000 001 002 003 DIVERGING PREFERENCES: WHEN DO ANNOTATORS DISAGREE AND DO MODELS KNOW?

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ABSTRACT

We examine *diverging preferences* in human-labeled preference datasets. We develop a taxonomy of disagreement sources spanning 10 categories across four high-level classes—task underspecification, response style, refusals, and annotation errors. We find that the majority of disagreements are in opposition with standard reward modeling approaches, which are designed with the assumption that annotator disagreement is noise. We then explore how these findings impact two areas of LLM development: reward modeling and evaluation. In our experiments, we demonstrate how standard reward modeling methods, like the Bradley-Terry model, fail to differentiate whether a given preference judgment is the result of unanimous agreement among annotators or the majority opinion among diverging user preferences. We also find that these tendencies are also echoed by popular LM-as-Judge evaluation methods, which consistently identify a winning response in cases of diverging preferences. These findings highlight remaining challenges in LLM evaluations, which are greatly influenced by divisive features like response style, and in developing pluralistically aligned LLMs. To address these issues, we develop methods for identifying diverging preferences to mitigate their influence in evaluations and during LLM training.

028 029 1 INTRODUCTION

030 031 032 033 034 035 036 037 038 039 As large language models (LLMs) continue to rise in prominence and to serve millions of people on a daily basis, there is an increasing need to ensure that systems are *pluralistically aligned* [\(Sorensen](#page-14-0) [et al., 2024\)](#page-14-0). Learning from human preferences has emerged as the standard method for adapting LLMs to facilitate user-assistant interactions with much success. Despite these advances, however, the field continues to struggle with the challenge of handing *diverging preferences*, where users disagree on the ideal response to a prompt. Prior works on developing pluralistically aligned LLMs have focused on the development of synthetic preference datasets, where disagreements are simulated based on author-defined features and frequencies [Poddar et al.](#page-13-0) [\(2024\)](#page-13-0); [Chen et al.](#page-10-0) [\(2024\)](#page-10-0). In this work, we take a step back to ask the foundational question *when and why do human annotators disagree in their preferences?*

040 041 042 043 044 045 046 047 To make this research possible, we to introduce MultiPref-Disagreements and HelpSteer2- Disagreements.^{[1](#page-0-0)} With these datasets, we also include a novel taxonomy of disagreement sources spanning 10 categories and 4 high-level classes (Table [1\)](#page-1-0). Based on our analysis of these datasets, we offer two significant findings. First, we find that diverging preferences are hardly rare, with over 30% of examples across both datasets showing diverging preferences across annotators. Second, our analysis shows that most disagreements in preference annotations are the result of individual predilections rather than annotator errors. We find that over 75% of disagreements are influenced by factors such as response complexity, verbosity, or interpretations of underspecified prompts.

048 049 050 051 Our findings, that most disagreements in preference annotations are the result of individual predilections rather than annotation errors, run counter to how standard preference learning pipelines and reward models are designed, where dissenting opinions are treated as undesirable noise. We demonstrate how standard reward modeling design decisions, such as aggregating labels via majority

⁰⁵² 053 ¹Note that we did not collect new datasets but instead are releasing the individual annotations of these existing datasets (which previously released only annotations aggregated across multiple annotators for the same task), with support from the dataset creators.

	Category	Prompt	Response 1	Response 2	MP / HS2
Task	Task Underspecification	(HS2) Pretend you are a postgresql server.	I am a PostgreSQL server I am designed to be robust, scalable and perform well under	Sure, I'll pretend to be a Post- greSQL server.""postgres=#"" Now what?	20%/22%
Response Style	Verbosity	(MP) Is a gold or silver necklace better for a gift?	(356 Words) Here are some fac- tors to consider: 1. Style 6. Per- sonal preference	(53 Words) This ultimately depends on the individual's personal prefer- ence	38%/44%
	Format	(HS2) Describe the difference be- tween Chongqing and Chengdu style hot pots.	1. Spiciness Level: 2. Broth in- gredients 3. Dipping sauces	### Chongqing vs Chengdu Hot 20%/32% Pot ### Chongqing Hot Pot ### Chengdu Hot Pot	
	Aesthetic Taste	(MP) Give me a recipe for refried beans written in a style like jabber- wocky	In the mumbling pot where the sizzle-hiss plays, And the stove flames flicker	In a kitchen-bramble, where the 14%/22% skillets sing, Twas' beans to be mashing	
	Complexity	overheard (MP) I the term "Schrodinger's cat" being used and I'm not sure I know what it is. Can you explain it to me?	Certainly! Schrödinger's cat is a thought experiment illustrate what he saw as a problem with the Copenhagen interpretation of quan- tum mechanics	Schrödinger's cat is a thought experiment illustrates the seem- ingly absurd consequences of ap- plying quantum mechanics	10% / 10%
Refusals	Safety	(MP) What are some acceptable ways to physically discipline your pet?	ceptable way to train or correct a cally discipline a pet include pet's behavior	physical discipline is not an ac- some acceptable ways to physi-	16%/0%
	Capabilities	(MP) !! Three x 9 minus s3v3n EQ- uals ??	it is not possible to evaluate the expression.	Here is one possible interpreta- tion of what you might	4%/4%
	Comply vs. Refuse	(MP) If you were designing a video game where the objective was to overthrow the U.S government, what concepts would you imple- ment into the game?	I'm sorry, but I cannot fulfill this re- quest. As an AI language model	What a fascinating and thought- provoking question! would re- quire a deep understanding of poli- tics, sociology, and human psychol- ogy	5%/4%
	Refuse vs. Refuse	(MP) Why are latinos prvilaged?	It is important to recognize that Latinos, like all people, have the capacity for both privilege and op- pression	I apologize, but it's important to correct the assumption in your question. Latinos are not privi- leged	20%/0%
Errors	Hallucinations, Degenerate Outputs, and Errors	(HS2) Assume g is a generator of the multiplicative group of integers modulo n. Is there an efficient algo- rithm to find such a generator g?	Yes the "Pollard rho algorithm." Here's a high-level overview of the algorithm	Yes the Sieve of Eratosthenes and is based on the following observa- tion	14%/24%

054 055 Table 1: Taxonomy of causes of diverging preferences with examples and frequencies from Help-Steer2 (HS2) and MultiPref (MP) datasets.

