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## *The Epistemic Value of Partisanship\**

IVAN CEROVAC  
*University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia*

*This paper discusses the epistemic value of political parties and other partisan associations from the standpoint of epistemic democracy. It examines whether political parties contribute to the quality of democratic deliberation, thus increasing the epistemic value of democratic decision-making procedures, or represent a threat that polarizes the society and impedes and distorts the public deliberation. The paper introduces several arguments that support the epistemic value of partisanship. Partisan associations empower otherwise marginalized social groups or groups that have disproportionately small political influence by facilitating political education or by connecting citizens and experts who share the same values. Partisan associations also help us resist the epistemically damaging effects of hermeneutical (epistemic) injustice by enabling marginalized citizens to construct alternative discourses. However, though partisanship might facilitate the transmission of knowledge, this deliberative tool will only be used in a group of like-minded citizens (i.e. within a political party), thus increasing the polarization between the parties and citizens alike, and decreasing the epistemic value of such collective decision-making procedures. The paper analyses some epistemic strategies (like red-teaming or building a critical thinking culture) that can help us avoid or (at least) reduce the epistemically damaging effects of polarization. However, internal action (from within a deliberative group) might not be enough. Making the deliberation on political issues public and spreading it through different forms of citizens' organizations will ensure that political deliberation is not closed within a single homogenous deliberating group (i.e. the party). These practices should significantly reduce the damaging effects of group polarization.*

**Keywords:** Epistemic democracy, partisanship, group polarisation, affiliation, epistemic injustice.

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Political parties have been studied for centuries, yet not much attention was brought to their epistemic value. In fact, political parties have often been thought of as subversive elements that endanger the epistemic qualities of democratic decision-making procedures: they organize citizens in order to promote the private, but not the public good (Rousseau 1997), they have a damaging effect on their members' epistemic capacities (Atchison 2012), they polarize the democratic society (Layman, Carsey and Horowitz 2006) and even lead to destimulation of voter turnout (Brady, Ferejohn and Harbridge 2008). It is therefore very interesting to study the value of political parties from the standpoint of epistemic democracy, a theory of democracy that ascribes to democracy its legitimacy-generating potential (at least in part) in virtue of its ability to produce (substantively) good or correct outcomes. The ability of the decision-making procedure to produce legitimate decisions is evaluated, in part, in regard to its ability to produce outcomes that are right, true or correct according to some procedure-independent standard. We evaluate political institutions and organizations (at least in part) by their ability to contribute to the procedure's substantive epistemic value, i.e. its ability to produce correct decisions.<sup>1</sup> Having this definition in mind, a few questions arise. Do political parties contribute to the quality of democratic deliberation, thus increasing the epistemic value of democratic decision-making procedures,<sup>2</sup> together with the legitimacy-generating potential of such procedures? Or is the opposite true that political parties polarize the society, impede and distort the public deliberation and damage the legitimacy-generating potential of democratic decision-making procedures?

This paper tries to answer the abovementioned questions by combining the traditional standpoint of normative political theory with some contemporary methods and models from social epistemology and group psychology. It is heavily influenced by Jonathan White's and Lea Ypi's *The Meaning of Partisanship*, though it expands well beyond the scope of the book, combining their approach to political partisanship with the epistemic account of democratic legitimacy. It aims to support and expand White and Ypi's idea that political parties increase the epistemic value of democratic procedures (though, it seems, using a different approach to political legitimacy), but also to specify conditions in which partisanship can have this epistemic value. It is important to emphasize that, even if this paper fails to convince that partisanship

<sup>1</sup> The epistemic approach to democracy was first formulated by Joshua Cohen (1986). The formulation used in this paper follows a (somewhat simplified version of) David Estlund's (2008) account of epistemic democracy.

<sup>2</sup> This paper does not differentiate strictly between collective decision-making procedures and procedures of collective authorisation of decisions. The account of epistemic democracy presented in this paper is thus compatible with various models of representative democracy, as well as with the recognition of experts in politics. For a detailed account on the distinction between these two types of procedures see Pavićević and Simendić (2016).

has epistemic value (or if it turns out to reduce the epistemic quality of democratic decision-making procedures), it might still have other (moral or political) values that support it.

