democracy Needs Patriotism," in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 120.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> David Abraham, "Constitutional Patriotism, Citizenship, and Belonging in America and Germany," *Temple Political and Civil Rights Law Review* 16, no. 2 (2007): 457-72, at 461.

fellow partisans. I also find deeply meaningful my membership in my national community, and I recognize that my partisan opponents share in that membership." On this reading of the relationship between partisan and national identities, the two are, if not irrelevant, then at least distinct, each sticking to its own sphere, and so are compatible. This poses no threat to cohesion as shared national identity.

This is not a real possibility, though. The preceding thumbnail sketch relies on a mistaken, overly privatized conception of partisan identity. In reality, partisanship is not like identities that operate mainly in the private sphere (even if the liberation of which required, at least for a time, significant politicization). As I argued in Chapter 2, one of the senses in which partisanship is a political identity is that it involves contestation over issues that are historically the province of national identity.<sup>29</sup> As such, partisan identity stands in a closer relationship to national identity than one of benign separation. The platforms of political parties typically involve stances on questions that bear on national-self understanding, such as by serving as effective political channels of identity-group politics.

Acknowledging contestation, however, is not in itself a problem for the liberal nationalist thesis. Far from it: In response to criticisms that conceiving of democratic citizenship as an identity is exclusive, liberal nationalists have long sought to emphasize the role of contestation and critique in the maintenance and construction of national identity. And so here, an even more sanguine hypothesis can be considered. Far from being in conflict, partisan community might be a theoretical *requirement* of the most viable forms of liberal nationalism – essential to its being adequately liberal – in that it bolsters the latter's inclusionary credentials by highlighting a well-established institutional mechanism for contestation. This is similar to the complementary relationship Will Kymlicka proposes between subnational identity groups and national identity in his multicultural theory of nationality.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 5.

<sup>30</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 9.

But again, this is too quick. The relationship between contestation and national identity is more complicated; merely stating that a sub-national identity channels contestation is not enough to say whether it supports or detracts from the cohesive power of national identity. In this way, attention to partisanship reveals a broader ambiguity within many liberal nationalist accounts. To make progress, we need to investigate in more detail what kind of contestation is compatible with, entailed by, or prohibited by liberal nationalism – a set of issues under-investigated within the liberal nationalism literature. On the one hand, contestation is celebrated as a principal means by which nationalism is made liberal, and nationalism "allows us to question and criticize" received understandings of shared identity.<sup>31</sup> The national culture, they continue, is made open to marginalized groups and immigrants through a continual process of reworking the national story. "Existing national identities must be stripped of elements that are repugnant to the self-understandings of one or more component groups," Miller writes.<sup>32</sup> In practice, such revision has required quite significant contestation. But this seems to call into question the claim that "liberal nationalism...remains committed to keeping the private sphere beyond reach of political intervention,"<sup>33</sup> because contesting dominant understandings of national identity will inevitably involve (at least the aspiration to) revise the self-conceptions of members of the dominant group, on the plausible assumption that part of their self-conceptions overlap with national identity. It seems liberal nationalism, if it is to avoid exclusion, cannot help but reach into the private sphere. The problem is that this seems to undercut a significant portion of the nationalist promise to facilitate trust and other democratic goods – promises which depend on nationalist identity being, if not pre-rational, then pre-political, or shielded enough to serve as a basis for cohesion as common identity.

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<sup>31</sup> Gina Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 4 (2019): 693–711, at 703.

<sup>32</sup> David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 142, quoted in Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," 704.

<sup>33</sup> Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," 703. For Gustavsson, this commitment is part of what distinguishes liberal nationalism from the more revisionary constitutional patriotism. Cécile Laborde's civic patriotism is in line with constitutional patriotism in this sense, in that it "puts pressure on the majority group, urging it to open up the public sphere, to allow widespread contestation of deeply entrenched practices and beliefs." Laborde, "From Constitutional to Civic Patriotism," 610.

So, in opposition to the optimistic approach to contestation, there is also significant hesitancy within liberal nationalism to advocate revision. Contestation by sub-national identity groups, such as that which characterizes the politics of recognition, is thought (at least by some liberal nationalists) to eviscerate the possibility of common foundations essential to national identity: "in the face of such [sub-national identity] divisions, [liberal nationalists] need policies to ensure that the primary loyalty of citizens is to the republic itself, not to the particular subgroup to which [citizens] belong."<sup>34</sup> Kymlicka notes that there is "ample evidence from around the world that differences in ethnic and national identity can, if emphasized and politicized, form a barrier to a wider solidarity."<sup>35</sup> In general, then, there seems an irreducible tension within efforts to model citizenship as common identity between, on the one hand, contestation and politicization (*liberalism*), and, on the other, unification and safeguarding some parts of identity from conflict (*nationalism*).<sup>36</sup>

One of the lessons we should take from this ambivalence is that we need to be very careful about which forms of partisan contestation are compatible with predicating cohesion on shared identity, and which forms threaten it. To capture this difference in the realm of partisanship, I propose a distinction between *additive* partisan contestation and *displacement* partisan contestation when it comes to national identity. Additive contestation occurs when parties operate within a shared political-cultural framework. When parties contest national identity, as when, for example, they channel the concerns of an excluded group, they do so within the ambit of a framework that is reasonably shared. Additive partisan contestation is compatible with reformulating the terms of national identity, including previously ignored contributions as well as contributions from new populations, as long as such conflict does not strike to the core of the foundation of the national-identity story. A party's appeals are grounded in a vision of national identity that can plausibly be said to be the same as that which grounds the

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<sup>34</sup> David Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," in *Republicanism and Political Theory*, ed. Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 133–58, at 142.

<sup>35</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, 173.

<sup>36</sup> Or at least, if the tension is not irreducible, the current state of the literature provides no way of resolving it.

appeals of their partisan opponents. They offer differing interpretations of the same rubric. Additive contestation is, as Gustavsson labels general liberal-nationalist contestation, "constructive criticism" that "demands that we side with and not against the object of our critique."<sup>37</sup> On this view, partisan identity is a form of expression of national identity; the two are "nested" in a way that is complementary.<sup>38</sup> Additive partisan contestation is compatible with democratic cohesion as shared identity.

In deeply divided democracies, however, there is another, more fundamental form of party conflict: displacement contestation. In these settings, parties are polarized, and compete to offer rival understandings of national identity. The citizenry is divided into groups that possess fundamentally different views of the country, including the significance and meaning of various historical events, the centrality of such cultural institutions as religion, and more that are upstream of more granular policy disagreements. Parties seek to displace the understanding of national identity offered by rival parties (or displace the historically dominant national understanding, in the case of progressive parties). Displacement partisan contestation tracks difference in the populace not only of belief, but also of identity. Moreover, the claims of participants in this sort of contestation are distinct from, and more challenging than, the claims of another category that poses a challenge to cohesion as shared identity, and that liberal nationalists have worried about: secessionists. Secessionist claims are importantly discriminatory, in that their asserted national identification is for the secessionist territory *rather than* the original homeland. There is an important sense in which an advocate of Scottish independence identifies as a Scott, not as a citizen of Britain. Polarized partisans, in contrast, identify with their sub-national identity group *and* with the nation. A partisan would typically not say "I identify more with the Republican Party than I do with the United States"; they would say "I identify with the Republican Party and with the United States, and a significant part of my interpretation of the

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<sup>37</sup> Gustavsson, "Liberal National Identity: Thinner Than Conservative, Thicker Than Civic?," 703-704.

<sup>38</sup> Miller writes of the possibility of "nested nationalities," such as in the United Kingdom and Switzerland in Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, Chapter 8.

latter comes from my membership in the former." This helps show how partisan identity and national identity are counterposed. Displacement contestation poses a threat to the liberal-nationalist thesis, because it undercuts the unifying power of national identity.<sup>39</sup>

This is not merely an academic distinction. One way of understanding the cultural-political polarization in divided societies such as the United States is as precisely this form of displacement contestation. American citizens – more to the point: Republicans and Democrats – disagree profoundly on what it means to be an American. The country is in the midst of a profound displacement contestation over the national narrative – a "battle for the meaning of America," as a group of political scientists has recently called it.<sup>40</sup> While it may have been more accurate to propose that citizens of the United States adhere to a common "American civil religion," united by quasi-spiritual rituals and symbols of national identity<sup>41</sup>, in the mid-20th century, such a thesis cannot hold today (if indeed it ever could). Now, given the polarizing trends and the alignment of partisan with other social identities I have discussed previously, the ascendant cultural-political division in the United States concerns precisely what liberal nationalists place their unifying hopes on: "partisan polarization is the linchpin of America's identity crisis."<sup>42</sup> The "identity agenda"<sup>43</sup> of conflict manifests in "debate over who is and can be

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<sup>39</sup> My distinction between additive and displacement forms of contestation differs from Miller's incipient distinction between subnational groups to which citizens display allegiance that exceeds, and allegiance that does not exceed, allegiance to the nation. He labels the former "factions," and considers them destructive of political community; see Miller, "Republicanism, National Identity and Europe," 139. I prefer framing the relevant distinction in terms of the substance of partisan disagreement, rather than in terms of allegiance (which I am interpreting to mean strength of attachment), since that more faithfully tracks what is at stake in polarized partisan politics. Whether one feels deep attachment to one's party is less relevant to the prospects of cohesion as shared identity than the nature of the claims of what one is attaching to (though of course deep attachment to parties participating in displacement contestation is more worrisome than shallow attachment to the same parties).

<sup>40</sup> John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). In a similar spirit, Samuel Pehrson argues for "getting past the failures of a universal ethnic-civic dichotomy" by attending to the "argumentative contexts of national identity." We should understand citizens' interpretations of their national identity as emerging from their placement within domestic debates about what that identity means. I agree with his "distinctly contextual" approach to interpreting national identity (137): Samuel Pehrson, "Argumentative Contexts of National Identity Definition: Getting Past the Failures of a Universal Ethnic-Civic Dichotomy," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 133–52.

<sup>41</sup> The seminal work here is Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (1967): 1–21.

<sup>42</sup> Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis*, 203.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

an American."<sup>44</sup> The salience and special character of debate around "issues like immigration, racial discrimination, and integration of Muslims boil down to competing visions of American identity and inclusiveness."<sup>45</sup> Displacement competition thus places questions of political and civic membership center stage.<sup>46</sup> The combination of this identity conflict with the expanding domains of political contestation – "conflict extension" – means that identity conflict is not confined to niche policy debates, but spreads to every other policy domain currently salient.<sup>47</sup>

Displacement partisan contestation is not exclusively an American phenomenon, even if it has perhaps developed to the most significant extent, and has been most well-documented, there. The taking of a "cultural" or "identity" frame has been a widely adopted political strategy by right-wing populists across Europe, pushing conflict over the meaning of national identity center-stage in recent elections. Parties such as Geert Wilders's Dutch Freedom Party, Viktor Orban's Fidesz, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, and others have all framed economic dislocation and anxiety, labor-force transitions, and immigration policies in a politics of displacement contestation over the national identity.<sup>48</sup> In Britain, meanwhile, debates leading up to Brexit and since have manifested similar trends.<sup>49</sup> A significant axis of difference between Labour and Conservatives is now an identity dimension concerning, among other things, the role of history (and especially empire) in national self-understanding, with the Conservatives

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>46</sup> For the relevance of membership questions to civic understandings, see also Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History*, 31. Smith further argues that these questions are most likely to emerge in contexts of demographic change, "just when prevailing senses of political identity have been severely shaken, creating voids that they are well equipped to fill" Ibid., 472.

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Layman et al., "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (May 2010): 324–46.

<sup>48</sup> Sara Wallace Goodman, *Immigration and Membership Politics in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 443–54; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Although the power of these movements is quite significant, and, in the case of Fidesz, even in government, there are structural differences between the United States system and systems of most European democracies that prevent the alignment of this dimension of conflict with party to a similar extent. For more detailed explanation, see Herbert Kitschelt and Philipp Rehm, "Determinants of Dimension Dominance," in *Welfare Democracies and Party Politics*, ed. Philip Manow, Bruno Palier, and Hanna Schwander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Herbert Kitschelt and Philipp Rehm, "Party Alignments: Change and Continuity," in *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*, ed. Pablo Beramendi et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 179–201.

<sup>49</sup> Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

positioning themselves as "defenders" of traditional interpretations of British identity as a conscious strategy to unite their core conservative factions with new working-class voters in the north.<sup>50</sup> These debates have accelerated changing dynamics in the meaning of British identity and its relationship to its constituent national identities, especially Scottish identity. To be patriotic in Britain today is perhaps more indeterminate than ever between being patriotic of one's national identity, or of British identity, generating new conflicts about the future of the Union.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, then, the relationship between national identity and cohesion in many contemporary democracies cannot be taken for granted. Not only is national identity not serving the cohesive role liberal nationalists would want it to, but it is also, itself, the conduit for these societies' most divisive conflicts. These facts have not been adequately appreciated in the political theoretical literatures on democratic cohesion, and spell serious trouble for those who would premise cohesion on identity.<sup>52</sup>

So far in this section I have argued that the realities of polarization pose problems for the liberal nationalist thesis. But what about partisanship that is constrained by the norms I outlined in Chapter 2? There, I argued that polarized political conflict – what I am here calling displacement partisan contestation – is characterized by, among other things, battles over a mixture of the authenticity of the "true" citizenry with the status of one's partisan group. I argued there that this cultural form of political contestation calls for a Political Partisanship that grants to partisan opponents the equal right to contest national identity, denying claims of exclusivist interpretation as in the realm of social identity.<sup>53</sup> While this minimal norm of recognition will go some way to easing the most pernicious elements of zero-sum conflict, it is

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<sup>50</sup> "Bonfire of the Insanities: The Government Doubles Down on Culture Wars," *The Economist*, February 20, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> For a history of these debates, focusing on the case of Scotland, see Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> This has also been underappreciated by constitutional patriots, who, while naturally more skeptical of the existence of shared bonds of national identity, have nonetheless sometimes partaken of the assumption that Americans are united by shared narrative and culture. Habermas, for example, argues that in the United States "a civil religion rooted in the majority culture took the place of nationalism": Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 113. See also Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging: Levels of Community and Their Normative Significance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129-131.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 5.

important to note, here, that it does not serve to rescue the liberal nationalist thesis from the criticisms I have discussed. Even if parties strictly adhere to this norm of recognizing that the elaboration of the meaning of national identity and political community is a shared project to which all citizens may legitimately contribute, this does nothing to reduce the scope of politicization – does nothing to change the fact that the fundamental objects of attachment liberal nationalism requires for shared identity to serve as a source of cohesion are objects of deep contestation. So appeal to a more normatively attractive conception of partisanship does nothing to answer my objection to the efficacy of the shared identity view of cohesion.