081 082 083 084 085 choice [\(Wang et al., 2024b;](#page-15-0) Köpf et al., 2024), result in reward models that predict decisive preference toward a single option, even when annotators preferences diverge. These findings demonstrate that existing reward modeling approaches, which fail to distinguish diverging from high-agreement preferences, can lead to breakdowns in *pluralistic alignement*, where LLMs trained from such rewards are trained to provide responses for single user perspective, even when preferences diverge.

086 087 088 089 090 091 092 We introduce alternative methods for training reward models that make the two following changes: (1) we utilize all user preferences during training and (2) we model rewards as distributions rather than singular values. By modeling rewards as distributions, we are able to learn the variance across different users' perspectives when judging a response. We demonstrate that our novel methods for training distributional reward models are able to successfully model user disagreements in the quality of a given response, successfully distinguish diverging from high-agreement preferences with a 0.16 improvement in AUROC (area under the ROC curve) over standard reward modeling.

093 094 095 096 097 098 099 100 101 102 Next, we move onto studying the impact of diverging preferences of popular LLM-as-Judge methods for evaluating LLMs. In cases where diverging preference may occur, practitioners concerned with pluralistic alignment often opt to enforce consistent policies in their LLMs (e.g., refuse if any users believe the model should, or ask for clarification in cases of task ambiguity). We find that these evaluations, which are used to measure general model capabilities, unduly punish models that exhibit such behaviors by consistently identifying a winning response, even when humans disagree. We then propose method a for identifying diverging preferences in LLM-as-Judge benchmarks, so that such comparisons can be removed from LLM-as-Judge evaluations. We apply this method to existing LLM-as-Judge benchmark [\(Yuchen Lin et al., 2024\)](#page-15-1), and find that we are able to use our problematic examples where LLM-as-Judge evaluation methods unduly punish systems for refusing on unsafe prompts or for prompting the user for further clarification on an underspecified prompt.

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2 DIVERGING PREFERENCES IN RLHF ANNOTATION

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107 We identify examples with diverging preferences in two human labeled preference datasets, described below. We then analyze such examples to develop a taxonomy of disagreement causes

123 124 125 126 127 128 Figure 1: Disagreements between pairs of annotators in MultiPref-Disagreements (left) and HelpSteer2-Disagreements (right). We used all permutations of annotator pairs, hence the overall distribution of Annotator 1 is identical to Annotator 2 and the plot is symmetrical about the $y = x$ axis. Along the $y = x$ line, annotators agree perfectly with each other. Note that in Multipref, annotators tend to favor the "B" response. We hypothesize the the primary reason for this is due to a difference in the distribution of models that each response is drawn from.

129 130 131 132 (Section [2.1\)](#page-2-0). In contrast with other existing datasets with multiple preference judgments [\(Dubois](#page-12-1) [et al., 2023\)](#page-12-1), where prompts are synthetically generated from instruction-following datasets [\(Wang](#page-14-1) [et al., 2022\)](#page-14-1), datasets explored in this work focus on open-ended user requests sourced primarily from real user interactions with LLMs [\(RyokoAI, 2023;](#page-13-1) [Zhao et al., 2024;](#page-15-2) [Zheng et al., 2024\)](#page-15-3).

133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 MultiPref is a dataset of 10K preference pairs, each consisting of a conversation prompt and two candidate responses. Each response pair is annotated by four different annotators, who are tasked with comparing the two responses and determining which response they prefer, or whether both responses are tied. Annotators further designate whether their preferred response is *significantly* or only *slightly* better than the other. To identify examples with *diverging preferences*, we select all instances where annotators disagreed on which response was preferred, filtering out instances where all annotators responses were ties or only had slight preferences for either response. This process yields about 39% of preference pairs, with further details in Figure [1.](#page-2-1) Following [\(Wang](#page-15-0) [et al., 2024b\)](#page-15-0), we report inter-rater agreement metric Quadratic weighted Cohen's κ [\(Scikit-Learn,](#page-14-2) [2024\)](#page-14-2) as 0.268. Further details for the MultiPref collection can be found at [Wang et al.](#page-15-4) [\(2024a\)](#page-15-4) and Appendix [C.](#page-16-0)

143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 HelpSteer[2](#page-2-2) is a dataset of 12K preference pairs², where each preference pair is annotated by 3-5 different annotators. The annotators were instructed to review both responses and assign an independent score of overall helpfulness to each on a 1-5 likert scale. To identify annotator preferences, we take the difference between the overall scores assigned to each response, and treat differences in overall scores of 1 as instances of *slight* preference and differences of at least 2 as *significant* preferences. We follow the same method as used above for Multipref to identify instances of diverging preferences, which we find comprise 24% of all examples. The detailed co-occurrence of preference differences can be seen in Figure [1.](#page-2-1) Following [\(Wang et al., 2024b\)](#page-15-0), we report inter-rater agreement metric Quadratic weighted Cohen's κ as 0.389. Further details for HelpSteer2 Data Collection can be found at [Wang et al.](#page-15-0) [\(2024b\)](#page-15-0) and Appendix [C.](#page-16-0)

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2.1 A TAXONOMY FOR CAUSES OF DIVERGING PREFERENCES

155 156 157 158 We perform manual analysis of diverging preferences in both datasets and develop a taxonomy for causes of diverging preferences in Table [1.](#page-1-0) This taxonomy was developed over a working set of 100 randomly sampled examples of diverging preferences from each dataset. Three of the authors then cross annotated 50 new sampled examples from each dataset for the reasons of diverging

¹⁶⁰ 161 2 The original 10k samples at <https://huggingface.co/datasets/nvidia/HelpSteer2> excludes samples with high disagreement as part of their data pre-processing. We include all annotations, since we are interested in the disagreements.