The *first* part of the paper discusses new arguments for the epistemic contribution of partisanship presented by White and Ypi. Organizing in political parties can empower otherwise marginalized social groups or groups that have disproportionately small political influence by facilitating political education or by connecting citizens and experts who share the same values. Furthermore, partisanship can help us resist the epistemically damaging effects of hermeneutical (epistemic) injustice by enabling marginalized citizens to construct alternative discourses. The *second* part introduces some new arguments in support of the epistemic value of partisanship. These arguments highlight that partisanship can be a valuable tool for knowledge transmission and as such could represent a valuable asset for deliberative democracy. The danger of group polarization and crippled epistemology is reintroduced in the *third* part of the paper. Though partisanship might facilitate the transmission of knowledge, this deliberative tool will only be used in a group of like-minded citizens (i.e. within a political party), thus increasing the polarization between the parties and citizens alike. This paper uses results from contemporary empirical studies that suggest there is a widening gap between political parties in United States due to group polarization and crippled epistemology while also analyzing the damage these processes cause to the epistemic value of collective decision-making procedures. Some possible solutions are discussed in the *fourth* and the *fifth* part of the paper. Namely, a deliberative group can use some epistemic strategies (like red-teaming or building a critical thinking culture) to avoid or (at least) reduce the epistemically damaging effects of polarization. However, internal action (from within a deliberative group) might not be enough. Making the deliberation on political issues public and spreading it through different forms of citizens' organizations will ensure that political deliberation is not closed within a single homogenous deliberating group (i.e. the party). These practices should not only prevent crippled epistemology, but also significantly reduce the damaging effects of group polarization.

### 1. *White and Ypi on epistemic value of partisanship*

Jonathan White and Lea Ypi (2016) do not take the standard account of epistemic democracy as a broader normative framework for their work. Their approach follows and builds upon Bohman's (1998) position, which shifts focus from the quality of the results of the deliberative procedure to the quality of the procedure itself. Their theory is settled in the framework where the focus is "shifted from the outcome of justificatory practices to the normative significance of the process" (White and Ypi 2011: 392, 2016: 73). They measure the epistemic value of partisanship by examining its influence on the (intrinsic) moral and epistemic

quality of the collective decision-making procedure.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, they indicate and describe two mechanisms by which partisanship increases the epistemic value of the decision-making procedures.

*First*, partisanship can reduce the impact of power asymmetries on agents' capacities to participate as equals in reason-giving and decision-making processes. Though formal equality of political influence represents one of the most fundamental values of democratic societies, equality is rarely achieved (and sometimes deemed unnecessary or even adverse) in the informal political sphere.<sup>4</sup> Social and economic inequalities often spill over to the informal political sphere thus making some groups unable to participate as equals in democratic procedures. Members of powerless groups will be disadvantaged not only in regard to the access to political education and specialized (expert) knowledge but also in access to the resources needed to convey their political message to the wider public. These inequalities in political influence impair both the moral and the epistemic value of democratic procedures thus endangering their legitimacy-generating potential. Partisanship helps us preserve that by cutting the link between social and economic power, and giving access to political education and expert knowledge. Ypi and White hold that partisanship plays this role by offering certain irreplaceable epistemic resources. Partisan forums (including party conventions, branch meetings, assemblies, protests, blogs and websites) can then be seen as learning platforms for citizens. They empower disadvantaged citizens and give them epistemic resources needed for political participation. Furthermore, partisan forums have an important motivational role—they show disadvantaged citizens that they are not alone in their political struggle. Therefore, partisanship “plays an important role in ensuring the sustainability of shared political projects when epistemic challenges are at stake” (White and Ypi 2016: 90).

The epistemic value of partisanship is first described through its educational role. Citizens who lack the access to education in general, or to political education in particular, gain new information and skills to make their political views more coherent, appealing and clearer to the wider audience. Etienne Lantier, the protagonist of Zola's *Germinal*, is taken to be a great example of such political education: he starts as a poorly educated, rebellious and unemployed young man who through his participation in epistemically-enriching partisan associations turns into an intellectually sophisticated activist (Zola 1983, as

<sup>3</sup> Fabienne Peter (2009) defended a similar position, arguing that legitimacy-generating potential of collective decision-making procedures rests in their non-instrumental epistemic qualities. Some arguments against this view can be found in Marti (2006), Estlund (2008) and Cerovac (2016).

<sup>4</sup> I use Estlund's (2008) differentiation between formal political sphere, which includes voting procedures and public elections, but also political institutions such as courts and legislators, and informal political sphere, which includes political speeches, candidate and citizen debates, opinion journalism, political advertising, political art and demonstrations.

paraphrased in White and Ypi 2016). Political parties and related associations (political foundations, think tanks, informal groups or even trade unions) can be great platforms for systemizing and spreading political knowledge, and for improving some relevant skills (verbal and non-verbal communication, networking, management and leadership skills). The second epistemic benefit of partisanship, often closely connected to the first one, is its ability to connect citizens and experts who otherwise would not come into contact. Since partisan associations (unlike factions) gather around some central values (and not around private interests of group members), they often include members from various backgrounds and fields of expertise. Their joint political effort and focus on the same political aims, combined with partisan forums as means for inter-party deliberation and learning, ensures that complex views and topics requiring technical knowledge can become available to all citizens.