Let me further defend these claims in the remainder of this section by responding to three possible responses the liberal nationalist could make. I will attempt to show how each response falls afoul of the stability criterion, the social pluralism criterion, or both; in the end, shared identity is not the right approach to understanding democratic cohesion in divided democracies.

The first response is that I have misunderstood the source of cohesion, setting the bar too high. A liberal nationalist might respond by stating that the meaning of national identity was never meant to command uniformity of interpretation. Miller, for instance, has argued that each citizen does not need to share or subscribe to every element of the national identity: "national identities are typically best understood as cases of 'family resemblance' – there are a number of features that typify those who belong to this particular nation, but not all of them need to be present in any one individual in order for us to say that she is a member."<sup>54</sup> "There is no one characteristic" that each citizen "has in common."<sup>55</sup> National identity admits of individual variation, and citizens can converge, through their own individual expressions, on a shared, overlapping national identity. It is true, further, that some evidence suggests there remains some convergence around important American characteristics and values: "Most Democrats and

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<sup>54</sup> David Miller, "Solidarity and Its Sources," in *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies*, ed. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 74.

<sup>55</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*, 22.

Republicans agreed [in 2016] the characteristics important to being American included respecting the country's institutions and laws and accepting people of diverse backgrounds."<sup>56</sup> "Feeling American" remains quite important for many Americans.<sup>57</sup> According to the most recent International Social Survey Programme study, well over 80% of Americans reported feeling "close" or "very close" to their national identity (as of 2013).<sup>58</sup> And perhaps the fact that Republicans and Democrats still make reference to the same object – American identity – to advance their visions – that is, they frame their arguments as better interpretations of what it means to be an American – indicates that, fundamentally, they still share a national identity in the relevant sense. In this light, today's polarized partisan contestation need not be so devastating for the hopes of premising cohesion on shared national identity.

There are several problems with this response. One issue it raises is how important an objective basis of commonality is for an identity to count as shared. If two people (or parties) both think they are members of some group, but have wildly divergent understandings of what that means, can they still be said to share that group identity? Might it not be a problem if citizens are similarly deeply attached to the nation, even if they possess, through their partisanship, different understandings of what the nation is? On Miller's own analysis, the objectivity question does make a difference. Members of a group have to share, *in fact*, some crucial elements of national identity. For even though there may be no "set of necessary and sufficient conditions for belonging to" a given nation, there is still some core set of characteristics that must command overlap among competing partisans.<sup>59</sup> "I may see myself as belonging to a distinct Cornish nation," Miller writes, "but if other Cornish men and women do not regard their Cornish identity *in this way*, then I am simply mistaken."<sup>60</sup> Two people (or

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<sup>56</sup> Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis*, 219.

<sup>57</sup> Deborah J. Schildkraut, *Americanism in the Twenty-First Century: Public Opinion in the Age of Immigration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Found in Gustavsson and Miller, "Why Liberal Nationalism Today?," 4. Of course, the graphic is indeterminate between Republican and Democratic support – the most important question, as I will soon suggest.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Emphasis added.

groups) cannot be said to share an identity unless enough of them, enough of the time, embrace the same object. But this is precisely what displacement partisan contestation reveals to be lacking. If members of a nation are to be united by anything for the liberal-nationalist thesis to get off the ground, then something as fundamental as "the soul of the nation" is surely it – a fact which does not obtain.<sup>61</sup> Opposing partisans advance stories that are, to some extent, zero-sum: "true" American identity cannot be both multicultural and white, multi-religious (or a-religious) and Christian, etc. The hope that lowering the bar of commonality to rescue the attribution of shared identity to the American population cannot be sustained when fundamentally divergent understandings of patriotic identity are at stake.

The Covid-19 pandemic provides fascinating and dramatic confirmation of these dynamics. Responding to this public health emergency has required massive, coordinated national policy responses and sometimes significant voluntary behavioral change on the part of citizens, such as mask wearing and social distancing. The adoption of such practices provides an interesting test case for the shared-identity thesis: citizens' willingness to incur the small personal costs for the good of the broader national community with which they identify. Recently, a team of scholars tested this hypothesis. More specifically, they tested whether those who identify strongly with the nation would be more willing to follow public health guidance, and also whether engaging in such practices "can enhance one's identification with the nation in turn" in a "reciprocal link" between national identity and public-health practices.<sup>62</sup> As it turns out, this reciprocal link did not hold in the United States. Compliance with public health rules was significantly determined by partisan affiliation, with Republicans less likely to comply. Republicans, though, exhibit high levels of national identification, but the interpretation of this identification is mediated, for many, through the figure of President Donald Trump. And since President Trump (especially initially) downplayed the importance of the virus and often

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<sup>61</sup> Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis*, 201.

<sup>62</sup> Hoi-Wing Chan et al., "War Against COVID-19: How Is National Identification Linked With the Adoption of Disease-Preventive Behaviors in China and the United States?," *Political Psychology* Early view (forthcoming) (April 2021), 3.

displayed a cavalier attitude toward public health guidelines, the link between Republican identity and national identity actually seems to have discouraged many citizens from complying. For many, that is, priming their national identity "had a negative indirect effect via trust in the Trump administration."<sup>63</sup> The wish to overcome division (in this case, prior disagreement about willingness to adopt Covid-19 preventative measures) through appeal to national identity is greatly diminished in cases in which the meaning of national identity is variable, and, in fact, is indexed to deep contestation.<sup>64</sup>

But suppose I am wrong that Americans lack the objective requirements of sharing a national identity. Suppose, that is, that the differences between the parties have been exaggerated, and that there remains an objective core that most Americans share. Displacement partisan contestation still poses a challenge to cohesion as shared identity, because the liberal nationalist thesis also contains a *subjective* basis of shared identity. Miller takes "mutual recognition" to be fundamental to nationality: "Nations exist when their members recognize one another as compatriots, and believe that they share characteristics of the relevant kind."<sup>65</sup> A nation's "existence depends on...a shared wish to continue their life in common."<sup>66</sup> The most basic element of mutual recognition is simply that members of a nation believe themselves to share a national identity, to be constituent parts of a larger whole. But the extreme affective polarization – the antipathy and even hatred across partisan groups – many social scientists have documented is evidence for a widespread belief by partisans that their opponents are members of an entirely different kind of community. In this way, the perception of polarization is itself a large part of the crisis. Quite apart from how far citizens really do disagree with one another, they frequently perceive the other side to be more extreme than they really are – even to be "un-

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the "highly contingent and contextual" relationship between national identity and support for various (especially redistributive) policies, see Richard Johnston et al., "Diversity and Solidarity: New Evidence from Canada and the US," in *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies*, ed. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and also Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Who Counts as an American? The Boundaries of National Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Miller, *On Nationality*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 23. On the subjective elements of national identity, see also Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?*, 1882.

American" – contributing to widespread feelings of disconnection with partisan opponents.<sup>67</sup> Although this form of polarization may be only "apparent" in one sense, its effects are perfectly real when it comes to the ability of a shared national identity to underwrite political cohesion.<sup>68</sup> Liberal nationalism's failure to satisfy the stability criterion thus remains.

A second response to my challenge to the liberal-nationalist thesis is to argue that even though national identity does not currently serve as an engine of cohesion, it might yet. A liberal nationalist might acknowledge that citizens of divided democracies cannot be said to meaningfully share a national identity, and yet insist that the shared-identity thesis can be helpful for thinking through how to bring opposing partisans together – to satisfy the stability criterion. Miller, for example, suggests national identity's unifying potential can be facilitated by state action, including in divided contexts, when "we are interested in the sources of solidarity for practical reasons (we want solidarity to increase, or at least not to decline)."<sup>69</sup> It is true that identities are "not susceptible to conscious control," he argues, but "governments, in particular, can and do shape the identities of their citizens. They do so when they design education systems, plan national days, choose which citizens to honor and which to vilify, which anniversaries to remember and which to forget, and so forth."<sup>70</sup> Similarly, many public commentators insist that if only we could focus on what unites us (our national identity), rather than what divides us (our

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<sup>67</sup> Teresa Bejan makes a similar point about the "crisis" of civility. See Teresa Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 3. For more on "perceived" polarization and its relationship to "actual" polarization, see Adam M. Enders and Miles T. Armaly, "The Differential Effects of Actual and Perceived Polarization," *Political Behavior* 41, no. 3 (2019): 815–39; Douglas J. Ahler, "Self-Fulfilling Misperceptions of Public Polarization," *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (July 2014): 607–20; Matthew S. Levendusky and Neil Malhotra, "(Mis)Perceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (January 2016): 378–91.

<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Andrea Sangiovanni has argued that the shared-identity argument has no motivational force "for those who do not *already* value their national identity." Andrea Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015): 340–59, at 351; emphasis in original. The unifying potential of liberal nationalism depends on subjective attachment as well as a shared understanding of what is entailed by national identity. I agree, and here I am identifying a further challenge: cases in which attachment to national identity, for the majority of the population, is not in doubt, but the understanding of which is divided. I am suggesting that here, too, the shared-identity argument runs aground. As it happens, I think the admission that the motivational and cohesive power of a substrate of the citizen bond depends on mutual understanding of the implications of that substrate applies to Sangiovanni's own alternative, "shared action," because he builds quite a bit of normative content into his understanding of shared action. For that reason, the objection does not apply to my own, thinner conception of shared action, described below.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, "Solidarity and Its Sources," 74.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

partisan identities), then we could dampen polarization. This was a core theme of President Biden's Inaugural Address, for example, and a primary mechanism by which he wants to end the "uncivil war" of extreme partisanship.<sup>71</sup> National identity, though not currently obtaining, remains a useful ideal, a political North Star toward which we should keep steering.

I agree that the state possesses considerable symbolic power, but, in cases where many of those tools are politicized, I worry the strategy of visible state promotion of national identity is likely to backfire. For one thing, it rests on an overly optimistic picture of the power of national symbology to convince and underemphasizes the extent to which appeals to such symbology are our most contentious conflicts, as described above. Consider, for example, the question of designing school curricula on national history – a key potential mechanism to consolidate national understanding (even though, in the United States, most consequential education policy is the province of individual state power, not national power). In recent years, textbook content has been the source of extremely divisive political debate, with partisans disagreeing over how sympathetically to look upon American transgressions of founding ideals (or whether to address them at all). What for Democrats is an honest portrayal of founding sins is, for Republicans, an unfair effort to hold past figures to current moral standards. What about appeals to the flag and national anthem? These have become lightning rods of public discussion since professional athletes started kneeling at the beginning of many professional sports games. Was this a peaceful means of drawing attention to the historic and ongoing oppression faced by Black Americans, or a disrespectful political stunt? Partisans, of course, disagreed. Much the same dynamics attend debates around public memorialization, statuary, and other potential levers of cohesion.

None of the potential state responses to these kinds of controversies is particularly promising for the liberal nationalist. For one thing, there is not some underlying, "correct" basis of national identity that the state can appeal to. Thinking otherwise is likely to lead down the path to dangerous forms of primordialist and essentialist argumentation, and, in practice, favor

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph R. Biden, "Inaugural Address."

traditionalist understandings of national identity with a status quo bias, conflicting with the social pluralism criterion. Debates over national identity must occur on the terrain of normative argumentation. But continuing to insist on, highlight, or prime the importance of national identity, in cases where the very tools of national identity are themselves politicized and highly contentious, will only "make politics especially emotionally charged and divisive" and thereby conflict with the stability criterion.<sup>72</sup> It is likely only to raise the stakes of each partisan conflict. In this way, cohesion as shared identity is inert, or "backward-looking," in that it depends for its motivation on already-shared characteristics and offers no resources for generating cohesion where it does not already exist.<sup>73</sup>

Now, it is important to note that it may simply be the right thing to do for the state to take sides in debates that concern the reconstruction of national identity: to diversify memorialization, to emphasize both the achievements and misdeeds of historical figures in school curricula and holidays, etc. Indeed, I think this is very clearly a requirement of social pluralism for societies attempting to transition from dominance of national identity by a historically powerful cultural-ethnic group to genuine pluralism. The point here is simply that doing so will invariably alienate the other side and motivate political will to reverse the interpretation if or when they take power, undercutting the promise of national identity to serve as an engine of cohesion across the citizenry. We have again encountered the tension between the politics of national-identity unity and the politics of social justice. In the face of such conflict, doubling down on national identity – insisting despite politicization that citizens do in fact, or ought to, share an overriding sense of identity – seems a misguided strategy. It is liable only to further inflame partisan divisions.