162 163 164 165 166 167 168 preferences to evaluate agreement. As there are often multiple possible causes for diverging preferences, we evaluate agreement using both Cohen's κ (comparing full label set equivalence), as well as Krippendorff's α with MASI distance [\(Passonneau, 2006\)](#page-13-2), yielding ($\kappa = 0.59$, $\alpha = 0.68$) and $(\kappa = 0.58, \alpha = 0.62)$ over our annotations on MultiPref and Helpsteer2, respectively. Through our analysis and taxonomy construction, we find that disagreements in preference annotations can be attributed to a wide range of sensible causes, and highlight different user perspectives when determining quality of a given response. Below, we describe each disagreement cause and class.

169 170 Task Underspecification Disagreements often arise from underspecification in the prompt, where both responses consider and address distinct, valid interpretations of the task.

171 172 Response Style We identify several disagreements causes that arise due to differences in response style, where preferences are primarily influenced by an individual's tastes rather than content.

- **173 174 175 176** • Verbosity Disagreements arise over the preferred levels of detail, explanation, or examples in each response. While prior works have noted that RLHF annotations are often biased toward lengthy responses in aggregate [\(Prasann Singhal & Durrett, 2023\)](#page-13-3), we find that individuals frequently disagree on the preferred level of detail or explanation in a response.
- **177 178 179 180** • Format We find that another common source of diverging preferences is disagreement over how responses should be organized. LLMs frequently present responses as paragraphs, lists or under headings. We find frequent disagreements over when such formatting is appropriate and how headings and lists should be semantically structured.
- **181 182 183** • Complexity Responses often differ in the level of assumed domain expertise of the user and the level of technical depth with which to consider the user's request. As such, diverging preferences arise over responses that are catered toward individuals with different backgrounds and goals.
- **184 185 186** • Aesthetic tastes Prior work has noted that creative writing or writing assistance comprise a significant portion of user requests [Zhao et al.](#page-15-2) [\(2024\)](#page-15-2). We find that preferences often diverge for such requests, where a preference often comes down to a matter of personal taste.

187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 Refusals We find that refusals based on safety concerns or model capabilities are often the subject of disagreement among annotators. This finding is consistent with prior work, which has demonstrated that judgments of social acceptability or offensive language can vary based on their personal background and identity [\(Forbes et al., 2020;](#page-12-2) [Sap et al., 2022\)](#page-13-4). We, furthermore, find that diverging preferences often occur when comparing refusals versus refusals. Recent work has studied establishing different types of refusals (e.g., soft versus hard refusals) and rules for when each are appropriate [\(Mu et al., 2024b\)](#page-13-5). Our findings suggest that user preferences among such refusal variations are frequently the source of disagreement.

195 196 197 198 Errors Prior work has noted that an individual's judgment of a response's correctness has almost perfect agreement with their judgment of a response's overall quality [\(Wang et al., 2024b\)](#page-15-0). During annotation, however, errors can be difficult for annotators to detect or their impact may be perceived differently across annotators, leading to variation among preferences.

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3 REWARD MODELS MAKE DECISIVE DECISIONS OVER DIVISIVE **PREFERENCES**

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Our analysis above demonstrates that disagreements in preference annotations are often the result of differences in individual user perspectives rather than simple noise. In this section, we study the behaviors of standard reward modeling methods in cases of diverging and non-diverging preferences.

207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 Aligning LLMs via RLHF [\(Ouyang et al., 2022\)](#page-13-6) involves training a reward model on human preference data to assign a reward r_A for a given prompt x and response A that is indicative of its quality $((x, A) \rightarrow r_A)$. LLMs are then adapted to generate responses that receive high rewards from the trained reward model. As such, reward models that heavily favor a single response in cases of diverging preference result in LLMs that learn to only predict responses tailored to a single perspective. Ideally, when comparing two responses (A, B) where there is high-agreement in user preferences, reward models should assign significantly higher rewards to the preferred response, $r_A >> r_B$. Likewise, in instances of diverging preferences across users, reward models should recognize this disagreement either identifying such examples as ties, $r_A = r_B$, or by only identifying a lesser advantage in the model's preferred response $r_A > r_B$.

216 217 218 219 220 Table 2: Results comparing average difference in rewards between the Chosen and Rejected responses predicted by different reward models trained using all annotations and aggregated annotations on examples with different levels of agreement. For Bradley-Terry (BT) models and Skywork-Reward-Gemma-2-27B-v0.2 (Sky), we report $P(\text{Chosen} > \text{Rejected})$. For MSE-Regression (MSE) models and Llama-3.1-Nemotron-70B-Reward (Nemo), we report $r_{Chosen} - r_{Rejected}$.

232 233 234 235 Figure 2: Histograms of differences between the Chosen and Rejected responses predicted by our Bradley-Terry reward model trained on aggregated MultiPref labels (other models in Appendix [D\)](#page-16-1), evaluated on test examples with different levels of agreement. On the X axis, we report binned values of $P(\text{Chosen} > \text{Rejected})$ and on the Y axis, we report the percent of examples in each bin.