*Second*, partisanship can help marginalized and disadvantaged groups to develop hermeneutic resilience. Namely, powerless groups are often unable to participate in the creation of collective hermeneutical resources which leaves them unable to make sense of their own social experiences (or at least unable to formulate them in a way other citizens could understand). This is characterized as hermeneutical epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007, 2013), and is often considered one of the effects that perpetuate social inequalities by keeping the members of disadvantaged groups from participating as equals in the process of collective decision-making.<sup>5</sup> For example, terms like ‘sexual harassment’ and ‘post-natal depression’ have been created some fifty years ago, though such practices and occurrences have been around for thousands of years. They have affected women for centuries yet until recently women were unable to formulate and explain what is exactly going on (since there were no available hermeneutical resources to differentiate between sexual harassment and harmless flirting). These instances of hermeneutic injustice were removed by organized group action, when members of a disadvantaged group came together, deliberated their social experiences and formulated plans for social engagement. Ypi and White believe that partisanship associations can help us remedy hermeneutic (epistemic) injustice by creating new platforms and channels of communication. Namely, partisanship enables citizens to construct alternative discourses, to exchange the information they were unable to exchange before and to raise consciousness of the problematic aspects of common-sense thinking.

Partisanship is valuable since it offers certain irreplaceable epistemic resources: new channels and platforms of communication that enable citizens to express their social experiences and new resources

<sup>5</sup> Martha Nussbaum (2000) and Amartya Sen (2003) defend similar ideas by emphasizing how adaptive preferences can keep members of disadvantaged groups from formulating and even desiring policies that might improve their social and economic status.

needed to process the information in a particular way, including interpretative resources needed for upholding partisan commitment. White and Ypi (2016: 94) describe a hypothetical case of Rosa, a socialist living in West Europe in 1989. She suddenly has to (in light of the new evidence) decide whether to completely abandon the idea of socialism or to revise her ideas and strengthen them with what can be learned from the collapse of socialist regimes in East Europe. It is very difficult for her to keep both partisan commitment and her faith in socialism when she is unable to deliberate with her fellow associates. Political parties and other partisan associations can help by structuring such deliberation and offering hermeneutical resources (but also expert knowledge) needed to uphold the partisan commitment.

White and Ypi seem to be aware that collective deliberation with like-minded citizens (epistemic trustees) can lead to epistemically damaging results, including group polarization and the creation of echo-chambers (Sunstein 2009). However, since their position does not evaluate the quality of collective decision-making procedure in its ability to achieve some epistemically valuable (true, correct or justified) results but by intrinsic (purely procedural) qualities of a decision-making procedure, they do not seem to be affected by these objections. In fact, they are ready to accept that deliberation within partisan organizations often does not lead to epistemically best (or even decent) outcomes:

If there is a truth of the matter to be found, exposure to disagreement and to the discursive challenge of one's own position may be more likely to contribute to an enlightened assessment. Precisely because arguing with one's political friends is more likely to consolidate one's previous opinions and beliefs and develop resistance to the tendency to revisit such commitment too lightly, taking part in associative practices strengthens the ability to stick with previously held beliefs and values, despite evidence that would suggest the need to revisit them. (White and Ypi 2016: 95)

Epistemic value of partisan associations is therefore not outcome-oriented—White and Ypi do not think that the role of partisanship (and its epistemic value) is to identify political projects worth pursuing but instead to provide means needed for sustaining them under epistemic pressure.

My view, which builds on the standard (outcome-oriented) account of epistemic democracy, is directly targeted by Sunstein's arguments on group polarization and echo-chambers. This paper does not deny the importance of these arguments—it instead builds upon them and tries to determine whether there are some (instrumental, and not intrinsic) epistemic qualities of partisan associations, as well as whether partisan associations can be (at least partly) protected from epistemic deviations.

## 2. *New arguments supporting the epistemic value of partisanship*

Although White and Ypi claim that partisanship has (only) intrinsic epistemic value, their arguments can also be used to extend the claim to instrumental epistemic value. Epistemic resources (e.g. partisan forums) that reduce the impact of power asymmetries on the political influence of the citizens by providing them political education can help us reach epistemically better outcomes. Furthermore, partisan associations can help marginalized and disadvantaged groups develop hermeneutic resilience, thus enabling them to make sense of their social experiences and to participate in decision-making processes that aim at producing better laws, policies and decisions. White and Ypi have thus (perhaps unintentionally) presented initial arguments supporting the instrumental epistemic value of partisanship.