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<sup>72</sup> Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis*, 215. As these authors argue, "it is possible to have a technocratic discussion about how to calculate cost-of-living increases in Social Security payments. It is harder to have such a discussion about whether undocumented immigrants deserve a chance at permanent residency or even citizenship. It is even harder when group loyalties and attitudes are aligned with partisanship.... The upshot is a more divisive and explosive politics." 10-11.

<sup>73</sup> On the idea that there is something regressive, or "backward-looking," to identity as the source of citizen solidarity, see also Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 351; Tuğba Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (November 2019): 1–21, at 5; Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?," 65.

At this point, the liberal nationalist might accept that insisting on the politics of national identity, with or without state power, is not the way to go, and argue instead for a strategy of de-escalation. Perhaps it would be better to privatize these conflicts rather than let them occupy all of the political oxygen and focus, instead, on questions of distributive justice and other issues not as bound up with the culture wars.<sup>74</sup> This approach might be wise on a case-by-case basis – in some campaigns, in some political battles. But as a general approach to citizenship, this response generates serious problems, too. For one thing, it severely underestimates the staying power of cultural-political conflict. Framing (partisan) political battles as referenda on the nature of national identity possesses a self-fulfilling logic that lasts well beyond individual elections. Together with changes in the party coalitions and the alignment of partisan identity with other social identities, national-identity framing devices "incentivize politicians in both parties to run on 'identity politics'."<sup>75</sup> Part of this is due to the need to define one's party against the agenda-setting power, which inevitably involves adopting the same terms of debate. But part of it seems due to genuine electoral advantages both Democrats and Republicans perceive to focusing on identity issues. The "identity agenda"<sup>76</sup> consists of Pandora's-box issues, and so "the American identity crisis cannot be undone easily."<sup>77</sup>

More importantly, though, this strategy again cannot succeed without running afoul of the social pluralism criterion. Privatizing identity conflict would be more palatable if there were not serious questions of public policy that flowed from these debates – policy essential to the lives and self-conceptions of minority groups. Not addressing these policy questions is, of course, its own form of decision in favor of the status quo and against coming to terms with diversity and past exclusions. Avoidance of politics cannot be the answer in any systematic way. When it comes to addressing identity conflict of the kind manifested by displacement partisan contestation, we cannot avoid it, and we should not want to. There is, however, a great deal of

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<sup>74</sup> See Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place*.

<sup>75</sup> Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, *Identity Crisis*, 214.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

difference between insisting that we debate what it means to be an American, including through partisan contestation, and doing so according to a rubric of shared national identity. In deeply divided contexts, the shared-identity account of social cohesion asks something of national identity that it cannot provide.

#### **4. Democratic Cohesion as Shared Belief**

"Once you can form a bond that is based on the shared acceptance of ideals," the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks recently said, "then you can find serenity. Otherwise you find conflict."<sup>78</sup> This nicely captures the spirit of accounts of democratic cohesion that premise cohesion on shared belief, or on agreement of some kind. There are two main variants: constitutional patriotism and political liberalism. I will briefly define the relevant features of both, before critiquing them jointly in reference to the criteria developed above. To preview, I argue that understanding citizen cohesion in terms of shared agreement faces a dilemma. If the agreement is interpreted too expansively, the view runs afoul of the pluralism criterion. But if agreement is interpreted too narrowly, the view runs afoul of the stability criterion.

Constitutional patriotism is associated most closely with the work of Jürgen Habermas (and with the political context of post-war Europe, and, especially, of post-war Germany<sup>79</sup>). Habermas sought a theoretical foundation for "postnational societies" to overcome the difficulties with the predominance of the modern nation-state model.<sup>80</sup> A "culturally

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<sup>78</sup> Tricia Johnson, presenter, "Elevating the Common Good Over Self-Interest," Aspen Ideas To Go, accessed June 3, 2021, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/podcasts/elevating-the-common-good-over-self-interest/>. Influential formulations of the belief-based account of cohesion include many liberal writers in the American tradition who defend American identity as primarily consisting in fidelity to founding ideas of liberty and equality, however imperfectly realized these may have been. See, e.g., Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955); Philip Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization," in *Concepts of Ethnicity*, ed. William Petersen, Michael Novak, and Philip Gleason (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>79</sup> On the historical origins and context of constitutional patriotism, see Jan-Werner Müller, "On the Origins of Constitutional Patriotism," *Contemporary Political Theory* 5, no. 3 (2006): 278–96; Abraham, "Constitutional Patriotism, Citizenship, and Belonging in America and Germany," 466–472.

<sup>80</sup> Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 107. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity," in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Bart van Steenbergen (London: Sage, 1994).

homogenous population" centered around a "national consciousness" may have been necessary for the legitimation and consolidation of modern states during the throes of the industrial era<sup>81</sup>, but the rise of nationalism was also bound up with the development of a pernicious drive to national self-preservation, an existential need to protect the nation "with the 'blood of its sons'" if necessary.<sup>82</sup> Given what he saw as the manifold pathologies of nationalism, along with increasing pluralism, Habermas, and those he has inspired, sought to displace the historical nation as the object of citizen sympathy: "the level of the shared political culture must be uncoupled from the level of subcultures and their prepolitical identities."<sup>83</sup> Instead, "The political culture of a country crystallizes around its constitution.... A 'constitutional patriotism' based on these interpretations can take the place originally occupied by nationalism."<sup>84</sup>

The aspiration of constitutional patriotism is to secure the conditions of social integration through common allegiance to a fundamental set of political principles, norms, and, in some accounts, procedures. These principles are to draw their force not from notions of peoplehood, history, ethnicity, language, and other "pre-political" or "cultural" elements, but from the validity and moral power of liberal-democratic ideals – a "cosmopolitan constitution."<sup>85</sup> In ethical terms, the goal is to move from the particular to the general or abstract, on the assumption that specifying such ideals at a suitable level of generality or abstraction will prove more compatible with the range of diversity characteristic of modern states. In turn, it is thought to be easier for historically marginalized groups or immigrants to fully join a society when the conditions of their assimilation (understood in the proper sense) with the dominant population require them (only) to join with the consensus on political principles, rather than, say, learn that population's language, idiosyncratic customs and culture, etc. The desired result is "the

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<sup>81</sup> Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 111-113.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Other prominent accounts of constitutional patriotism include Attracta Ingram, "Constitutional Patriotism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 22, no. 6 (November 1996): 1–18; Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Mertens, "Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship: Kant Against Habermas," *European Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1996): 328–47, at 329.

separation of citizenship and national identity."<sup>86</sup> Shared belief is the key to cohesion in the post-national society.

The other variant of cohesion as shared belief comes from political liberalism, and, more specifically, from those who have sought to ground duties of public reason and liberal justification in their facilitation of a valuable form of citizen relationship, community, or cohesion.<sup>87</sup> On this view, what unites citizens is a form of reasoning together, a shared commitment to obey public reason constraints such that public discourse can be said to be a cooperative endeavor. Cohesion requires that "we view one another as persons who have the authority to make valid claims, not merely as obstacles to or tools for attaining our own ends," as Kyla Ebels-Duggan puts it. This represents a form of coordination, or cooperation, because "we realize the ideal of civic friendship if we exercise the power of the state cooperatively with all reasonable citizens."<sup>88</sup> And this cooperation, for this group of theorists, requires, and consists in, the public use of reasoning and shared belief "on what counts as a reason for political purposes."<sup>89</sup> Citizens come together around a consensus on the principles and ideals that ought to bear normative weight in public argumentation, and a commitment to using only those. "Agreement," therefore, "is a necessary condition of the best civic relationships."<sup>90</sup>

Considering constitutional patriotism and civic-friendship varieties of political liberalism together, this view holds that "the unitary bond among individuals is the result of an agreement, an appreciation of liberal values, such as equality, freedom, or human rights."<sup>91</sup> Being a citizen, a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>87</sup> Rawls occasionally uses the language of "civic friendship" to describe the relations in his ideal society: see, e.g., John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 253, 447. But it was not until this more recent wave of theorizing that the implications of political liberalism for the character of the citizen bond were developed systematically. See Andrew Lister, *Public Reason and Political Community* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); R. J. Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 47, no. 1 (2019): 72–103; Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 238 (2010): 50–71. For an older account with a similar spirit, see Donald Moon, *Constructing Community: Moral Pluralism and Tragic Conflicts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>88</sup> Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," 55-56. See also Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," 75.

<sup>89</sup> Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," 50. See also Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," 81-84.

<sup>90</sup> Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," 58.

<sup>91</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 6.

member of a democratic community, is about believing certain things, and citizens agree on enough – they share enough belief – to overcome the "threat" that pluralism poses to civic friendship and community.<sup>92</sup> Notice that there are two key moves in this argument. The first is the claim that we can identify suitably broad objects of agreement, or shared belief, across the citizenry. The second is that such agreement underwrites a morally valuable form of community that satisfies the desiderata and therefore stands as a plausible account of democratic cohesion. I want to cast doubt upon both moves, and thus on the ability of shared belief to serve as the appropriate basis of citizenship for divided democracies.

What kind of beliefs need to be shared? There is, it turns out, considerable ambiguity in these literatures, including on such fundamental questions as what the proper objects of agreement must be, and, even more basically, what it means for citizens to share a belief. These questions are essential to gauging the meaning and plausibility of the shared-belief argument.

We should begin by distinguishing between different objects of belief and different ways of sharing this belief. On the former dimension, the most typical candidates proposed are that citizens must believe in, or agree with, principles or ideals (e.g., equality, liberty), norms (e.g., a commitment to coalition-building, or to not pressing one's political advantage in every case even if formally allowed) and procedures (e.g., majority voting, a division of powers).<sup>93</sup> On the latter dimension, what it means to share a belief, we should further distinguish between depth and breadth of belief: that is, *how deep* an interpretation of those propositions – with what level of specificity – must citizens agree on for the belief to count as "shared"? Do they need to agree merely on the importance of certain principles, norms, and/or procedures at face value, or do

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<sup>92</sup> Leland, "Civic Friendship, Public Reason," 73.

<sup>93</sup> In this way, all of these options can be formulated as propositions – for example, in the case of shared principles, citizens believe, or agree with, the proposition that "liberty and equality are bedrock principles of our government and society." I am thus, in this section, focused on the cognitive, propositional content of principles, norms, and procedures. Procedures, for their part, do not seem to only possess propositional content; they are also things we *do*. This is true, and will be important to my arguments about action below, but I am trying, insofar as possible, to isolate the part of procedures that we agree with, as in we agree with the validity or aptness of.

they need to share specific formulations and applications of them to specific instances?<sup>94</sup> And *how many* principles, norms, and/or procedures is it supposed that citizens share? Is it enough to agree on a core set, or must agreement be broader in this sense? Making these questions explicit is important for showing the difficulties these accounts face, and how these difficulties are general features of all attempts to ground democratic cohesion in shared belief rather than, more narrowly, problems for a version that spells out only one path through those questions.

Consider versions of the thesis that interpret shared belief "strongly." This incorporates accounts that require citizens, at the strongest end of the spectrum, to share belief in principles *and* norms *and* procedures, and to share a relatively large number of them and at a relatively high degree of specification. We can perhaps glimpse such commitments in political liberalism, whose (procedural) duty of public reason presupposes agreement on principles and norms, at a reasonably sharp level of specificity.<sup>95</sup> Or, insofar as a constitution encodes principles, norms, and political procedures, and insofar as it is thought also to require a specific band of interpretations, strong versions of constitutional patriotism exist.

The problem with these and other strong versions of the shared-belief thesis is that the amount of agreement they require is unattainable in divided democracies. As Jacob Levy writes, citizens "are not...united by allegiance to some particular political ideal, at any level of abstraction; even if most people had sufficient political knowledge and sufficiently coherent views to qualify as holding an ideal, polities contain a perennial diversity of such ideals...."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> See also Paul Billingham's discussion of the "zoom problem" within political liberalism in his Paul Billingham, "Does Political Community Require Public Reason? On Lister's Defence of Political Liberalism," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 15, no. 1 (2016): 20–41, at 32–33.

<sup>95</sup> Billingham, 32–33. Further evidence can be found in that other Rawlsian mechanism of agreement, the overlapping consensus – a mechanism strangely absent from this literature. The overlapping consensus consists in agreement on the "basic political structure," which includes fundamental laws, civil liberties essential to the realization of justice, and procedures. See Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, Lecture IV. This is quite substantial shared belief.