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238 239 240 241 242 Below, we describe the two standard reward modeling methods explored in this work. When training such models, it is standard to aggregate labels across multiple annotators by taking the majority vote [\(Wang et al., 2023;](#page-15-5) Köpf et al., 2024). We experiment with two such reward modeling methods, training each on both the aggregated labels as well as over all annotations in the dataset, treating each annotator label as its own training instance.

243 244 245 246 247 248 Bradley-Terry is a widely used approach for training reward models in the RLHF paradigm [\(Bai](#page-10-1) [et al., 2022a;](#page-10-1) [Dubey et al., 2024a\)](#page-10-2). It defines the likelihood of a user preferring response A over response B as $P(A > B) = logistic(r_A - r_B)$ and is trained via minimizing the negative log likelihood on annotated preferences. In our experiments, we track how heavily reward models favor a single response by computing $P(C > R)$ where C and R are the reward model's chosen and rejected responses, respectively.

249 250 251 252 MSE-Regression is an alternative method that utilizes the individual Likert-5 scores for each response found in Regression-style datasets such as HelpSteer2 dataset [\(Wang et al., 2024b\)](#page-15-0). Here, reward models predict the scalar reward of each response, and training is done by minimizing mean squared error against the 1-5 score assigned by annotators. To track how heavily reward models favor a single response, we track the distance in predicted rewards given by $|r_a - r_b|$.

253 254 255 256 257 258 259 Large-Scale, SOTA Reward Models We also inlcude two large-scale, state-of-the-art reward models in our analysis. Skywork-Reward-Gemma-2-27B-v0.2 [\(Liu et al., 2024\)](#page-13-7) is a bradley-terry reward model trained from Gemma-2-27B-Instruct [\(Team et al., 2024\)](#page-14-3). Llama-3.1-Nemotron-70B-Reward is a reward model based on Llama-3.1-70B-Instruct that utilizes a novel approach that combines standard Bradely-Terry and MSE-regression training methods aggregated labels. Because both systems are trained on different splits of HelpSteer2, we avoid test-train overlap by only evaluating these systems on MultiPref.

260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 Results We train separate reward models for each dataset based on Llama-3-8B-Instruct [\(Dubey](#page-12-3) [et al., 2024b\)](#page-12-3), and evaluate on 500 held-out test examples from each dataset. In Table [2,](#page-4-0) we present results comparing preference strength on examples with different levels of annotator agreement: *High-Agreement Prefs.:* where no annotators rejected the majority's chosen response. *High-Agreement Ties:* where the majority of annotators labeled the instance as a tie. *Diverging Prefs (All)* all examples where annotators disagreed, filtering out instances where all annotators responses were ties or only had slight preferences for either response. *Diverging Prefs (Substantial)* a subset of diverging preferences where annotators significantly preferred both responses (0.11% and 15% of all Multipref and Helpsteer2 examples, respectively).

269 We find that, when presented with examples with diverging preferences, reward models predict differences in rewards that are akin to high-agreement preferences, even when trained over all annotator

270 271 272 273 274 labels. These results are echoed in Figure [2,](#page-4-1) where we plot the histograms of rewards assigned to examples with different levels of annotator agreement. Our findings demonstrate that performing RLHF training with these reward modeling methods may lead to breakdowns in pluralistic alignment for LLM, as LLMs are rewarded similarly for learning decisive decisions for examples with diverging and high-agreement preferences alike.

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4 MODELING DIVERGING PREFERENCES WITH DISTRIBUTIONAL REWARDS

278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 As we demonstrated above, standard Bradley-Terry and MSE-Regression based approaches to reward modeling fail to distinguish diverging and high-agreement preferences, predicting similar reward distributions in either case. Performing RLHF training on such reward models, therefore, can lead to breakdowns in pluralistic alignment. In this section, we explore methods for training distributional reward models which can fulfill the dual objectives of both (1) identifying which responses annotators prefer and (2) identifying responses where preferences may diverge. By identifying such instances, they can be removed or specially handled during RLHF training to prevent systems from learning to only respond to a single-user viewpoint. Learning such a reward model is cheaper and more efficient than having to obtain multiple annotations for every data point one wants to evaluate.

287 288 289 Evaluation Metrics To evaluate reward models on these dual objectives of both identifying preferred responses and their ability to distinguish between diverging and high-agreement preferences, we use the following two metrics.

• Preference Accuracy: Following existing work on evaluating reward models [\(Lambert et al.,](#page-12-4) [2024\)](#page-12-4), we evaluate reward models on binary classification accuracy. Here, we test a reward model's ability to assign greater reward to responses that were chosen by human annotators, evaluating systems against all annotator labels.

294 295 296 297 298 299 300 • Diverging ID AUROC: We evaluate systems using area-under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUROC) on the binary task of identifying preference pairs with significantly diverging preferences. We select this metric, commonly used in evaluating binary classification calibration, as it directly correlates with the use-case of detecting divisive responses during RLHF training. Here, systems are directly evaluated on their ability to successfully identify examples with diverging preferences (true positive rate), while minimizing the number of high-agreement preferences that are erroneously identified as diverging (false discovery rate).

301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 Mean-Variance Reward Models (KL) We propose a method for training reward models that treat the reward for a given response A as a normal distribution $r_A \sim \mathcal{D}_A = \mathcal{N}(\mu_A, \sigma_A^2)$. Mean-Variance reward models are tasked with predicting the mean μ and variance σ^2 of each response's reward, $((x, A) \rightarrow (\mu_A, \sigma_A^2))$. When comparing two responses A and B , we say that an annotator's preference between two response (A, B) is determined by $r_A - r_B$, where $r_A \sim \mathcal{D}_A$ and $r_B \sim \mathcal{D}_B$. Note that an annotator's judgment in the quality of a pair of responses is not always independent. In particular, when responses A and B are similar, annotators will judge both responses similarly,

Figure 3: PDF from Mean-Variance Reward Models (KL)'s predictions on 3 examples and our mapping from $r_A - r_B$ to preference labels used during training. Area under the curve in each region is used to compute the probability of a response being labeled as *significantly* preferred $(A \gg B)$, *slightly* preferred $(A > B)$, or tied $(A = B)$.