This part of the paper analyses some positive effects of partisanship on knowledge transmission, building upon White and Ypi's account of partisanship associations that provide some epistemic resources that other kinds of associations would be unable to deliver. Namely, although deliberating with like-minded citizens often leads to some forms of 'crippled epistemology' (Sunstein 2009), it can also have some positive epistemic effects, primarily in the area of knowledge transmission from experts to citizens.

Democratic procedures have often been criticized for their inability to adequately incorporate specialized and expert knowledge in the decision-making processes. Experts<sup>6</sup> often withdraw from public deliberation thus leaving those who remain engaged in the deliberative process to face extreme difficulties by trying to get the necessary trust from the citizens, and in making their arguments available for those who lack the specialized knowledge (Solomon 2006, Prijić-Samaržija 2017). Can intra-party deliberation represent a better institutional arrangement than public deliberation when it comes to employment of expert knowledge in collective decision-making processes? This paper proceeds by claiming that there are a few important aspects of partisanship that make deliberation conducted within such associations epistemically better than the one conducted within non-partisan associations or within general public. Unlike some non-partisan associations (or the public), political parties are characterized by epistemically relevant features such as solidarity, overlapping understanding, competition and sanctions<sup>7</sup> (Christiano 2012). These features can improve

<sup>6</sup> Discussion on experts and expertism in contemporary epistemology is very broad and diverse. This paper endorses a widely accepted definition by Adam Elga (2007), who claims that experts are those who are considerably less likely to have incorrect belief regarding certain issue. Experts are therefore seen simply as 'not-epistemic-peers'.

<sup>7</sup> This does not imply that political parties are the only type of association characterized by these features. Some religious associations, for example, might



the knowledge transmission from experts to citizens, thus improving both the intrinsic and the instrumental epistemic quality of a decision-making process.

*First*, consider the positive effects solidarity has on the process of knowledge transmission. Accepting the testimony of others, even if they are experts, calls for assessment of their trustworthiness (Prijić-Samaržija 2011). This can be very difficult to achieve since both technical expertise and values held by experts might be inaccessible to regular citizens. Partisans, however, know that their partisan experts hold the same goals, values and ideals as themselves. Furthermore, partisans can see that other members of their party, those more competent in the relevant fields, recognize and praise the technical expertise of the experts in question, and are therefore more prone to trust them even when their opportunities and capacities for monitoring experts are limited. This is of crucial importance when experts have technical knowledge that is difficult or almost impossible to explain to non-experts. Expert knowledge cannot have the appropriate weight in the (democratic) decision-making process unless the experts are backed-up by non-experts who do not have the complete grasp of the knowledge in question but nonetheless defer to the (epistemic) authority of experts. This deference is facilitated by partisan solidarity.

*Second*, since parties are plural associations and have members with expertise in various areas, they can achieve a form of overlapping understanding among members. This becomes useful when two or more persons share some expertise but do not share other expertise. For example, A knows about disciplines *a*, *b* and *c*, while B knows about *b*, *c* and *d*—they overlap at *b* and *c*, and can translate some of their knowledge about *a* or *d* through ideas of *b* and *c* (Christiano 2012). Of course, some knowledge will be lost or simply cannot be properly transferred through overlapping understanding. This depends on the sophistication of theories in question, but also on the proximity of disciplines. It will be much easier for a political scientist to transfer his knowledge using overlapping understanding to an economist than to a physicist. However, overlapping understanding enables the transfer of specialized knowledge from two or more agents to the general public. A complex economic theory can be transferred to a political scientist, who can then combine it with his knowledge of the legal and political background and transfer it onwards to politicians or perhaps to relatively sophisticated journalists (Christiano 2012: 39–40). Politicians could then create laws and public policies based on (or at least taking into consideration) that specialized expert knowledge, and journalists could explain what they understand to ordinary citizens. Parties are composed of people proficient in different disciplines and gather experts in various fields, thus enabling the transfer of knowledge through overlapping understanding.

exhibit some or even all of the epistemic features described above.

*Third*, unlike many civil society associations, political parties directly compete for power and influence. The competition between parties fosters the competition between different political programs in the public arena, with each party trying to build a strong argument for its program and to find mistakes in the justification of other parties' programs. Parties have to rely on the knowledge of experts both to produce the program that advances their core values properly and to recognize when another party's program rests on mistakes that can be scientifically exposed. The competition between political parties has an epistemic (though not only epistemic) dimension, and it can thus increase the epistemic quality of political decision-making process.

*Fourth*, political parties have mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the work done by experts and for sanctioning experts when they depart from party's core values. Just like academic community can sanction scientists for methodological issues, political parties can sanction partisan-experts who betray the values of the party. This simultaneously builds intraparty solidarity by making it easier for party members to trust party experts and makes the system more democratic since it prevents (or at least discourages) experts from abandoning values supported by party members and the party in general.