<sup>96</sup> Levy, "Against Fraternity: Democracy without Solidarity," 107. It is also possible to object to such strong interpretations along the lines of the social pluralism criterion. It is not at all clear that encouraging or requiring immigrants, say, to endorse or "come to" agree with or believe in a substantial set of principles, norms, and procedures is any less onerous than encouraging or requiring them to adopt a set of cultural practices associated with the national identity. See, e.g., David Miller, "The Coherence of Liberal Nationalism," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 23–37, at 27. I mostly agree with this critique, but I set it aside here. (That said, I think it is likely significantly

Although almost all citizens of United States (as well as other mature democracies) profess to value freedom and equality, thus apparently demonstrating shared belief, a brief examination of contemporary political battles reveals that such agreement is in fact quite shallow. To take just one example, consider the propositional disagreement at stake in the recent controversies over mask wearing in the United States noted earlier. Many conservatives and libertarians objected to the imposition of mask mandates by even local governments, on the grounds that such objections were necessary to protect their freedom and bodily integrity. But liberals have been, in general, strongly in favor of mask wearing – and on similar justificatory grounds. They interpret the demands of freedom and bodily integrity to entail the responsibility to take precautions where doing so was necessary to safeguard the health of their fellow citizens (and thus their freedom and bodily integrity). Under conditions of polarization, the policy and issue realms that enjoy broad support have been steadily declining.<sup>97</sup> But this lack of agreement is not a product of only contemporary polarization. Even in the mid-20th century, often remembered with fondness as a golden age of values consensus<sup>98</sup>, much agreement was only ostensible, failing to account for the exclusion of racial and other minorities from the public sphere and profound differences by class.<sup>99</sup> The bond among citizens of divided democracies cannot be conceived as one of strong consensus in many domains.<sup>100</sup>

The question then becomes whether strong versions of the shared-belief thesis might still be useful as a guiding ideal, as a goal for a society to work toward. The problem here, though, is that there is no mechanism for explaining how the citizens of a polity, if they do not already share an appreciation for liberal-democratic principles, norms, and procedures at a relatively high

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more normatively justified to require endorsement of a set of liberal-democratic ideals for would-be citizens than it is to require adoption of cultural practices.)

<sup>97</sup> Geoffrey Layman et al., “Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics.”

<sup>98</sup> Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*.

<sup>99</sup> Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> See also Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 76-77, 109. See also exposition of the so-called “asymmetry objection” to public reason liberalism, whose proponents point out that disagreement over “the right” – the basic matters of justice at stake in contemporary politics – is not relevantly dissimilar from disagreement over “the good.” See, e.g. Timothy Fowler and Zofia Stemplowska, “The Asymmetry Objection Rides Again: On the Nature and Significance of Justificatory Disagreement,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (2015): 133–46.

degree of specification, can be brought to experience such agreement. Even if there is desire among the population to overcome this disagreement, beliefs are not the type of things one can adopt simply because one wants to; they can only be held, or adopted, if one finds sufficient compelling reason.<sup>101</sup> Still less can they be imposed, or manipulated from the outside. It is true that conditions may be adjusted to be more conducive to thinking through political issues in a sincere manner – perhaps by reducing disinformation, for example. But even well-designed institutional environments cannot make up for a lack of the relevant forms of consensus when they do not already exist. In this sense, the share-belief view is static, or mainly backward-looking; it "promote[s] solidarity on more or less *fixed* grounds...focus[ing] on what citizens already share in common...without paying sufficient attention to the production of these shared grounds."<sup>102</sup> This variant thus runs afoul of the stability criterion, since it contains no resources for imagining a path out of divided societies to the proposed source of cohesion.

In response to these objections, theorists of cohesion as shared belief may want to advocate for a less onerous version of the thesis, one that relaxes the amount of agreement required. This could be done by allowing disagreement on principles, or norms, or procedures, or by lowering the scope or level of shared specification of these. This "weaker" variant also lays plausible claim to capture an important part of the spirit of the constitutional patriotic and political-liberal projects. Constitutional patriots, of course, have good reason to avoid requiring agreement that is too onerous, since the primary appeal of their account is that it facilitates inclusion. Thomas Mertens, for example, understands constitutional patriotism as requiring "only that [citizens] accept democratic procedures."<sup>103</sup> Müller's version especially emphasizes contestation, and, in response to criticisms that constitutional patriotism shares much of the exclusiveness of nationalism, prizes only a thin commitment to shared principles that does not

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<sup>101</sup> See also Peter Jones, "Beliefs and Identities," in *Toleration, Identity and Difference*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 81. This does not imply that motivation plays no role in the adoption or maintenance of beliefs, as the phenomenon of motivated reasoning makes abundantly clear. But far from suggesting that beliefs may be adopted easily, motivated reasoning demonstrates how difficult it is to change.

<sup>102</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 8.

<sup>103</sup> Mertens, "Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship," 336.

require allegiance to a static constitution.<sup>104</sup> And the *raison d'être* of political liberalism is sensitivity to reasonable disagreement, which is why Ebels-Duggan's account of cohesion includes the proviso that "we need to agree on what counts as reasons for enacting policies, but not on which policies would be best."<sup>105</sup> On this view, what unites the citizenry is mutual recognition of rational agency; the emphasis is placed on our fellow citizens' ability to come to their own conclusions through a process of reasoning, and rather less on the substantive conclusions reached.

These variants have the virtue of leaving plenty of scope for political and social pluralism, thus better addressing critics who charge that any theory of cohesion imposes uniformity or threatens exclusion. But this move, too, faces problems: What is gained in acceptance of pluralism is lost in stability. The charge that the shared-belief thesis, and especially constitutional patriotism, is insufficiently motivating has long been thought by critics to be an Achilles heel of the view. "Love," it is frequently said, "matters for justice."<sup>106</sup> This criticism is most often interpreted as a failure of inspiration or motivation. Believing in the truth of or agreeing with a proposition is insufficient to motivate sacrifice (for supporting the welfare state) or vulnerability (as a basis for trusting one's fellow citizens and being trusted in return). It is possible to agree that a proposition is true, correct – and also, even, the right thing to do – without feeling moved to act upon it. This line of argumentation is, by now, well-known in the academic debate, so beyond endorsing it I will not rehearse its main lines here. What I wish to emphasize is that recognizing the motivational insufficiency of bonds of thin agreement spells trouble for this candidate account of democratic cohesion's ability to unite the citizenry – especially a divided citizenry – in any meaningful fashion. Any theory of citizenship that places the weight of its argument on belief, or that "makes of national belonging a form of rational

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<sup>104</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, "Three Objections to Constitutional Patriotism," *Constellations* 14, no. 2 (June 2007): 197–209.

<sup>105</sup> Ebels-Duggan, "The Beginning of Community: Politics in the Face of Disagreement," 59.

<sup>106</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Nationalism and Patriotism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Charles Taylor, "Why Democracy Needs Patriotism," in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 1996).

attachment,"<sup>107</sup> runs into serious difficulties because it provides little in the way of substance that could unite a citizenry already displaying division. The shared-belief view of citizenship is thus even less convincing along this domain in divided contexts.

This problem becomes more severe the more abstract or universal the required beliefs become. Consider the following proposition: "I believe in equality. But more specifically, I believe equality entails paying a decently large portion of my income in taxes to the state, so the state can provide effective support services for my fellow citizens to lead lives of dignity and of their own choosing. I further believe that equality requires not just tolerance but active recognition and appreciation of those of minority gender identities and sexualities." To the extent many citizens endorse this proposition – in a Nordic town, perhaps – and share belief in this respect, we might think this quite substantive way of interpreting the value of equality could supply a substantial form of stability (as well as motivation). But as we move along the spectrum to more universalist specifications of the required shared belief – in line with the constitutional-patriotic aspiration to minimize the substance of what is shared – it becomes increasingly difficult to see what work agreement is doing in the way of cohesion. The proposition "I believe in equality" is significantly more abstract, and, as such, will command a broader range of agreement in divided societies. It will unite those who subscribe to the more precise welfare-style specification noted above, but it will also count those who believe equality entails a moral duty to donate to local civil society and religious organizations and a skepticism of paying high taxes for state welfare programs within the same cohesive democratic community. But it will do so in such a superficial way that it is no longer clear how such a thin interpretation of cohesion as shared belief could even count as a theory of cohesion, let alone one that adequately satisfies the stability criterion.

In this section, I have argued that defenders of democratic cohesion as shared belief face a dilemma when applying the thesis to polarized contexts. If proponents of democratic cohesion

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<sup>107</sup> Abraham, "Constitutional Patriotism, Citizenship, and Belonging in America and Germany," 468.

as shared belief interpret the shared belief requirement strongly, then it becomes unattainable in divided societies and threatens pluralism. But if they interpret the shared belief requirement weakly, lowering the threshold of agreement required, then they undercut the sources of citizen stability. I therefore find accounts of citizenship premised on what citizens believe to be wanting.

Even if I am right to be skeptical, however, it is important not to overstate what I have demonstrated. There is a difference between arguing that it is wrong to understand the core of the citizen bond in terms of belief, on the one hand, and rejecting any role for belief in a theory of cohesion, on the other. There is a difference, that is, between asking agreement to satisfy the pluralism, motivation, and stability criteria for cohesion and recognizing that citizenship must entail some propositional content – even if it is not the part of citizenship used to bring people together. It is probably impossible to develop an adequate theory of cohesion entirely without the notion of belief. As such, the substrate of cohesion I am about to explain and defend – shared action – depends for its plausibility on the specific shared belief of agreement on, or commitment to, certain political (and nonpolitical) procedures. The hope is that isolating and emphasizing the analytically (and practically) distinct components of action within a theory of citizenship will provide new resources for divided contexts.

## **5. Democratic Cohesion as Shared Action**

So far, this chapter has pointed to some serious difficulties with understanding the citizen bond in divided societies in terms of shared identity or shared belief. This section builds upon these discussions by developing an alternative answer to the problem of democratic cohesion. Instead of shared belief or shared identity, my view centers the citizen bond on shared *action* – on what citizens *do* together as citizens. Before making the argument in detail, let me first summarize the major moves. The shared action view premises cohesion on the mutual recognition of relations of interdependence that emerge when people do things together. Historically, the paradigmatic form of interdependence was modeled by the division of labor that

made possible cooperative social production in modern economies. After elucidating the main features of this view, which has recently enjoyed renewed attention from several theorists, I extend this insight from the economic to the political realm, arguing that the full realization of democratic governance requires the political involvement of all citizens in a similarly interdependent (shared) fashion. When the maintenance of democracy is understood in such dynamic terms, it reveals how participation can serve what Carole Pateman has called an "integrative" function: the "experience" of participation "attaches the individual to his society and is instrumental in developing it into a true community."<sup>108</sup> Partisanship, at its best, plays a key role in rendering visible this participative interdependence, thus supporting cohesion as shared action. But partisanship's role in this account is concededly ambivalent, posing both resource and danger and calling for non-political forms of shared action to complete this conception of cohesion.

### *5.1. Social Production, Interdependence, and Shared Action*

Although it is not nearly as common in the contemporary literature, the shared action account has its roots in similar historical anxieties as other leading models of social and political cohesion. Western societies began to make the mass transition from traditional small-scale economies to developed, industrial ones in the 19th century. These economic changes were accompanied by equally profound social and demographic transitions, "with the increasing scope and acceleration of the circulation of people, goods, and news. Populations became unmoored from the corporative social ties of early modern societies, thereby becoming at the same time both geographically mobilized and isolated."<sup>109</sup> Many early social theorists worried that these and other changes would permanently eviscerate the traditional foundations of social unity (or cohesion, or solidarity), and so the origins of many influential modern discussions of these

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<sup>108</sup> Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 27. Pateman attributes this view of participation to Rousseau.

<sup>109</sup> Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, 111.

concepts are bound up with a preoccupation with the conditions of the new industrial political economy. Émile Durkheim was a leading figure in this vein, investigating, in his early work, the requirements of cohesion and stability in the modern age. But Durkheim thought the conditions of industrialization contained the seeds of continuing social cohesion, if in a new way. He was captivated by the degree of specialization that new industry required, and how this specialization, or division of labor, was essential for productive capacity. In the new economy, people's labor is interdependent in a way it was not in more self-sufficient communities, and social production depends on the cooperation (but not central coordination) of many individual parts of a larger whole. This was, for Durkheim, the root of a new form of community: recognition of co-participation in a joint project.<sup>110</sup>

For this strand of thought, it is, paradoxically, our *differentiation* that forms the conditions of unity – unity not in spite of difference, as in the premodern world, but precisely because of the coordination that our differentiated positions in the structure of social production makes possible (and necessary). This vision of cohesion through interdependence, and interdependence through differentiation, depends on certain favorable background conditions obtaining, including a degree of equality of opportunity and basic welfare.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the key is for each individual (each worker, in this case) to recognize the fruits of their activity in the larger process – to "feel as if he is of some use" and recognize "that his activity has a meaning."<sup>112</sup> There is a

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<sup>110</sup> His principal work here is Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 1893. I am concerned with Durkheim's distinctively modern notion of "organic solidarity" – unity through differentiation and the requirements thereof – rather than "mechanical solidarity" – his characterization of premodern unity through sameness. See also Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985); Lisa Herzog, "Durkheim on Social Justice: The Argument from 'Organic Solidarity,'" *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 1 (2018): 112–24. Other early theorists of solidarity include Smith, Hegel, Marx, and Weber, although the latter two thinkers were primarily concerned with solidarity below the level of the nation. See Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 11-15; Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, "Introduction," in *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies*, ed. Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4-5.

<sup>111</sup> Herzog, "Durkheim on Social Justice."