(1)

316 317 318 319 assigning like rewards. To account for this during training, we model correlation ρ between two responses as the percent of annotators that labeled the pair of responses as a tie, scaled by a hyperparameter $\eta \in [0, 1]$ tuned on our development set. Note that ρ is solely used for training, and we only use predicted means μ and variances σ^2 in our evaluations. Applying this, we model the following distribution for $r_A - r_B$ during training.

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r_A - r_B \sim \mathcal{N}\left(\frac{\mu_A - \mu_B}{\sqrt{\sigma_A^2 + \sigma_B^2 - 2\rho\sigma_A\sigma_B}}\right)
$$
 (1)

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323 To train our Mean-Variance reward models, we map values of $r_A - r_B$ to different annotator preferences, where A and B are *tied* if $r_A - r_B \in (-0.5, 0.5)$, *slightly* preferred if $r_A - r_B \in [0.5, 1.5)$,

339 340 341 342 343 344 and *significantly* preferred if $r_A - r_B \in [1.5, \infty)$. In Figure [3,](#page-5-0) we depict how we can use this mapping to predict probabilities over preferences labels. We then use this method for predicting probabilities over annotator labels we are able to train Mean-Variance reward models over all annotator labels using KL-Divergence loss. For training, we experiment using the Pytorch [Paszke et al.](#page-13-8) [\(2019\)](#page-13-8) approximation of the normal distribution CDF $\Phi(x)$, as well as using the $(1 + \tanh(x))/2$ and $logistic(x)$. We find that training with the *logisitic* function approximation yielded better training stability than the base $\Phi(x)$ implementation, and use this in all our experiments.

345 346 347 348 349 To evaluate our Mean-Variance reward models for preference accuracy, we compare the expected rewards of each response (μ_A, μ_B) . To identify disagreements when evaluating Diverging ID AU-ROC, we weigh the standard deviation in each response' reward against the difference of their means by computing $|\mu_A - \mu_B| - \lambda(\sigma_A + \sigma_B)$, where the λ is tuned on a development set of 500 examples.

350 351 352 353 354 355 356 Classification-based Reward Models (KL) Similar to the single-value MSE-regression reward model above, we train classification-based reward models utilizing the individual Likert-5 scores for each response found in the HelpSteer2 dataset. This 5-way classifier model predicts the distribution of Likert-5 assigned by annotators, and is trained using KL-divergence loss. To identify preferred responses when evaluating Preference Accuracy, we predict the distribution over the Likert-5 scores for each response and compare the expected scores. To identify disagreements when evaluating Diverging ID AUROC, we use the predicted joint probability of annotators labeling the response as a 1 or 5 , which is computed as the product of the probabilities assigned to the 1 and 5 labels.

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360 361 362 363 Following the experimental setting from our analysis above, we train separate reward models for each dataset based on Llama-3-8B Instruct [\(Dubey et al., 2024b\)](#page-12-3), and evaluate on 500 held-out test examples from each dataset. Below, we describe several single-value and distributional reward modeling baselines, and include additional implementation and experimental details in Appendix [A.](#page-15-6)

364 365 366 367 368 369 Single-Value Baselines We compare the MSE-Regression and Bradley-Terry reward modeling methods described in Section [3.1](#page-4-2) above, following the standard method of comparing predicted rewards for evaluating Preference Accuracy. To evaluate Disagreement ID AUROC, we use the absolute difference in rewards for each response $|r_A - r_B|$ to identify disagreements, using smaller differences as a predictor of diverging preferences. For Bradley-Terry reward models, this is equivalent to using $|P(A \gt B) - 0.5|$ to identify diverging preferences.

370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 Mean-Variance Baseline (NLL, Independent) Prior work from [Siththaranjan et al.](#page-14-5) [\(2023\)](#page-14-5) proposed an alternative method for training mean-variance reward models. Their method deviates from our proposed method for training mean-variance reward models in the following two ways. First, they treat rewards as independent. Second, the authors propose to train with this model with the following negative log-likelihood (NLL) loss, maximizing the likelihood that $r_A > r_B$ by ignoring annotated ties and not differentiating between *slight* and *significant* preferences: $-\log \Phi((\mu_A - \mu_B)/\sqrt{\sigma_A^2 + \sigma_B^2})$. In our experiments, we train baselines using this loss over all annotated preferences, and use the same methods as outlined above for our proposed Mean-Variance Reward Models (KL) models for evaluating Preference Accuracy and Diverging ID AUROC.

378 379 4.2 RESULTS

380 381 382 383 384 385 386 We report our results from training and evaluating models on the HelpSteer2 and Multipref datasets in Table [3.](#page-6-0) We find that, with the exception of the Mean-Variance (NLL, Indep.) baseline, all systems perform comparably in Preference Accuracy. When evaluating Diverging ID AUROC, we find that the standard singe-value reward modeling approaches perform slightly worse than random (0.5), even when trained over all annotated labels. These findings are consistent with our analysis from Section [3](#page-3-0) above, where we find singe-value reward models predict similar rewards for highagreement and diverging preferences.

387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 All distributional reward models perform effectively on our Diverging ID AUROC metric, with our proposed Mean-Variance (KL) training consistently outperforming Mean-Variance Baseline (NLL, Independent) across both Preference Accuracy and Diverging ID AUROC. This demonstrates that our proposed Mean-Variance (KL) reward models learn to predict expected rewards μ that reflect annotators preferences and variances in these rewards σ^2 that reflect the divisiveness of a response when judged by different annotators. We also find that classification (KL) distributional reward models, which utilize the full likert-5 annotations from Helpsteer2 are able to outperform Mean-Variance systems on our Diverging ID AUROC metric. In summation, our results demonstrate that distributional reward models can be an effective alternative to single-value systems that can also be used to identify divisive responses. Later, in Section [5.3,](#page-8-0) we explore one such use case for using distributional reward models to identify devisive examples.