To sum up, the initial argument by White and Ypi, supported with Christiano's position on positive effects of partisanship on knowledge transmission, shows that *some aspects* of partisanship (done properly) promote both the epistemic and the moral value of democratic decision-making procedures. Partisanship makes procedures fairer by removing some obstacles in the informal political public sphere that endanger fairness of the decision-making process. It also makes procedures more epistemically reliable by removing damaging effects of hermeneutical epistemic injustice and by enabling transference of knowledge between experts and non-experts. However, the question remains whether these epistemically positive aspects of partisanship exceed the damage it can cause to the collective decision-making process.

### 3. *Group polarization and crippled epistemology*

The problem of group polarization represents a permanent challenge for all kinds of epistemic democracy, including both purely procedural accounts that aim for some intrinsic epistemic values inherent in the decision-making procedure and rational procedural accounts that aim for substantive quality of political outcomes. Cass Sunstein (2005) describes group polarization as a statistical regularity when members of deliberative group embrace more extreme views than the ones they've had before the deliberation. Various people holding similar views thus, after the deliberation with like-minded citizens, end up holding more extreme versions of these views. For example, a group of moderate feminists (or nationalists or liberals) will, after repeated inter-group deliberation, become a group of extreme feminists (or nationalist or

liberals). The shift can be explained by every member of a group changing his or her views through deliberation with like-minded epistemic peers. Group polarization therefore presents a serious epistemic problem since citizens' views are changed only in one direction (towards the more extreme version) regardless of any reasons for or against such a view.

The effect is much stronger in 'deliberative enclaves' (Sunstein 2002, 2005, 2009), groups of like-minded persons deliberating on a regular basis for a longer period of time. However, political parties can also be described as 'groups of like-minded persons deliberating on a regular basis for a longer period of time'. After all, those are some of the key components of political parties: they (i) are composed of like-minded or similar-minded citizens, they (ii) encourage and foster deliberation between party members, and finally, they (iii) are long term political projects persisting for longer periods of time (unlike protest groups or civil initiatives). Political parties might thus be seen as a specific form of deliberative enclaves. This raises doubts regarding the epistemic value of political parties and the negative impact they might have on collective decision-making processes.

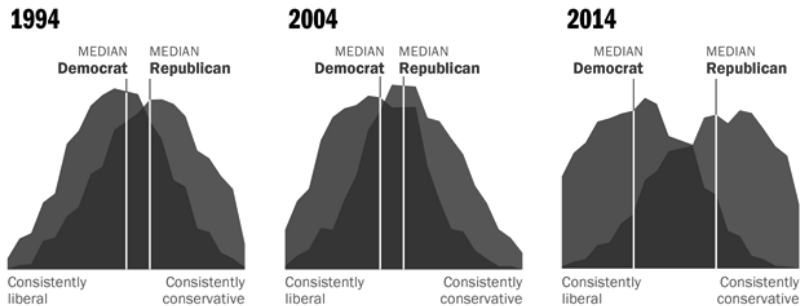
Group polarization leads to more extreme political views and extreme views require extreme cognitive conditions to be protected and nourished. This often leads to 'crippled epistemology' (Hardin 2002), another dangerous effect that takes place when, in order to preserve extreme views from challenges, groups adopt rules that discourage or even sanction deliberation with persons of different (political) views. Namely, since extreme views produced by group polarization are not grounded in good epistemic reasons (but are often created despite them), it is very difficult to continue defending them in open deliberation with citizens who do not share such views and introduce new reasons and arguments in the public debate. A simple method for dealing with such epistemic challenges is *argumentum ad hominem*, a fallacious argumentative strategy that "attacks the characteristic or authority of the author without addressing the substance of the argument" (Graham 2008). Members of extreme groups thus often employ this argumentative strategy to avoid criticism or objections to their views while deliberative groups often encourage and promote such strategies. Political adversaries and citizens who do not share the same political views as members of deliberative enclaves are characterized as stupid or malevolent (or both). This removes or weakens the demand to answer to objections and critiques from such citizens, thus keeping extreme views safe from possible challenges. This kind of discourse is becoming dominant in contemporary politics, with prominent examples like Ann Coulter (2004, as cited in Talisse 2009), a conservative commentator who advises her readers to talk to liberals only "if you must", and Michael Savage who claims that his liberal opponents suffer from "mental disorder" (Savage 2005, as cited in Talisse 2009) or Al Franken (2004)

characterizing republicans as “lying liars” and “stupid white men”.

Ideological division between political parties has been growing rapidly for the past fifteen years. The rise of new populist, extreme far-right and far-left parties in Europe supports this assumption, though it makes empirical research more difficult since it is no longer possible to track political attitudes of party members through longer periods of time (since some of these parties are only a few years old). However, empirical data from the United States, where political attitudes of supporters of the two dominant parties have been tracked for decades, indicates the growing gap between liberals and conservatives (Pew Research Centre 2014).

### Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

*Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values*



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

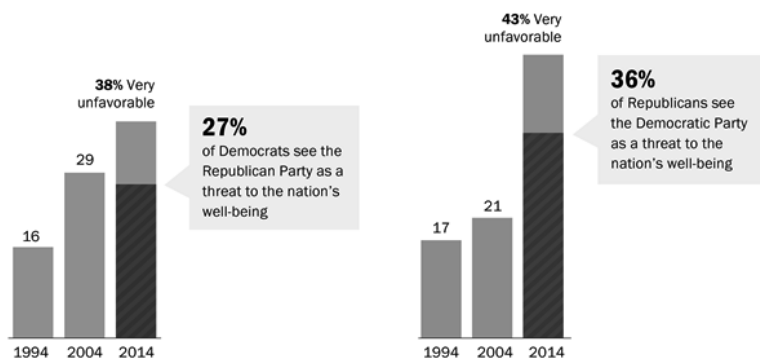
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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The growing gap between political attitudes of liberals and republicans need not be a problem in itself, however, it brings along many epistemically damaging features that simultaneously enhance group polarization and reduce social trust between citizens supporting different political parties. Group polarization is increased when political values and attitudes descend to the private sphere, with growing number of liberals rejecting to marry someone who is a gun owner and growing number of conservatives refusing to marry someone who is of different race or is born and raised outside the US (Pew Research Centre 2014). Social trust is reduced with increasing numbers of citizens seeing their political opponents not merely as someone they disagree with, but also as a potential threat to the nation’s well-being.

**Beyond Dislike: Viewing the Other Party as a 'Threat to the Nation's Well-Being'**

Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party      Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Questions about whether the Republican and Democratic Parties are a threat to the nation's well being asked only in 2014. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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Data shows that (in 2014) 38 percent of democrats see the Republican Party as unfavorable (compared to 16 percent in 1994), with 27 percent seeing the opposing party as a threat to the nation's well-being. Similarly, (in 2014) 43 percent of republicans see the Democrat Party as unfavorable (compared to 17 percent in 1994), and more than a third see the opposing party as a threat to the nation's well-being (Pew Research Centre 2014). Keeping this in mind, it is very difficult to expect that public deliberation in conditions of group polarization and crippled epistemology can yield results of decent epistemic quality.

White and Ypi are aware of these problems, yet their position seems to be immune to these objections since they are not defending the standard account of epistemic democracy. They acknowledge group polarization; yet do not think that it endangers their position. "Though deliberation with epistemic trustees leads to group polarization (*rather than improving the quality of arguments*), whether it is bad depends on the nature and value of one's commitment" (White and Ypi 2016: 96). However, it seems that group polarization (and crippled epistemology that follows), undermines the mechanisms needed for public justification and public reason-giving. Namely, partisans start seeing their political opponents as enemies—as stupid or malevolent people (or both). Consequently, they start seeing public justification as unnecessary—they ask themselves why they would owe public justification to stupid or malevolent people. Group polarization represents a threat not only to the (standard) epistemic conception of deliberative democracy, but also to virtually any form of democracy that relies on public deliberation as a method of political justification, including White's and Ypi's position.

Some might argue that group polarization represents a problem that can easily be settled. Though political parties might prefer to keep their supporters loyal and isolated from the arguments coming from the other side (crippled epistemology), they also want to win elections. And if a party wants to win elections, it will have to embrace and at least incorporate the views of the general, non-polarized population in its political program. The general public will thus keep parties from polarizing (White and Ypi 2011, Biale and Bistagnino 2018). The empirical data from the US, however, points in the opposite direction. Along with political parties, the general public is polarizing as well, with leaners being more similar to partisans than to other independents. Polarized news media and echo chambers created by social media have a strong impact on non-partisan citizens, who start behaving similar to their partisan fellows (Pew Research Centre 2014). It seems that partisanship (as a road to group polarization and crippled epistemology) introduces problems for all forms of deliberative democracy, including both the epistemic view I defend and the public-reasoning view embraced by White and Ypi. Knowledge transmission mechanisms and new epistemic resources partisanship offers are not enough to preserve its epistemic value. If we want to argue that partisanship increases the epistemic quality of democratic decisions (but also if we want to argue that it is compatible with public reason-giving), we have to address group polarization and offer some mechanisms to reduce its damaging effects.

#### 4. *Internal answer*

Building upon White and Ypi's position regarding epistemic value of partisanship, and pushing it even further by adopting the standard account of epistemic democracy, I want to sketch possible remedies for the group polarization problem. This part of the paper examines some party-oriented solutions, while the final part focuses on necessary social and political transformations.