<sup>112</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 14.

subjective element of mutual recognition in Durkheim's theory of social cohesion as productive interdependence.<sup>113</sup>

Iseult Honohan, Andrea Sangiovanni, and Tugba Sevinç have recently defended sophisticated conceptions of citizenship that share some of the Durkheimian spirit. Their accounts draw, in large part, on economic notions of productive interdependence, of embeddedness in and contribution to an arrangement of production with certain others that can be viewed as shared.<sup>114</sup> As such, the argument begins with a similar sociology as Durkheim's. Sangiovanni observes that in modern societies, "we depend on the joint contributions of myriad other citizens and residents" to provide the "resources necessary to function as biological, social, and political beings."<sup>115</sup> The achievements and contributions of individuals can be meaningfully understood only within the context of the broader social-productive "structure that allows us to develop and make use of our talents."<sup>116</sup> Because "the quality of [a citizen's] life crucially depends on the support of other citizens and residents" in their contributions to economic life, citizen communities exist in a state of "particularly deep and pervasive...mutual dependence."<sup>117</sup> Similarly emphasizing interdependence, Sevinç writes that in modern societies "individuals are more than ever forced to cooperate by the increased interdependence in society."<sup>118</sup> The result is that "the bonds that unite citizens are thought to emerge as a result of their producing together, with and for others in society."<sup>119</sup>

So I am not the first to find Durkheim's emphasis on interdependence an attractive basis for citizen relations for the present day. None of these accounts, however, are especially explicit about what interdependence means, or about how political interdependence might count as a

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<sup>113</sup> See also Miller, "Solidarity and Its Sources," 70-71. Miller doubts that Durkheim's version of interdependence, reliant as it is on market and economic arrangements, "will necessarily produce genuine solidarity." In this way, his criticism applies also to Sangiovanni's and Sevinç's accounts, further motivating the need to investigate noneconomic forms of interdependence and their ability to engender a valuable form of cohesion, as I do.

<sup>114</sup> Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?"; Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action?"; Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity."

<sup>115</sup> Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 355. Sangiovanni prefers the term "solidarity."

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 18. Sevinç prefers "joint activity" to "joint action."

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 11.

valuable basis for cohesion. Further, none of them address the specific challenges of political contestation – or partisanship – to this vision of citizenship. These are my goals for the remainder of this chapter, beginning by systematizing the relevant features of cohesion as shared action.

The economy is understood as a site of shared action. Both terms must be elaborated to appreciate the distinctiveness of this view's grounding of cohesion. First, it is predicated on shared *action*. Actions are, characteristically, contributions of one's energy toward some end. The duration of an action (and its degree of dynamism) of course varies; the action of carrying a table is finite<sup>120</sup>, while the action of contributing one's labor to society is much more sustained. It is important for its value that economic action be ongoing. In this case, the specific action – economic activity – is also productive, in the straightforward sense that it produces material goods and services. But not all action need be productive in this sense, and, as I show below, this is not essential to its having value.<sup>121</sup>

The dynamic and ongoing qualities of actions distinguish them from the more static phenomena of possessing an identity or a belief. It is instructive that we often say we "hold" an identity or a belief. This is not to say that actions do not ever bear a relationship with identities or beliefs we have, such as when we "act on" the basis of one of those (prior) phenomena. But it is to insist on a distinction, since actions can enjoy independence from beliefs and identities. The things we do need not flow straightforwardly, and should not be conflated with or taken as necessarily direct expression of, what we believe in or what we are. There is, to illustrate, a distinction drawn in religious studies between religions as practices (or actions) and religions as practices plus belief. In the development of the early Christian Church, there were times when Christianity was more a function of practice – rituals, services, etc. – separable from strict adherence to dogma. Only later did belief come to be an essential component of religious

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>121</sup> Contrast this with definitions of cohesion (or in this case "solidarity") that explicitly rule out action, such as Banting and Kymlicka's focus on pure intentions and attitudes. Banting and Kymlicka, "Introduction," 3.

practice.<sup>122</sup> Although action can express belief or identity in a relatively derivative way, it does not always, and its value does not necessarily depend on its doing so. Acting is a distinct, isolatable phenomenon from being and believing. Centering the citizen relationship on actions that are dynamic and ongoing gives continual cause for reminder of the source of cohesion.

Second, the action is *shared*. Shared action is a special type of action. One can contribute one's energy by oneself to some action, but shared action is collaborative in the sense that it requires the actions of all members: the ends of the action are "possible and can be achieved only with and through the contributions of others."<sup>123</sup> This is not to say that the ends need to be theorized to any great extent, nor to dispute the idea that the benefits of the ends are enjoyed individually. The interdependence that characterizes economies does not involve highly specified ends; economic action does not proceed according to a blueprint, but is more open-ended. Moreover, shared action does not always require face-to-face engagement, on the factory floor, say, nor does it require central coordination; there can be "collective action without shared agency."<sup>124</sup> Indeed, action being shared is compatible with competition, as long as the competing parties can be said to share a project to which each of their contributions is essential for the meaning of the project (as with teams in a sports league). As such, shared action is compatible with differential attainment, or differential success – that is, diverse workers still participate in shared action even though the benefits of their labor are not equally distributed. Shared action describes participation in the common project of making society work, which rests a level above discrete projects for which there are sometimes winners and losers. In this way, shared action describes and appeals to a deeper sense of shared fate individuals possess in virtue of which they succeed or fail collectively.

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<sup>122</sup> See, generally, Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 10.

<sup>124</sup> Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 343. See also Matthew D. Kuchem, "Young, Gilbert, and Social Groups," *Social Theory and Practice* 46, no. 4 (October 2020): 737–63.

On this view, conceiving of society in terms of the economic interdependence that characterizes shared action forms the foundation of social cohesion. When people engage in shared action, they "recognize their dependency in realizing the ends of these activities and in this respect are conscious of the reality of their social relations," resulting in "an understanding of unity and togetherness."<sup>125</sup> Importantly, though, it is not merely the existence of a state of interdependence that creates bonds of cohesion.<sup>126</sup> It is, in addition, the *acknowledgment*, or *recognition*, of interdependence: solidarity must be spoken, in a way. As Sevinç writes, "the more citizens become conscious of the interdependent nature of their social relations, the stronger their sense of shared fate."<sup>127</sup> This is perhaps especially important in advanced, post-industrial democracies, where the forms of economic contribution are less reminiscent of industrial labor.

To illustrate the value of community centered on shared action, consider the case of Gander, Newfoundland, Canada in the early autumn of 2001. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, all flights within and to the United States were grounded, causing ground control to redirect 38 westward-bound transatlantic flights to the small town of Gander. Within a matter of hours, the town's population almost doubled, with nearly 7,000 passengers from around the world flooding the town in a time of great confusion, distress, and grief. Residents of Gander sprang into action, working around the clock for days to house, feed, and comfort the arrivals. They converted schools and libraries into temporary dormitories and organized supplies

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<sup>125</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 10.

<sup>126</sup> Herzog emphasizes that key to the success of Durkheim's notion of organic solidarity is the prevalence of the "perception" of a certain amount of distributive justice: "what matters is that the members of a society, the people in the street, believe in equality of opportunity and just prices, and consider their violation morally problematic." Herzog, "Durkheim on Social Justice," 121.

<sup>127</sup> Sevinç, 10. See also Honohan on "reflective recognition of interdependence": Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?," 59. Sangiovanni goes a step further, and argues that acknowledgment of interdependence (solidarity) grounds distinctive obligations of social justice of the kind that have been institutionalized in the form of the modern welfare state. This stronger conclusion has some stronger premises built in: Sangiovanni conceives of economic interdependence in terms of life-sustaining reciprocity. This allows him to provide a "reciprocity-based conception of social justice" that appears, in the end, to draw most of its normative force from natural egalitarian duties of fairness rather than acknowledgment of interdependence or shared action. I do not think his argument succeeds, because he conflates the exceedingly general form of adversity of exiting the state of nature with the more specific kind of adversity in modern societies that ostensibly justifies the welfare state. But while Sangiovanni's account of shared action does not, I fear, gives us a convincing moral grounding for the social justice duties of the welfare state, it still gives compelling reason to think shared action might be valuable for democratic cohesion. Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 354.

from their own homes; the townsfolk, along with the arrivals, prepared thousands of meals; they prayed together and partied together and tried to make sense of what seemed a different world. After several days, the arrivals departed, having found in a dark time a beautiful sense of cohesion "somewhere in the middle of nowhere," celebrated at regular anniversaries in Gander through the present day.<sup>128</sup> The profound sense of cohesion that developed among these many diverse strangers required nothing in the way of shared identity, and required no common beliefs. The many languages spoken by the passengers from across the globe proved little barrier because words were not necessary for the camaraderie they felt. It was from their shared dependence on one another, and the actions taken in the face of this vulnerability, that a sense of community developed.

What happened in Gander was exceptional, and we cannot expect the bonds forged in the fires of a dramatic emergency situation to provide a perfect model for citizen relations on an ongoing basis. There is, however, much to take from this example, and from the preceding discussion on economic interdependence, for understanding how community premised on shared action be can viable in the political realm.

### 5.2. *Shared Action and Partisan-Political Interdependence*

In the Durkheimian tradition, both the problem of social disunity and the solution of social cohesion are framed chiefly in economic terms. The predominant understanding of the nature and value of shared action is, accordingly, a productive one, relating to our interdependence in the division of labor in order to produce the goods and services that make modern society possible. But the idea of social interdependence of differentiated roles and its unifying potential are not exhausted by the domain of the economic. For we live not only in relations of economic production and consumption with others, but also in *citizen* relations. I

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<sup>128</sup> This story has recently been recounted in the Broadway musical *Come from Away*, written by Irene Sankoff and David Hein.

now want to argue that relations of democratic citizenship are also relations of interdependence, formulating a political basis of shared action. The project of maintaining democracy – collective self-governance – requires political participation that can be fruitfully conceived as a locus of shared action among differentiated roles.<sup>129</sup> This citizen interdependence is manifested through both *political* and *nonpolitical* actions, and both are necessary for a complete account of democratic cohesion as shared action. Here I focus on political interdependence, and, especially, on partisan action. In the next subsection, I turn to the mediating role of nonpolitical action.

To be successful, my account needs to show how political relations manifest shared action. I begin with the "action" side of the phrase.<sup>130</sup> Recall that one distinguishing feature of economic action is its dynamic nature: it is a contribution of one's energy that is sustained; it requires active input. There are many forms of actions citizens do in their capacity as citizens. Benjamin Barber captures this point nicely:

"While there is a sense in which every human thought, every event, every utterance (called 'speech acts' by certain philosophers) can be regarded as an action, our definition intends a somewhat narrower and more common usage. Action here suggests building or closing a hospital, starting or concluding a war, taxing or exempting a corporation, initiating or deferring a welfare plan – in other words, doing (or not doing), making (or not making) something in the physical world that limits human behavior, changes the environment, or affects the world in some material way.... politics remains something we

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<sup>129</sup> Honohan and Sevinç also recognize a political basis of the interdependence among citizens, but neither explains what forms of actions count in any degree of specificity. Both, moreover, tend to limit citizen action to the deliberative encounter in the public sphere. For Honohan, "citizens are interdependent through the practice of politics" because "citizens actively participate in their own self-rule," but the level of detail is left at "public interaction of various forms": Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?," 61. Similarly, Sevinç locates political interdependence in "political activities" and "political participation": Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 9.

<sup>130</sup> Miller briefly notes that national identity is "an active identity" consisting of "communities that do things together, take decisions, achieve results and so forth." He does not, though, pursue these ideas any further. Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, 29. See also Miller, *On Nationality*, 6.

do, not something (such as power, for example) that we possess or use or watch or think about. Politics is action and is about action."<sup>131</sup>

Most obviously, to participate in democratic politics through voting, deliberating, and remaining informed is to take an active role in the political community. This form of contribution is, of course, different from economic contribution. It need not typically involve material labor, or an output of specifically bodily energy in any direct sense. In addition to political action being dynamic contributions of one's energy, it is also, like the theorization of economic action, ongoing. Political participation is not the sort of action that can be completed once and for all; it has an intertemporal aspect that is crucial for its meaning and value. The bond among citizen comes from "constant commitment and ongoing political activity."<sup>132</sup> Sevinç, too, mentions this aspect of "continuity" when it comes to participation, in that "political participation (and society-wide productive cooperation)...requires continuous engagement from citizens."<sup>133</sup> But why is it important that action be ongoing? Why not simply encourage one great participative event – a constitutional convention or deliberative weekend, for example, or another mechanism that possesses the virtues of inclusiveness and active input but that is time-bound?

The reason democratic participation must be ongoing is that continuity is part of what it means for participation to be democratic. An essential element of the democratic ideal is responsiveness to citizen demands. Circumstances change and preferences evolve, and a government that remains inert, or only takes account of opinion once in a great while, cannot be said to be very democratic. This is part of what is at stake in contemporary worries about the

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<sup>131</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 122-123. While there is much I admire in Barber's account of political action, it frequently seems biased toward the material in a way I fear is exclusive. He also fails to consistently disambiguate action from belief, such that his occasional arguments for community through action trade on consensus. See, e.g., his examples on 209, and his stance that citizens should be "united by the ties of common activity *and common consciousness*" (223, emphasis added).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>133</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 10.

"atrophy" of democratic institutions and democratic "backsliding" – the failure to take seriously the contingency of political achievement and attend to the fragility of democratic institutions. Institutions are not self-regulating or self-sustaining; they cannot simply be wound up and then left alone. Another important reason democratic action must be iterative is that it is essential to the possibility of forming and reforming new, sometimes surprising, political coalitions, especially those that break apart entrenched (and aligned) identity groups. As I argued in Chapter 2, the creation of such crosscutting associations is part of what distinguishes political partisan identity from the ossified forms of social partisan identity we see in polarized societies and enhances political agency. Moreover, the development of assurance and trust cannot generalize across diverse citizenries unless opportunities for new encounters emerge, and these opportunities require democratic action to be ongoing.<sup>134</sup> Democratic institutions have an important "maintenance" imperative, then, that is safeguarded in part by ongoing input.<sup>135</sup> This focus on ongoing action sides with Machiavelli, who recommends periodic rituals of *re*-founding the republic to render it stable<sup>136</sup>, over Arendt, in this respect, whose notion of political action prefers periods of spectacular creation and natality.<sup>137</sup> Shared action commends participation as practice – as something one may not get right at first, or consistently, but that one acquires through habit and continual effort.