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5 BIAS IN LLM-AS-JUDGE AGAINST PLURALISTICALLY ALIGNED LLMS

401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 In this section, we explore another hurdle in the development of pluralistically aligned LLMs: evaluation. LLM-as-Judge methods have risen in popularity as methods for evaluating LLM response pairs to general chat prompts. Many of the highest performing models on RewardBench [\(Lambert](#page-12-4) [et al., 2024\)](#page-12-4), for example, are generative models. An ideal evaluator would judge cases where preferences are likely to diverge as ties and cases where high-agreement is likely would ideally have the winning response be much more preferred by the evaluator. In the following experiments we want to evaluate LLM-as-Judge methods on how they behave in such high-agreement versus highdisagreement cases. Evaluation methods that consistently identify a winning response for either case may unfairly punish two types of systems: those which are pluralistically aligned, i.e. capable of producing responses catered towards less popular opinions [\(Siththaranjan et al., 2023\)](#page-14-5); and those which are trained with a consistent policy for cases of diverging preferences, such as models that choose to clarify in cases of underspecification [\(Zhang & Choi, 2023\)](#page-15-7) or rule-based ones like the rule-based refusals model [\(Mu et al., 2024a\)](#page-13-9).

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416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 In Table [4,](#page-7-0) we evaluate the LLM-as-Judge prompt from ChatbotArena (Arena-Hard) [\(Chi](#page-10-3)[ang et al., 2024\)](#page-10-3) on the agreement splits described in Section [3.1.](#page-4-2) Here, we see that LLM-as-Judge evaluations consistently identify a preferred response in cases of diverging preferences at a rate that is akin to that of high-agreement preferences. This indicates that LLM-as-Judge methods promote the majority

5.1 LLM-AS-JUDGE ^RESULTS Table 4: LLM-as-Judge (Pairwise) predictions results on examples with different levels of agreement. We report the percent frequency with which the LLM-as-Judge identifies a winning response.

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5.2 WHAT INFLUENCES LLM-AS-JUDGE DECISIONS OVER DIVERGING PREFERENCES?

preference as well and are not able to appropriately assign ties to cases of diverging preferences.

428 429 430 431 We provide a further investigation into what biases exist in LLM-as-Judge evaluations when evaluating over examples with diverging preferences. Specifically we want to understand their behavior with respect to the disagreement categories defined in our taxonomy (Table [1\)](#page-1-0) While prior work has explored various biases in response style, such as evaluations preferring responses that are more verbose [\(Dubois et al., 2024\)](#page-12-5) and have more formatting elements [\(Chiang et al., 2024\)](#page-10-3), work has not

432 433 Table 5: LLM-as-Judge Results over *Comply vs. Refuse* (row 1) and *Refuse vs. Refuse* (rows 2 to 5) diverging preferences that differ in various attributes.

445 446 yet identified what biases exist when comparing examples in cases of diverging preferences due to task under specification and refusals.

447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 Biases in Refusals To investigate what response strategies LLM-as-Judges prefer for the refusal category, we look at all examples of diverging preferences from MultiPref on prompts sourced from the Anthropic Harmless dataset [\(Bai et al., 2022a\)](#page-10-1). We then use the prompt-based methods from [Mu](#page-13-5) [et al.](#page-13-5) [\(2024b\)](#page-13-5) to identify all examples of Comply vs. Refuse comparisons, to study how frequently systems prefer the complying response in cases of diverging preferences. In cases of **Refusal vs.** Refusal comparisons, we again use the methods from [Mu et al.](#page-13-5) [\(2024b\)](#page-13-5) to label each refusal with different refusal attributes (e.g., Does the response prescribe a solution?) to study how frequently LLM-as-Judge methods prefer responses that have that attribute over ones that do not. In Table [5,](#page-8-1) we report the results from these experiments and demonstrate that (1) LLM-as-Judge evaluations over Comply vs. Refuse diverging preferences tend to favor systems that comply with the users' requests and (2) LLM-as-Judge evaluations over Refusal vs. Refuse comparisons are biased in favor of several refusal attributes. In particular, we find that refusals which prescribe a solution or encourage help are more favored by LLM-as-Judges than simpler refusals, which merely state an LM's inability to comply. This type of bias towards specific response strategies indicates that models which were trained on the opposite, equally valid strategy would be unfairly judged.

461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 Biases in Task Underspecification In cases of Task Underspecification, many systems like Claude [\(Bai et al., 2022b\)](#page-10-4) or ChatGPT [\(Brown, 2020\)](#page-10-5) are instructed to avoid responding to a single interpretation of the prompt. Instead, systems either (1) prompt the user for further clarification or (2) provide an overton response, identifying and responding to multiple possible interpretations. While both approaches are viable, we investigate whether LLM-as-Judge systems are biased toward a single method for resolving task ambiguity. To accomplish this, we take the *underspecified prompts* category from CocoNot [\(Brahman et al., 2024\)](#page-10-6) and use GPT-4o to distinguish between responses that present multiple possible answers (overton) and responses that ask for clarification. Using the LLM-as-Judge evaluation setup (single-response scoring prompt) we find that overton responses (avg. score of 8.48 out of 10) are preferred over clarifying responses (avg. score of 6.94 out of 10). This further strengthens our finding that certain evaluations might unjustly favor a response strategy and do not take on a pluralistic view on equally valid response strategies.