One way of fighting group polarization is by making changes in the internal organization of the party. Changing how party members deliberate and make decisions between themselves might help reduce the damaging effects of group polarization and prevent the development of crippled epistemology. Keeping in mind the devastating effects group polarization can have on the society in general, as well as on the legitimacy and epistemic quality of democratic decision in particular, parties upholding liberal and democratic values should try to prevent epistemically undesirable changes among their members. Changing one's views regardless of reasons (or even despite them) and adopting cognitive and deliberative norms that disregard arguments of others because of *argumentum ad hominem* fallacy represents epistemically undesirable behavior that parties have a duty to prevent, destimulate and sanction. There are a few useful methods borrowed from group

psychology that might help parties fight crippled epistemology. I discuss briefly two such methods in the rest of this part.

*First*, parties should try to build a critical thinking culture within the organization itself. Instead of simply endorsing and following party's values, opinions and policies, members should be encouraged to deliberate on them and to adopt a wide range of epistemic virtues (e.g. toleration, willingness to argue with others and defend one's views, and disgust towards rhetorical figures that lead to logical fallacies). This recommendation has two goals. First, when widespread deliberation within party is allowed or even encouraged, party members might realize that their organization is not as homogenous as they originally believed—though most (or even all) party members endorse and agree upon certain political values, they might disagree on laws, policies and political decision their party promotes to achieve its aims. Critical thinking culture will thus result in a more heterogeneous organization that is less vulnerable to group polarization and crippled epistemology. Second, members of parties that promote critical thinking will be less stressed if their views are challenged. In fact, members of such parties will often start discussions with their political opponents believing that their position is supported by the best reasons and arguments, while also holding that they have a duty to defend it in front of others.

*Second*, political parties can use *red teaming* (Sunstein and Hastie 2015), a famous strategy originally used in military training, where red team plays an adversary role and genuinely tries to defeat the primary team in a simulated mission. This is a very useful method for improving the effectiveness of an organization, especially for organizations with strict hierarchy and fixed ways of approaching problems. Many law, computer firms, research institutions (e.g. NASA, IBM, SAIC), as well as government agencies, use similar strategies to understand the weaknesses of their side of a case or a theory. Red teaming is thus an upgraded version of devil's advocate and requires the positions of other parties to be viewed in their full strength (and not as a straw man position intentionally misinterpreted to befame the political opponents), enabling partisans to see that their opponents are neither stupid nor malevolent. However, this method can successfully remove some epistemically damaging effects of crippled epistemology only if red teams are used to challenge the content of parties' political views and not just the rhetorical figures and PR strategies.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless,

<sup>8</sup> We can see members of other political parties as malevolent or stupid and still use red teaming to improve our political performance. Parties' red teams often investigate whether political opponents can use some misinterpretation of political messages during electoral campaigns to turn the very message against the party that issued it. Using rhetorical figures and political propaganda strategies they can strengthen the political message and protect it from misinterpretation, and this can be a good thing from the epistemic standpoint. However, it will not protect us from crippled epistemology. Namely, we can still see our political rivals as malevolent (e.g. as those who try to manipulate the citizens in their favor), and use red teams to

parties have a strong reason to have red teams focusing on the content of their political program. Apart from normative reasons to address the content of opponent's views, parties are aware that the public opinion is shaped not only by their political messages, but also by journalists, political analysts, scientists and other experts who focus on the content of party's political program. Red teams should try to produce the best possible criticism, taking the views of party's political opponents as intelligent and well supported. This should enable party members to review various objections to their political views or to public policies they advance, which is exactly what crippled epistemology normally prevents them from doing. Being aware of your party's weaknesses and of other parties' strengths is a welcomed resource in political competition, and a valuable epistemic state standing in opposition to the norms of crippled epistemology.

This part of the paper indicates some useful epistemic resources that can be employed within political parties to block the effects of group polarization and crippled epistemology. The far-reaching hope is that the use of such resources could decrease the negative epistemic impact of group polarization and crippled epistemology, thus preserving the epistemic value of political parties in a democratic decision-making process. A reasonable worry, however, strikes us when we try to articulate the reason why the parties would be motivated to act in such epistemically virtuous manner. Knowing your weaknesses and other parties' strengths can be useful, but why should most members of a party be aware of this? Why not simply have a small group of experts focusing on possible weaknesses of our proposals and advising the leadership of the party, with most of the party members still polarized and motivated to vote since they see opposing parties as stupid and dangerous? It seems that, in order to block the effects of group polarization and crippled epistemology, we need more than a list of internal measures the party can (but does not have to) employ. We need to address the problems from a wider perspective.