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<sup>134</sup> See also Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 137–74.

<sup>135</sup> This view of democratic action as a continual process requiring "eternal vigilance" contrasts with the discourse of innovation and disruption, of moving fast and breaking things, that has long since moved from Silicon Valley to Washington, London, and Brussels, becoming an ethic of governance. A focus on maintenance, repair, and fixing has recently emerged as an organizing theory within the critical veins of urban studies, anthropology, economics, and other fields, in explicit opposition to discourses of disruption (especially surrounding technology and governance). The foundational statement is Steven J. Jackson, "Rethinking Repair," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); see also Tom Hall and Robin James Smith, "Care and Repair and the Politics of Urban Kindness," *Sociology* 49, no. 1 (February 2015): 3–18; Shannon Mattern, "Maintenance and Care," *Places Journal*, November 23, 2018.

<sup>136</sup> See especially Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, Kindle edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2013) Book 3, Discourses 1 and 49. These conceptions of participative vigilance, stability, and ritual are core themes of classical republican thought. See, generally, Held, *Models of Democracy*, Chapter 2.

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, her admiration for the American Revolution and Declaration of Independence in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963).

Partisan action amply fulfills these criteria of action. Based on my discussions in the previous chapter, I do not think this claim needs much further justification; it is the "shared" component of my formula for democratic cohesion that will prove the heavier lift. But before moving on to that question, it is perhaps worth briefly reemphasizing the claim that parties are the primary institutional vehicles for political participation in modern representative democracies. They provide, more consistently and broadly than any other channel, the tools for continual citizen action. They are the great sustainers of participation. It is within this framework that the treatment of partisanship's intertemporal qualities by several other recent normative theorists of partisanship gains additional use. Russell Muirhead especially emphasizes this point. He understands partisan loyalty to inhere in a party "stand[ing] together over time," sustained by "partisan memory" of key successes and failures and "partisan patience" for projects and victories to come – both told in a comprehensive, meaning-making narrative.<sup>138</sup> This endurance is important, for Muirhead, because political change takes time: "Any ambitious attempt to realize any reasonable approximation of the common good will take a great deal of time to work out, and those who share an idea of the common good will need to stand together over time if they are to discover what is possible in politics."<sup>139</sup> This is no doubt true, but we can also appreciate the staying power partisanship allows in democratic publics in terms less anchored to the pursuit of individual partisan political projects. The ongoing nature of parties' concern helps ensure that there is a continually educative environment for learning the skills of participation. The ability of citizens to practice citizenship thus does not rise or fall with the vicissitudes of periodic and contingent popular reform movements or ephemeral charismatic figures. The party landscape helps pass the torch of citizen action onto each succeeding generation.

Having established that citizen relations are similar to economic relations in their being a form of action, it remains to be seen whether partisan political action is shared in the relevant

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<sup>138</sup> Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 128-140.

<sup>139</sup> Muirhead, 139.

sense – how political action manifests relations of interdependence that form the basis of an account of cohesion. We saw earlier that the fact that economic production is shared, or joint, in the form of a division of labor is central to that view's promise to describe social cohesion. Can the same be said of political relationships, especially those across partisan-identity lines? In what sense is partisan action interdependent?

As with economic production, not every citizen plays the same role. The political analog of the division of labor has recently been expressed by explanations of democratic talk as a multifaceted phenomenon whose value partly depends on the networked contribution of multiple different parts. This "systemic" approach has been developed most fully within deliberation theory, as scholars have sought to distance this tradition from overly consensual or rational convictions confined to discrete mini-public by embracing the interactions among diverse actors in the public sphere writ large. A need has been recognized to move from, as Simone Chambers puts it, "democratic deliberation" to "deliberative democracy."<sup>140</sup> In an influential statement of this approach, eight deliberative theorists argue for the necessity of going "beyond the study of individual institutions and processes to examine their interaction in the system as a whole."<sup>141</sup> After all, "most democracies are complex entities in which a wide variety of institutions, associations, and sites of contestation accomplish political work – including informal networks, the media, organized advocacy groups, schools, foundations, private and nonprofit institutions, legislatures, executive agencies, and the courts."<sup>142</sup> On this approach, then, a "system" is "a set of distinguishable, differentiated, but to some degree interdependent parts,

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<sup>140</sup> Simone Chambers, "Rhetoric and the Public Sphere: Has Deliberative Democracy Abandoned Mass Democracy?," *Political Theory* 37, no. 3 (June 2009): 323–50, at 324.

<sup>141</sup> Jane Mansbridge et al., "A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy," in *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, ed. Jane Mansbridge and John Parkinson, Theories of Institutional Design (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–26. See also John Dryzek, *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Maxime Lepoutre, *Democratic Speech in Divided Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). See, too, the work of Iris Marion Young: although presented as more a critique of deliberation, it can also be considered to have laid the groundwork for the more inclusive systemic approach in Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Michael Sandel also briefly notes that the civic republican tradition he draws on recognizes the importance of "multiplicity" and "differentiation" in democratic participation: Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 360–361.

<sup>142</sup> Mansbridge et al., "A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy," 2.

often with distributed functions and a division of labor, connected in such a way as to form a complex whole."<sup>143</sup>

The systemic approach is, so far at least, primarily a theory of deliberation, "one that encompasses a talk-based approach to political conflict and problem-solving – through arguing, demonstrating, expressing, and persuading."<sup>144</sup> As such, it needs to be expanded to incorporate the non-political, non-deliberative forms of citizen action described above and below (yielding, perhaps, a systemic approach to the systemic approach to deliberation). Moreover, although this work helpfully shows that citizens' differential contributions remain contributions to a shared, larger project, we need a more precise sense of the nature of that project.

The most basic sense in which citizens depend on one another flows from the fact that they are related through their involuntary membership of the same state: "a polity consists of people...who are stuck with one another."<sup>145</sup> There is a minimal sense of shared fate that attaches to a group of people who are demarcated from all others mostly by accident. But there is much more to say here about the kind of interdependence that characterizes citizenship within democratic states, starting with the different forms of participation citizens engage in. At the core of the democratic ideal is the notion of popular sovereignty, the idea that the people themselves govern, and share this governing authority. To this extent, there is a more substantial sense in which the specific collective enterprise uniting citizens, despite the arbitrary origins of the association, depends for its full realization on the participation of all citizens. Political participation conceived in this manner "take[s] on the sense of a journey in which the going is as important as the getting there and in which the relations among travelers are as vital as the destinations they may think they are seeking."<sup>146</sup> Democracy is a special form of action, then,

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 4-5. Mansbridge et al.'s formulation of the systemic approach explicitly mentions, albeit without explanation, as one of its benefits the ability to bring parties into the normative picture: "for example, highly partisan rhetoric, even while violating some deliberative ideals such as mutual respect and accommodation, may nonetheless help to fulfill other deliberative ideals such as inclusion." Ibid., 3.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>145</sup> Iris Marion Young, quoted in Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?," 60.

<sup>146</sup> Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 120.

"the end of which is possible and can be achieved only through the contributions of others."<sup>147</sup>

This is both a conceptual point, and a normative point; what is lost when democratic action wanes is not only the meaning of democracy (a state's democratic credentials), but also the legitimacy of the regime.

To be sure, the ends, or goals, of the shared project of democracy are importantly, and as a matter of principle, quite open. Part of the nature (and value) of democratic politics is that it is left to the people, and competing factions within the people, to set the course of democratic politics. Citizens of a state that sets the ends in advance, as by comprehensively endorsing a conception of the good, or rules certain questions or concerns outside the bounds of proper discussion, as with feminist concerns for much of history, are not engaged in the kind of shared project with which I am concerned. But we should not let acknowledgment of this basic liberal point obscure the powerful sense in which "the goal" of democracy includes "a reference to the actions and aims of each of us."<sup>148</sup> As Margaret Canovan wrote of Arendt's view, "politics is not simply a way of promoting [individual] welfare any more than ballet is simply a way of keeping fit."<sup>149</sup> It is the success of this larger project that is collectively shared across the citizenry, and to which their individual, differentiated actions contribute. The "participatory situation," then, "is such that each citizen would be powerless to do anything without the cooperation of all the others" in this sense,<sup>150</sup> because there can be no democracy of one. To speak of commonality at the level of participation in a joint project does not entail commonality at more precise levels of what citizens hope to gain from the project.

In this way, political interdependence as a principle is perfectly compatible with differential success, with winners and losers, at the level at which everyday politics proceeds. Citizens do not share a common fate all the way down. All citizens may be similarly vulnerable in

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<sup>147</sup> Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 10. See also Honohan, "Friends, Strangers or Countrymen?," 60.

<sup>148</sup> Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 343.

<sup>149</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," *History of Political Thought* 6, no. 3 (1985): 617–42, at 636.

<sup>150</sup> Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 23.

the face of the potential for the failure of the democratic project, just as all workers are similarly vulnerable in that all but extreme recluses depend on the contributions of their fellow workers to produce vital goods and services they cannot themselves. Just as economic interdependence operates through the competitive mechanism of the marketplace, the logic of political interdependence similarly contains a competitive element. Political fortunes, like economic fortunes, vary across the citizenry and across time.<sup>151</sup> Partisanship thus makes interdependence visible through the competition among partisan communities, central to which is the experience of political loss.<sup>152</sup>

This talk of encouraging partisans to see their opponents outside the specifics of their partisanship recalls my argument about forms of recognition appropriate to partisanship in Chapter 2. There, I argued that partisanship under conditions of polarization transforms into a cultural form of identity through which partisans seek to assert and defend the authenticity of their partisanship in a way that renders debate intractable. I further argued, in response, for a general form of recognition that replaces notions of authenticity and integrity with a more universalist object of co-participation in the democratic project. We are now in a position to appreciate more precisely both what it is partisans are recognizing in their opponents and how they might be encouraged to actually recognize it. What partisans are asked to recognize is their state of interdependence with their opponents arising from their mutual contributions to the shared action of maintaining democratic governance. Apart from the daily tally of partisan wins

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<sup>151</sup> The failure to distinguish these senses of vulnerability (one universal and one differential) is one reason, I think, many find the most civic-republican democratic theories unconvincing.

<sup>152</sup> It is also possible to describe partisan-political interdependence in a negative register, focusing on the experience of political loss and "sacrifice." Danielle Allen's account of citizenship emphasizes how "sacrifices draw people into networks of mutual obligation and in so doing have the capacity to rejuvenate political relationships" (although without focusing on the partisan relationship), Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*, 110. Acknowledging shared vulnerability to loss – acknowledging that "sacrifice is fundamental to democratic citizenship" (37) – is admirable, and shares some of the spirit of my account. But I fear it would be more harmful than helpful to the cause of democratic cohesion, especially when partisanship is added to the mix, without the nonpolitical forms of interdependence I describe in the next subsection. Her framing enhances the sense in which partisan competition exists over objectives that are scarce, and scarcity tends to activate out-group hostility; see Donald Kinder and Cindy Kam, *Us Against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). I am advocating recognition at a different level of vulnerability – less recognition of political loss and defeat, and more recognition of collective vulnerability to the collapse of the democratic project in which they all share a stake.

and losses, the elections, the differences, lies a common commitment to brave the public square to contribute one's part to the only system of governance that cannot exist otherwise. Although substantive, recognition of shared action is a less ambitious goal for which to aim compared to recognition of shared identity, or shared belief. To ask of partisans to acknowledge the effort of the adversary requires less in the way of fellow-feeling or strong identification, since it is predicated on acknowledgment that the contributions are different; the parts are interdependent, not identical. And it requires less in the way of admiration or appreciation of the views of other parties.

This is, however, a heavily qualified argument. Articulating a politics of partisan loss and sacrifice seems just as liable to increase the distance across partisan divides than to decrease it by facilitating common recognition of interdependence. To counteract this possibility, partisan political action must be supplemented by non-partisan as well as non-political forms of shared action.

### *5.3. Shared Action and Nonpolitical Interdependence*

Recall that an important prerequisite for shared action to serve as a basis of cohesion is that citizens must recognize, or acknowledge, their interdependence: "the more citizens become conscious of the interdependent nature of their social relations, the stronger their sense of shared fate."<sup>153</sup> As a categorical statement, though, this is surely false. Interdependence, we have seen, incorporates competition as well as collaboration, and it is not yet clear how reminding partisans of the competitive nature of their relationship with opposing partisans would yield an enlightened appreciation of their mutual contribution to the larger project of maintaining democracy. Even outside the context of straightforwardly competitive institutions like partisanship, it is not clear that reminding citizens of their interdependence with others would

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<sup>153</sup> Seving, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 10.

not yield negative side effects – a concern we find, memorably, in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*.<sup>154</sup> In the contemporary world, consider, for example, the reliance in many wealthy countries of services and industries such as agriculture on migrant labor. This is fairly well-acknowledged in the public sphere, but it has not translated into a great sense of togetherness or fellow-feeling with this profoundly disenfranchised population. Indeed, it has arguably been a contributor to feelings of economic and cultural threat that have powered the populist right in recent years. In practice, then, as is clearly shown by highly polarized contexts, we need ways of conceptualizing this thornier form of vulnerability inherent in citizen interdependence, and its principal institutional channel, partisanship, in such a way that it is conducive to democratic cohesion rather than destructive of it. In particular, the success of cohesion as shared action is greatly facilitated by nonpolitical forms of citizen action.

Citizen action expands beyond the bounds of activities traditionally associated with political participation. Citizens, at their best, "practically do things for one another" *in their capacity as citizens*.<sup>155</sup> It will be helpful to begin by explaining two examples of what I mean by nonpolitical citizen action before explaining their common organizing principles and their relationship to partisan political interdependence.