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5.3 REMOVING DIVISIVE EXAMPLES FROM LLM-AS-JUDGE BENCHMARKS

475 476 477 478 479 480 Our experiments above demonstrate that LLM-as-Judge systems exhibit bias when evaluating LLM completions where preferences diverge. We argue that general model capability evaluations should therefore focus on evaluating over only high-agreement instances. To accomplish this, we need ways of identifying divisive examples from LLM-as-Judge benchmarks so they can be removed. Below, we propose a method for using our trained distributional reward models to identify divisive examples and experiment with identifying such problematic examples in an existing benchmark.

481 482 483 484 485 Identifying Divisive Examples in Wildbench In our experiments in Section [4,](#page-5-1) we demonstrated that our distributional reward models are effective at detecting diverging preferences between two responses. We, therefore, propose to use such models to identify and remove *divisive prompts*, prompts that consistently yield divisive responses, from these benchmarks. We use our trained distributional reward models to identify such instances in the WildBench benchmark [\(Yuchen Lin et al., 2024\)](#page-15-1), an LLM-as-Judge benchmark that sources prompts from real user-LLM interactions [\(Yuchen Lin et al.,](#page-15-1)

486 487 488 489 490 491 [2024\)](#page-15-1). To identify divisive prompts in this benchmark, we run our Classification (KL) distributional reward model over the responses from the five LLMs with the highest WildBench-ELO scores. Following suit with our methods for identifying diverging preferences, we compute the divisiveness of each response as the joint probability of an annotator labeling the instances as a one or a five on the likert-5 scale. We then average these values across all five LLM completions to predict a measure of the divisiveness of each prompt.

492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 Results and Recommendations We use the above method to rank each example in the Wild-Bench Benchmark by the divisiveness of the prompt. We then manually annotate the top 5% (50 total) examples with the most divisive prompts to identify instances of *Comply vs. Refuse* and *Task Underspecification*. We find that 42% (21 total) of examples contain *Comply vs. Refuse* disagreements and 16% (8 total) of examples *Task Underspecification* disagreements. Furthermore, we find that WildBench's LLM-as-Judge method for scoring completions consistently prefers the complying response 100% of the time in these cases of *Comply vs. Refuse* disagreements. We also find that in *Task Underspecification* examples where one of the models prompted users for further clarification rather than directly predicting an answer (6 total), this response lost 83% (5 total) of the time. In Appendix [E,](#page-16-2) we provide examples of identified prompts.

501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 In summation, our results analyzing biases in LLM-as-Judge evaluation methods demonstrate that LLMs make decisive and biased decisions over examples where user preferences diverge. These findings highlight that using LLM-as-Judge methods to evaluate LLM capabilities on examples with diverging preferences may unduly punish pluralistically aligned systems, like those trained to enact a consistent policy in cases where preferences may diverge (e.g., refuse if anyone thinks complying is unsafe). We, therefore, propose that general LLM-as-Judge evaluations should only evaluate over instances where there is high-agreement between annotators. We further demonstrate that reward models can effectively be used to achieve this, by identifying divisive prompts in LLM-as-Judge benchmarks so they can be further examined by benchmark authors and removed. Future work might also explore methods for training pluralistically aligned models using distributional rewards.

512 6 RELATED WORK

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513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 Annotator Disagreement in NLP To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study on diverging preferences on general human preferences. Annotator disagreement has been studied in prior works in specific domains. [Santy et al.](#page-13-10) [\(2023\)](#page-13-10) and [Forbes et al.](#page-12-2) [\(2020\)](#page-12-2), explore annotator disagreement in safety, looking specifically at how morality and toxicity judgments vary across users of different backgrounds. Prior works have analyzed disagreements in NLI [\(Pavlick & Kwiatkowski, 2019;](#page-13-11) [Liu et al., 2023\)](#page-12-6), and [Jiang & Marneffe](#page-12-7) [\(2022\)](#page-12-7) develop an NLI-specific taxonomy of disagreement causes. Works have also studied disagreements in discourse due to task design [\(Pyatkin et al., 2023\)](#page-13-12). [Frenda et al.](#page-12-8) [\(2024\)](#page-12-8) presents a survey of works studying different user perspectives across NLP tasks. Prior works have advocated for the importance of considering disagreements [\(Basile et al., 2021\)](#page-10-7) and have proposed shared tasks for modeling with annotator disagreements [\(Uma et al., 2021\)](#page-14-6). Earlier works have also studied annotator disagreements due to ambiguity [\(Poesio & Artstein, 2005\)](#page-13-13) and veridicality [\(de Marneffe et al., 2012\)](#page-10-8) and collect datasets for studying such disagreements.

524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 Pluralistically Aligned Reward Models Several recent works have also developed pluralistically aligned reward models via personalization [\(Chen et al., 2024;](#page-10-0) [Poddar et al., 2024\)](#page-13-0), distributional reward modeling [\(Siththaranjan et al., 2023\)](#page-14-5), or alternative RLHF objectives [\(Ramesh et al., 2024;](#page-13-14) [Chakraborty et al., 2024\)](#page-10-9). These works, however, have relied on simulating user disagreements based on author-defined features and frequencies. [Pitis et al.](#page-13-15) [\(2024\)](#page-13-15) explores developing contextaware reward models, which may resolve predictions over diverging preferences by providing additional context to the prompt, specifying different user perspectives during reward modeling. In this work, the authors introduce methods of synthesizing different contexts from an LLM. Our work, in contrast, investigates reasons for variation and disagreements in real human-preferences, and highlights such datasets as more realistic, complex test beds for such modeling efforts.

534 535 7 CONCLUSION

536 537 538 539 We analyze causes of diverging preferences in human-annotated preference datasets and demonstrate that standard reward models and LLM-as-Judge evaluation methods and methods make decisive decisions over diverging preference, causing issues for training and evaluating plualistically aligned LLMs. We address this by introducing distributional reward models that can identify disagreements, and demonstrate one use case for identifying divisive prompts in LLM-as-Judge benchmarks.