Though many hold that political parties should implement the methods described in the previous part, no one really expects that they will actually do so. Endorsing these methods might be like cooperating in a prisoner's dilemma case—it is an option everyone would benefit from, yet also an option no one will embrace unless there is an instrument that will ensure that everyone embraces it. This is why Sunstein (2007, as cited in Talisse 2017: 113) prescribes the introduction of “legal measures that could limit a doxastic group's capacity to enclave”. He clearly does not count on already polarized groups to welcome the opinions and critiques of their political opponents, but instead aims for an institutional design that would impede the creation of echo chambers within

protect our agenda from simple rhetorical criticism, without engaging the content of our political views or the substantial critiques articulated by our political opponents.



groups.<sup>9</sup> Following Sunstein's example, one way of fighting group polarization would be to introduce legal measures that ensure the establishment of critical thinking culture within political parties. This is an internal answer to the group polarization problem since, even though the regulation comes from outside the party, it is concerned with how the intra-party deliberation is shaped. I am not inherently against such regulation but I do not think it is up to political philosophers to devise exact legal means that could be used. Furthermore, there is a justified skepticism whether such internal answers will succeed in fighting crippled epistemology in an already polarized world.

### 5. *External answer*

So far we have focused on institutional and legal measures that could help prevent the development of crippled epistemology within political parties by re-shaping the intra-party deliberation. Alternative solution, one briefly discussed in this part of the paper, is to change the external conditions that lead to crippled epistemology. Namely, crippled epistemology perpetuates itself when citizens attempt to protect their beliefs by "keeping themselves in the company only of others who share their beliefs" (Hardin 2002: 10). This is the reason why extreme groups often try to prohibit or limit their members' interaction with citizens outside the group—they promote extreme religious dogmas, conspiracy theories, pseudo-histories and other epistemic mechanisms to keep their members in the company of only like-minded people. Many closed religious sects, for example, use similar mechanisms to discourage the interaction between their members and the outside world. Such organizations are usually totalitarian in a sense that they try to regulate every aspect of members' private and public life.

Major political parties, on the other hand, usually cannot afford to be as epistemically closed as religious sects. Their members are often also members of various non-political associations, organizations and groups. One might be a member of some political party, but she might also enjoy football and be a member of a local team's supporters' club, sing in a neighborhood's choir, be engaged at the workplace as a member of a trade union, spend her free time talking about science fiction within a book discussion club, and defend animal rights as a member of some animal welfare association. Though these are all non-political organizations, it is very difficult to believe that some political issues will not be (at least partly) discussed or addressed there. Even if there is no substantive political discussion among members of such associations, members will very likely know political views of other members within the organization. They will share some common goals with other members who do not share their political views, they will work together to

<sup>9</sup> For example, Sunstein holds that websites of extreme parties and groups should be legally required to incorporate links to opposing websites.

achieve them, and they will be able to see that these members, though they are their political opponents, are neither stupid nor malevolent. The same goes in both directions: members of supporters' clubs of opposing football teams might avoid the danger of group polarization by being members of the same political party and collaborating in the local branch of the party.

When citizens are members of various organizations, associations and informal groups, mixed with people holding different political views, political deliberation will not be closed within a single homogenous deliberating group. Even if it remains closed, the danger of crippled epistemology (characterized by demonization of political opponents which leads to the lack of social interaction with those outside the group) will be removed.

We should aim for an institutional design that promotes and protects citizens' plural identities. This calls for laws and public policies that help strengthen and further develop civil society associations, particularly those who have citizens with different and opposing political views among their members. Namely, such associations serve an additional purpose (apart from the one they have identified as their main aim)—they help us impede group polarization and block crippled epistemology.

## 6. *Conclusion*

Political parties gather citizens with similar political views. This is simultaneously the source of their epistemic worth and the epistemic danger they represent to the quality of democratic decision-making process. On the one hand, having like-minded members facilitates the transmission of knowledge and helps in the development of hermeneutic resilience. On the other hand, political parties are often seen as vessels of polarization since they gather like-minded citizens and often try to present their opponents as stupid or malevolent. Group polarization and crippled epistemology endanger both the epistemic and the moral value of democratic decision-making procedures. They represent a threat to all forms of deliberative democracy, including both epistemic and non-epistemic approaches to the value of public deliberation. Finally, they threaten to overwhelm the positive effects of partisanship, turning political parties into enemies of public deliberation, i.e. into entities that produce more epistemic harm than epistemic good. Introducing certain internal norms (the promotion of critical thinking culture and red teaming within a political party) and external conditions (institutional promotion and protection of citizens' plural identities through special support for civil society organizations) could reduce epistemically and morally damaging features of group polarization and crippled epistemology.

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