The first example is citizen (or national) service programs.<sup>156</sup> Such initiatives have their roots in mandatory military mobilization around the time of the development of mass

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<sup>154</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, ed. Donald A. Cress, Second Edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011). Rousseau argues that the development of agriculture and metallurgy led to a division of labor and increasing interdependence, activating our latent comparative faculties, which increased the prominence of emotions and actions of vanity. Inequality and social precariousness were the result.

<sup>155</sup> Sibyl Schwarzenbach, "Democracy and Friendship," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2005): 233–54, at 234. Talisse also recognizes the imperative to "reserve spaces within our social environments for collaborative activities and projects in which politics is simply beside the point." Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place*, 5. But his highly instrumental view of democratic politics largely denies the possibility that, given adherence to the conditions of contextualizing politics he admirably expresses, democratic life could serve as a source of connection and meaning. Even though Talisse intends no "derogating or reprimanding of democracy" (11), I think this is the result of his thesis. He also fails to convincingly address the most important implication of his argument: the tension between pursuing worthy or just ends, which will likely involve partisan participation, and the fact that sometimes this will lead to greater politicization of the kind he excoriates. The result is a profound depreciation of political participation (see especially 21–22).

<sup>156</sup> I prefer "citizen service" over the much more common "national service" label because much of the benefit of this form of citizen action derives from its being concentrated in small groups, not undifferentiated at the national scale.

democracy, but have long since shed their martial association.<sup>157</sup> Citizen service programs now provide opportunities for citizens to engage in highly diverse forms of involvement for a period of several months to several years. The basic concept is to assemble citizen volunteers from all walks of life (from diverse geographies, racial and ethnic backgrounds, religions, educational levels, and many other dimensions) for a period of sustained work, likely sponsored by a local community organization. The particular forms of action the group practices will be diverse, geared to maximally align community need, group members' skills and interests, and the landscape of facilitating organizations who can host. Experiences might include bolstering the capacity of an environmental nonprofit constructing urban farms; supporting the aging population and addressing critical worker shortages in the care industry; with proper training, providing mentorship to children from under-resourced background; among many other examples. These groups could be comprised exclusively of young citizens, or could be cross-generational. In all cases, experience must be compensated (to avoid biased participation from the well-off), and, since the imposition of a mandatory requirement for citizen service seems unlikely in the modern world, must be supported through a widespread norm or expectation of involvement. This need not rely solely on civic altruism, however; the government can subsidize bonuses from employers for citizen service alumni and scholarships from higher education institutions to attract younger participants.<sup>158</sup>

Advocacy of citizen service is not a new proposal for healing civic malaise; it is periodically dusted off during periods of reflection on rejuvenating practices of citizenship. But there is significant reason to believe that this time may be different, not least because of the documented scale of political and social division. Such programs are enjoying a considerable resurgence in the United States, France, and other countries, proposed by political actors across the political spectrum. These programs are usually explicitly formulated and defended in a

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<sup>157</sup> Current manifestations of citizen service programs are often traced to William James, who made the connection between service and militarization explicit in William James, *The Moral Equivalent of War*, 1910.

<sup>158</sup> Barber has a highly specified example of a "service corps" with which my own account shares some of the spirit; see Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 300-302.

register of citizenship and designed to bring heterogeneous groups of citizens together. A recent report from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, for example, endorses proposals to "establish a universal expectation of a year of National Service and dramatically expand funding for service programs or fellowships that would offer young people paid service opportunities." The authors (among them Danielle Allen) note that the purpose is to "inspire commitment to American constitutional democracy and to one another."<sup>159</sup>

Another example of nonpolitical shared citizen action that aspires to similar purposes is a renewed commitment to localism. The local has fared poorly in recent years. In the United States, politics has suffered a relentless nationalization of issue salience and media coverage, contributing to the bifurcation of political behavior.<sup>160</sup> Across Western democracies, globalization has often reduced the role of local identity as an orienting source of meaning and belonging in people's lives – or distorted it into a catch-all empty signifier for all things not cosmopolitan and global and elite with little positive referent.<sup>161</sup> There are many reasons one might worry about the decline of localism. Here I am most concerned with localism's ability to anchor a sense of community pride tied to proximate place. Importantly, promoting a spirit of localism does not face the problems identified above with trying to premise citizen community around national identity.<sup>162</sup> There, the controversial nature of the objects of identification render efforts to promote national identity counterproductive in divided contexts. But national identity is not our only source of commonality. We are also all residents – in effect, members – of sub-national political communities such as cities or towns or states; some of us identify the counties we live in as home. This simple fact has been greatly neglected in conversations about

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<sup>159</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences, "Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century" (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2020), 58.

<sup>160</sup> Daniel J. Hopkins, *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>161</sup> See David Goodhart's analysis of populism as the revenge of the "somewheres" (those somewhat involuntarily tied to place) over the "anywheres" (roughly the cosmopolitan global elite) in David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: Hurst, 2017).

<sup>162</sup> Parts of this paragraph and the following are taken from my essay, "A Way to Tamp Down the Toxic Politics of National Identity," *Governing*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.governing.com/now/A-Way-to-Tamp-Down-the-Toxic-Politics-of-National-Identity.html>.

polarization. A commitment to localism promises ready-made practices, institutions, and narrative resources that could ground us with sources of affection more concrete than inscrutable national identity – something closer to hand, and to heart.

Localism is not just supporting one's professional sports teams. It is also about organizing local festivals and civic traditions; frequenting public spaces; supporting small businesses; learning about local history; joining small-scale mutual aid networks, cooperatives, and block parties. Localism is a patriotism of place, an ethos of civic pride in the idiosyncrasies and particular values that distinguish one's place from all others. This spirit need not necessarily rise to the intensity of the rustic agrarian ethic of a Wendell Berry, for whom "life is inseparable from the history and the place" of his native Kentucky.<sup>163</sup> But for many, it can be a meaningful site of shared activity. Moreover, localism is easier to rally around than national identity since, although their meaning is probably fairly rarely the object of consensus, its lower stakes are significantly less likely to inspire the intense culture-war clashes of the kind associated with national identity.<sup>164</sup>

Where should we place citizen service and the cultivation of attachment and activity at the local level in our understanding of democratic cohesion? One argument envisions these sorts of activities as beneficial insofar as they constitute "training grounds" for more familiar political participation. John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, argued for the importance of local attachment in developing a "public-spirited type of character" consistent with participation at all levels of government.<sup>165</sup> Local institutions and participatory civil society organizations provide more accessible starting points for citizen action than centralized,

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<sup>163</sup> Wendell Berry, "A Native Hill," *The Hudson Review* 21, no. 4 (1968): 601–34, at 602.

<sup>164</sup> Martha Nussbaum also recognizes the importance of local attachment, although her primary concern is love of the nation. See, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 208; see also Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 235. An important source of the renaissance of interest surrounding local identity in public policy circles can be found in Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak, *The New Localism: How Cities Can Thrive in the Age of Populism* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

<sup>165</sup> See the excellent discussion of these elements in Mill and Tocqueville in Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 29.

homogenized (and homogenizing) national institutions.<sup>166</sup> But this perspective essentially assimilates the purpose and value of nonpolitical organization and action into a traditional account of participation's value.<sup>167</sup> By envisioning other forms of citizen action as so many chances for developing the skills of partisan-political participation, it is bound to reproduce partisan divisions in other domains. In viewing the former as primarily facilitative of the latter, it imposes an unhelpfully unitary model of the citizen's participation in line with the drive to authenticity I have already rejected. It thus fails to appreciate the distinctiveness of the role of activities such as citizen service.

In my view, the real benefit of nonpolitical citizen action is not in *facilitating* political participation, but *mediating* it. The goal is not to reproduce the precise form of partisan-political interdependence in the maintenance of the democratic project, but to support the conditions that enable such interdependence to be recognized as constitutive of democratic cohesion. To do this most effectively, nonpolitical citizen action – including the examples I have just illustrated – must proceed according to several organizing principles relating to the composition, character, and intended value. These principles are interlocking and mutually supportive. Most obviously, the kinds of activity involved run orthogonal to the most divisive issues at stake in partisan competition. Citizen service and local activity are civic, or public, insofar as they are open to everyone, incorporate people in their capacity as citizens, and are justified in terms of their ultimate benefit for the polity, without being political, in the common sense of confronting organized difference. To be sure, it would be unrealistic to suppose that the design and implementation of citizen service programs and deciding which forms of local engagement enjoy elevation to the status of particularly important to this or that locale will be without controversy. Still, any forms of division associated with citizen service and localism would seem to be more expressions of a more general form of pluralism bound to be relevant in any activity that

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 30-34.

<sup>167</sup> And moreover, much of what Mill and Tocqueville were praising was straightforwardly political action, even if at the local level. They often conflated political and nonpolitical forms of citizen activity.

incorporates diverse citizens rather than yet another expression of partisan-political division. Moreover, the existence of diversity or disagreement within sites of citizen action is in fact part of its justification. The civic-but-nonpartisan lens is important because it allows for representation of maximal diversity, driving home the collaborative, shared spirit. By participating in shared endeavors with citizen-others – and, especially, with opposing partisans – citizens will appreciate their interdependence in carrying out the activity. And they will gain a basis for appreciating how they might stand in *other* forms of interdependence with their partisan opponents.

The intentional inclusion of members of rival partisan communities within citizen service cohorts or activities at the local level thus allows for a softening of relations through a certain kind of visibility. Whereas wholehearted and good-faith political participation (especially partisan participation) is compatible with "seeing" opponents only on television or as the villains in news stories and social media posts with which one already agrees, nonpolitical citizen action necessitates flesh-and-blood interaction. These sorts of interactions combine, paradoxically, the logic of both intimacy and anonymity. Working with a group on a service project for a period of months or joining a neighborhood gardening effort for the season offers ample opportunity for cementing relationships and connections whose friendliness goes well beyond that of even the most communitarian account of civic friendship. When those relationships occur across partisan boundaries, then those involved will know that it is possible, even pleasurable, to contribute in a shared fashion with someone on the opposing side. When they return to the partisan arena, they may be inclined to see their opponents in a new light. But on another level, the closeness of bonds takes off from a form of political "anonymity" insofar as partisanship can be disaggregated from those aspects of the self involved in the nonpolitical citizen action.

A final characteristic we should ascribe to nonpolitical citizen action crucial for its contribution to partisan-political interdependence is the possession of a ritualistic form. Citizen service programs and a renewed focus on local activity work best when they are sustained over

time and enact commitment to ritual. Like most forms of actions, rituals embody and express principles that can be put in the form of belief, or cognitive proposition. But at the real heart of the concept is action, not rational deliberation. Rituals are organized, sequenced actions (orchestrated gestures, motions, utterances, and more) that lend themselves to an intensity of experience and proceed according to some set of procedures or structures. This latter clause indicates that rituals are formalized actions, in the sense of being prescriptive and relatively rule-bound.<sup>168</sup> By "formal," I do not mean hewing always to solemn decorum or sartorial precision, which can risk being exclusionary. Walt Whitman's motley democratic crowd is just as welcome as the attendees of the Inaugural Ball. The far more important sense of formality stems from ritual's ability to act as "guard rail" for social interaction, providing something to lean on when spontaneous or casual encounter, which often presupposes a degree of familiarity, is not forthcoming or is unrealistic. In divided contexts in which partisan antipathy runs deep, to ask partisans to recognize their interdependence in even nonpolitical citizen action will be seen by some to ask quite a lot. Formal procedure provides a sense of expectation and security, a script to follow, that can ease the difficulty or awkwardness sometimes involved in performing actions that might otherwise be a source of anxiety.

One familiar democratic ritual is the concession speech. Once it has become clear that an incumbent or challenger has lost an election, it has been common for them to make a speech acknowledging defeat and, often, congratulating the winner. In addition to representing an attractive instance of graciousness between the politicians themselves, concession speeches, at their best, signal the identity of the winner to the broader citizenry, endorsing the peaceful

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<sup>168</sup> Scholarly definitions of ritual vary enormously, as do the practices on which they are based. For an excellent overview, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 3. For those in the anthropology and sociology of religion who emphasize the nonrational, praxis basis of ritual over the communicative, as I do here, there is a certain resemblance to the functionalism in Durkheim's vision of cohesion through differentiation upon which I am relying: People are profoundly shaped by the roles, norms, and rules they occupy or are encouraged to occupy. I am comfortable with this association, insofar as nothing I have argued depends on the more substantive methodological notions sometimes associated with functionalism or structural-functionalism, such as a high degree of determinism about social positionality and an inability to theorize change. Such determinism can perhaps be ascribed to Iris Marion Young and those who have followed her; see my comments in Chapter 2, Section 4.

transfer of power and implicitly conferring a form of legitimacy on the winner. The declining prevalence of concession speeches represents one symptom of a more polarized atmosphere. Of course, the most infamous recent failure to abide this ritual – Donald Trump's refusal to admit his defeat in the United States 2020 presidential election – is dangerous for many more immediate reasons than its departure from the concession-speech norm, and it is probably more accurately blamed on the democracy-hostile, win-at-all-costs branch of the Republican Party rather than on "polarization." Still, its absence indicates some of what has been lost over the past few decades.