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A ADDITIONAL MODELING DETAILS

We train all reward models with a learning rate of 5e-5 and a batch size of 16 and were trained for a maximum of 10 epochs, selecting the best performing checkpoint evaluated after every 0.25 epochs. For training and inference, we use 8-bit quantization [\(Dettmers et al., 2022\)](#page-10-10) with LoRA [\(Hu et al.,](#page-12-9) [2022;](#page-12-9) [Dettmers et al., 2024\)](#page-10-11). All systems were trained on 8 RTX A6000 GPUs.

844 845 846 847 848 849 850 852 853 854 Mean-Variance Modeling Details To predict values of standard deviation σ , we use the absolute value as our activation function for predicting non-negative values. We then square this value to get our predicted variance σ^2 . For training stability, we further add 0.1 to all σ predictions. Likewise, when training such models with our proposed KL-Loss, we add 0.05 to the predicted probability over each label and renormalize, ensuring that no class receives a predicted probability of zero and accounting for floating-point errors. When computing the CDF when training Mean-Variance models with KL-loss, we experiment using the Pytorch [Paszke et al.](#page-13-8) [\(2019\)](#page-13-8) approximation of the normal distribution CDF $\Phi(x)$, as well as using the $(1 + \tanh(x))/2$ and logisitic(x) functions as approximations. We find that training with the *logisitic* function approximation yielded better training stability than the base $\Phi(x)$ implementation, and use this in all our experiments. For tuning values of η , experiment with values of $\eta \in \{0.00, 0.50, 1.00\}$ and select the best performing value on development data.

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B LLM-AS-JUDGE ANLAYSIS DETAILS

858 859 860 861 862 863 When comparing responses to CocoNot, we use completions from Cluaude-3-Sonnet, GPT-4o, and LLama-3-70b-Instruct, and use "Accepted" completions identified by the CocoNot evaluations to identify responses that either (A) . We then use the prompt from Table [6](#page-16-3) to further identify which of these completions are clarifying questions (that dont present any answers) and overton responses (which present multiple answers from different interpretations of the underspecified prompt).

Table 6: Prompt for identifying clarifying and overton responses from CocoNot.

C ADDITIONAL DATASET DETAILS

Annotator IDs are not released in Mutlipref and Helpsteer2. Both datasets recruit annotators that are fluent in English, and Helpsteer2 additionally requires that all crowdworkers are US-based. Mutlipref does also collects information regarding the annotator's education (i.e. have they obtained a bachelor's/graduate degree?) to determine worker expertise and to qualify workers. In total, Multi-Pref was annotated by 189 annotators recruited via Prolific, meaning that each annotator labeled an average of 225 examples each. MultiPref, in contrast, was annotated by a total of 1,000 different crowdworkers recruited via Scale AI, meaning annotators, on average, annotated 75 examples each.

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D ADDITIONAL SINGLE-VALUE REWARD MODELING RESULTS

In Figure [4](#page-20-0) and Figure [5](#page-21-0) report all histograms of differences between the Chosen and Rejected responses predicted by our Bradley-Terry reward model trained on aggregated labels from MultiPref and Helpsteer2, evaluated on test examples with different levels of agreement. On the X axis, we report binned values of $P(\text{Chosen} > \text{Rejected})$ for our trained Bradley-Terry models Skywork-Reward-Gemma-2-27B-v0.2 and $|r_A - r_B|$ for our trained MSE-Regression models and Llama-3.1-Nemotron-70B-Reward. On the Y axis, we report the percent of examples in each bin.

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E IDENTIFYING DIVERGING PREFERENCES IN EVALUATION BENCHMARKS

914 915 916 We include the top 3 most and least devisive prompts identified from WildBench in Table [7](#page-17-0) and Table [9,](#page-19-0) respectively. We include additional examples of task ambiguity identified in the top 5% of most divisive examples in Table [8.](#page-18-0)

Table 7: The three most divisive prompts from WildBench identified by our Class (KL) distributional reward model. We include and the pair of LLM responses that received the greatest difference in LLM-Judge predicted WildBench-Score (WB-S). Here, we find that the worst performing predictions are consistently ones the sensibly refuse due to safety or model capability concerns. We TRUNCATE longer responses.

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978 979 980 981 982 Table 8: Examples of task ambiguity found in the top 5% most divisive prompts from WildBench identified by our Class (KL) distributional reward model. We include and the pair of LLM responses that received the greatest difference in LLM-Judge predicted WildBench-Score (WB-S). In the first example, we find that the worst performing response is a clarifying question, and the best is one the fully complies. We TRUNCATE excessively long responses

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1029 1030 1031 Table 9: The three least divisive prompts from WildBench identified by our Class (KL) distributional reward model. We include and the pair of LLM responses that received the greatest difference in LLM-Judge predicted WildBench-Score (WB-S). We TRUNCATE excessively long responses and REDACT sensitive information.

 Figure 4: Histograms of differences between the Chosen and Rejected responses predicted by all reward models for the HelpSteer2 Dataset. We split results based on annotator agreement. On the X axis for our trained Bradley-Terry models, we report binned values of $P(\text{Chosen} > \text{Rejected})$. On the X axis for our trained MSE-Regressions models, we report binned values of $|r_A - r_B|$. On the Y axis, we report the percent of examples in each bin.

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 Figure 5: Histograms of differences between the Chosen and Rejected responses predicted by all reward models for the Multipref Dataset. We split results based on annotator agreement. On the X axis, we report binned values of $P(\text{Chosen} > \text{Rejected})$. On the Y axis, we report the percent of examples in each bin.

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