But even if it were somehow restored, the concession speech can only take us so far, consisting as it does in a speech act delivered to a passive audience who, given the fragmentation and specialization of political media, mostly consists of members of their own side. We need new democratic rituals for a polarized age – rituals fulfilling the promises of shared action I have tried to exhibit here. A better example might be a national day of service one month before election day. Before the election, when campaigning is in full force yet the electorate has not yet been divided into winners and losers by the results, citizens could gather in representative small groups. The public and private sectors could coordinate the expectation to pay employees to participate. These groups would then engage in meaningful volunteering that is scrupulously choreographed to be as nonpolitical as possible: local environmental cleanup, spending time in care homes. Perhaps the service could be bookended by a ritual of greeting and introduction and parting. Over the course of the day, such activity, it is hopeful to suspect, would provide a welcome breaking of the partisan-political fever and a reminder of the broader context in which the coming election will unfold.

When diverse citizens participate in the visible performance of ritual-like actions, they become aware of a valuable form of interdependence. And these nonpolitical actions pave the way for recognition of interdependence in the partisan-political realm. They provide chances for

stepping away, or stepping back, from the intensity of the partisan scrum so as to appreciate their joint contributions to the democratic project.

#### *5.4. Satisfying the Criteria*

Throughout the preceding subsections, I have tried to point out the ways in which shared action is superior to shared identity and shared belief as a basis for democratic cohesion in socially and politically polarized societies. As I begin to close the chapter, though, it is worth making a few additional comments regarding how this view more satisfactorily satisfies the criteria for an account of cohesion with which I began the chapter.

An account of cohesion must respect social pluralism. The bonds of citizenship cannot exclude those outside the dominant culture. One advantage of my multidimensional analysis of cohesion is that it reveals the ways in which cohesion's effects on pluralism are not indexed simplistically to the scale from "thin" to "thick" citizen identity – from asking little of the citizen bond to asking more. This assumption is widespread in the relevant literatures, especially in the debate between liberal nationalism and constitutional patriotism, which largely turns on the question of how much substance of citizenship is compatible with inclusion. In reality, cohesion's implications for pluralism vary more complexly with the type of citizen substrate – i.e., identity, belief, action. For there is a real sense in which my active-citizenship defense of cohesion as shared action requires more of citizens than even the more communitarian positions in those debates, and yet, because the nature of the requirement is different, is in fact more conducive to the social pluralism criterion. Defenses of substantive national identity frequently require strong feelings of allegiance to and positive identification with fellow citizens and common interpretation of the polity's symbolic landscape and history, which alienates those who do not already. The level of my account which does incorporate such substantial notions of solidarity rests a level below that of the nation, at the party, which is not mandatory. And shared-belief views require substantial consensus on the specification of fundamental political principles,

which looks difficult in divided societies. While shared action requires adherence to procedural norms of democracy, this is left significantly less specified than in consensual approaches. Most fundamentally, it is easier for minorities, members of marginalized identity groups, those left behind by globalization, and all others who motivate the importance of the social pluralism criterion, to become full (moral) citizens by *acting*, rather than *being* or *believing*. Action is a superior tool of cohesion for purposes of inclusion.

But perhaps the story is not so simple. One might wonder whether this very feature of my account leaves it vulnerable to a pluralism objection from a different direction (and one which does not apply to cohesion as shared identity or shared belief). Civic-republican views of citizenship have long been dogged by the worry that they ask too much of citizens. Perhaps the emphasis on participation is perfectionist – too reliant on an idiosyncratic or overly specific form of action to which only a small subset of the population would likely adhere.

As I have presented it, cohesion as shared action guards against this worry. For one thing, it is not clear that the form of participation with which I am most concerned – partisanship – is so otherworldly demanding, given how prevalent the phenomenon is in most democracies. It is true that not all partisans are as committed as the ones described here, not as facilitative of solidarity and belonging and prone to recognize the contributing actions of their partisan opponents. But many are, or have the potential to be. Luckily, though, those who are not – and those who reject political parties altogether, either only those on offer or partisanship in principle – can still have a place within my understanding of political unity. I accord significant importance to nonpolitical forms of civic action as a way of recognizing our interdependence. It is true, however, that citizens who reject participation in the civic world altogether – reject, that is, both political and nonpolitical forms of action – cannot be said to partake in citizen cohesion. If this is a problem, the exclusion of civically alienated citizens seems likely a problem also for accounts based on shared identity and shared belief. But given the political context I have highlighted throughout this dissertation – the rise of partisan tribalism, the collapsing together of

politics and culture – it would seem of greater importance to focus on those perhaps too engaged. The concern with partisan action, and the ways in which this most assertive form of participation can yet be incorporated into an attractive model of democratic cohesion, responds most directly to the challenges facing divided democracies in the 2020s.

How does shared action fare on the motivation dimension? Citizenship must "inspire the moral and civic engagement self-government requires."<sup>169</sup> It will come as no surprise that I side with the many critics of shared-belief views who charge them with being comparatively weightless, unable to derive the requisite passions to undertake the energy of democratic participation from rational endorsement of a set of moral principles. The more interesting comparison is between my view and shared-identity views: explaining superior motivation has been, after all, their comparative advantage. But here, too, centering cohesion around the notion of action takes us further. The most obvious shortcoming of the liberal nationalist thesis on this account is its strict preference for keeping the primary sources of motivation at the citizenry-wide level, and the corollary aversion to subnational forms of strong identification. As I showed in the last chapter, political parties provide ready-made and powerful sources of motivation through the development of solidarity and belonging. Insofar as these are obscured by the shared-identity view and expressed by the shared-action view, this is a significant benefit for the latter when it comes to motivation.

But there is also a subtler difference. Consider a member of an ideal liberal-nationalist nation: one that firmly espouses the values of participation. (Consider, further, that the difficulties I raised above about applying such visions to polarized contexts could be removed.) It is possible to imagine that for some, perhaps many, members of the nation, merely the knowledge of possession of the national identity is enough to satisfy what participatory motivation it inculcates. Perhaps it is enough to hold – there is that characteristically passive language again – an identity that encodes the value of participation without in fact acting upon it,

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<sup>169</sup> Markell, "Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On Constitutional Patriotism," 38.

because one can still be safe in the knowledge that others in the national community are taking up the participative mantle.<sup>170</sup> In this way, the shared identity could excuse nonparticipation in a way that is not possible on the shared-action account. For shared action places dynamic contribution at the very heart of citizenship.

There is, then, more room for daylight to get between holding a participative national identity and actually participating than there is to get between understanding the very nature of citizenship as participating and actually participating. Taylor captures the centrality of this understanding when he observes that "A citizen democracy can only work if most of its members are convinced that their political society is a common venture of considerable moment, and believe it to be of vital importance that they participate in the ways they must to keep it functioning as a democracy."<sup>171</sup> The use of "venture" nicely captures the sense in which participation is a collaborative endeavor among interdependent actors admitting of no substitute. Moreover, the shared-action account offers a more expansive understanding of the sources of recognizing interdependence, and therefore of forms of citizen action. It is thus better able to explain the crucial role of nonpolitical activity in our understanding of the political community and its cohesion. Thus, while both certain forms of shared-identity and shared-action views possess resources for inspiring participation, shared action gives a more convincing answer to the problems of motivation.

Finally, there is the stability criterion, the concern to "cultivate coherence from within heterogeneity" and prevent further social and political fragmentation.<sup>172</sup> This would seem the biggest challenge for my account, given that it builds difference directly into the vision or metaphor for political community. As Durkheim held, interdependence requires specialization, which presumes differentiation of roles; it is unity through a certain kind of difference. There is a sense in which shared identity and shared belief emphasize to a greater extent what citizens have

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<sup>170</sup> I think this is the most plausible way of construing claims that shared-identity views are "fixed" or static (and therefore deficient); see, e.g., Sevinç, "Three Approaches to Social Unity and Solidarity," 5.

<sup>171</sup> Charles Taylor, "Why Democracy Needs Patriotism," 120.

<sup>172</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 85.

in common. Could a focus on participative action really be a convincing vision of cohesion amidst polarization? Or have I largely abandoned any attempt at civic friendship?

I would make two comments. First, as I have tried to show throughout this chapter, stressing what citizens have (or should have) in common – whether in terms of identity or belief – is not nearly the surefire path to stability and civic friendship in divided contexts that it may appear on the surface. It is liable, instead, to have counterintuitive, counterproductive effects. Thus, while I must admit that shared action posits less that must be shared across the citizenry than particularly the shared identity view, when these views are applied to real-world (especially divided) democracies, it does not follow that shared-identity citizenship will be more stable than shared-action citizenship. Second, even though my view is certainly more conflictual than the leading contenders, it does not give up on the goal of cohesion, but understands it differently. The idea is that drawing attention to what citizens do – how they contribute their time and energy – to maintain and further the democratic project which they importantly share can be just as inspiring of cohesion as focusing on what citizens believe or who they are. The metaphor of interdependence central to shared action speaks of and speaks to a citizenry united through interdigitated contribution. And while the connection between participation and those latter frames can be contingent or fleeting, with action it is inherent.

## Conclusion

Many democracies confront a changing politics of identity. Nowhere is this more evident than in discussions of partisan polarization. As society divides in both political and cultural life along partisan lines, the forms of connection between citizen and state begin to assume an increasingly identitarian logic which threatens any viable form of cross-polity identity. Partisanship seems both cause and consequence of the gravest aspects of political division. In this dissertation, I have tried to develop a normative account of partisanship that is sensitive to these dynamics. I have tried to analyze what might be wrong with polarization by focusing specifically on the ways in which partisan identity can distort, or support, the connection between citizens and the political sphere, and their connections to one another. My overarching claim is that, while the effects of polarization have indeed transformed the nature of partisan identity in dangerous directions, we should not hope for a citizenship without partisanship, or a partisanship without identity.

In making this argument, I have distanced myself from a tendency within recent normative theorizing on partisanship to downplay the senses in which partisanship is an identity. For one natural response to trends of polarization is to hope for a politics less clouded by claims of identity. Politics, many commentators argue, should be about "the issues": substance over symbolism, reason over expression. Many normative democratic theories of discourse in the past several decades have, of course, followed this line of reasoning, constructing models of participation around ideals of reason-giving. But even several recent, prominent accounts of partisanship center argumentative rationality. These accounts, notably those of Jonathan White & Lea Ypi and Matteo Bonotti, helpfully remedy the lack of attention to partisanship in prior democratic theorizing, and impressively show how the ideals of deliberation and political justification through public reason can be made compatible with positive arguments for partisanship. But they are less impressive as evaluations of what goes wrong under conditions of polarization. Viewing partisanship as an exercise in reason-giving or claim-making obscures other components of partisan identity, and

thus obscures what is interesting about polarization's effects on the relationship between the cognitive and non-cognitive components of partisanship. This was my argument in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, I delved into the notion of identity in greater detail. I addressed a series of puzzles that arise when examining the socialization approach to partisan identity, focusing, especially, on polarization's effects on the agency of partisans and the nature of inter-partisan conflict. I suggested that there are ways of conceiving of each of these dimensions of identity that partially resolve the worries about treating partisanship as an identity in its own right. My goal was to provide a more comprehensive map of the conceptual space of partisan identity than has yet been attempted by either normative or empirical scholars. Thus, in addition to advancing the normative theory of partisanship, the chapter also constituted a modest contribution to the empirical literature. Many empirical scholars reach for comparisons of polarized parties to "religions" or "cultures," without any underlying theoretical account of what might distinguish "political" from "social" forms of partisan identity. I offered one such framework, thereby providing a better grounding for evaluating polarization.

My description of Political Partisanship relied on a broadly civic-republican understanding of politics, which I further explored through an inquiry into the relationship between partisanship and citizenship throughout the remainder of the dissertation. Chapter 3 focused on relationships internal to parties, and how parties can, at their best, inculcate certain attractive citizen virtues in uniquely effective fashion. I built upon arguments by Nancy Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead (among others) that view parties as sites of connection between citizen and politics by arguing that such connection ideally consists in a sense of solidarity with fellow partisans and a related sense of belonging to the polity. In so doing, I sought to vindicate the place of substantial forms of meaning in democratic life, and, since I advocated this at the level of party, I evaded many of the potent charges such visions of citizenship have long attracted – e.g., that they suppress disagreement or are exclusive. Political parties, then, are a promising but largely neglected site for the claim that we need to "connect citizens back to politics."

In Chapter 4, I asked whether advocating such ideals of partisan community might come at the expense of any viable account of the democracy-wide, inter-partisan relationship. I argued that we must be careful when calling for unity or cohesion to disaggregate the elements of citizenship at stake, particularly those of identity, belief, and action. Centering the citizen bond primarily around shared identity or shared belief seems only realistically achievable at the expense of parties and all they contribute. And they pose serious problems for polarized societies, liable to only further envenom political contestation. I argued, instead, for placing the idea of shared action at the center of citizenship. Citizens should view one another as co-contributors to the project of maintaining collective self-governance, interdependent in their unique contributions – including, notably, partisan contributions. But, crucially, (partisan) political action must be supplemented by other forms of shared action, such as local engagement and citizen service. Interdependence thus expresses itself through citizen relations – through participation, but also through other actions citizens jointly perform in their capacity as citizens.

Singing the praises of citizenship as shared action will likely put me at odds with defenders of more unified citizenship, such as nationalists, liberal and otherwise (not to mention with most public commentators on the state of polarization). A unity of action and a politics of practice builds less into the citizen bond, and some might find it a feeble goal in divided times. Yet it does not – I do not – surrender completely the aspiration for community in the public sphere; indeed, my account licenses even more connection with fellow citizens, just those within one's party. Democracy-wide relationships require no such substantive bonds. But the fact that citizens converge in their belonging to the state from their personal partisan perspectives constitutes a valuable form of cohesion to strive for under conditions of polarization.

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