


Chapter 1

Political Identity, Democratic Empowerment, and Political Learning

Niels Noergaard Kristensen

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9303-9331>
Aalborg University, Denmark

ABSTRACT

The political commotion of the world is rising anew. Political challenges and political turmoil unfold side by side, and at the fore of many current political struggles stands the notion of “political identity.” Identity is a key asset in citizens’ orientations toward political issues, their selection of information, and not least their political participation at large. The character of political challenges and struggles suggests that we need a revitalized and more comprehensive conceptual framework and operationalization of political identity. Political identity plays a role in most political activity, and the authors engage in elaborating the concept. The discussion presents the notion of political learning in order to bridge the complex and vigorous relations between on the one side political orientations and awareness and on the other side current manifestations of democratic political identities.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3677-3.ch001

INTRODUCTION

Modern sociology has for decades been focusing on the relationship between individual identity and modernity. Still, writing at a time of climate change, global warming and the spread of coronavirus, the world seems in a frenzy, and it appears that Ulrich Beck's (1992) concept of 'risk society' or Anthony Giddens's (1991) notion of the need for 'ontological security' has never been more topical or relevant than it is today. Turbulent times challenge democratic politics and governance in Western countries, and the political commotion of the world is rising anew. Party systems, in many instances, have failed to produce solutions to vital policy problems, like immigration, world trade, the spread of pandemic diseases or environmental issues. All these issues affect politics, as well as how politics is perceived at the individual level thus affecting political identities. Identity represents a key asset in citizens' orientations towards political issues, their selection of information and not least their political participation as a whole. Political identity is at the forefront of many political debates. The locked conventional thinking of identity politics, however, seems to permeate most political debates. The character of many political struggles seems to suggest that we need a more comprehensive conceptual framework of political identity, and also new insights focusing on how prevailing political identities develop.

The continued significance of political identity and its relation to democratic liberal ideals is testified by the momentum and worldwide scale of new types of social movements, such as the #MeToo movement. However, a large segment of regular citizens have begun to express support for more autocratic ideals (Foa & Monk, 2017), and conventions of what democratic political identity is (or ought to be) are in flux. Political scientists have long assumed that 'democratic consolidation' is a one-way street: once democracy in a particular country has been consolidated, the political system is safe and liberal democracy is here to stay. This picture is no longer evident, and to some democracy gets closer to a 'moribund' reality in times in which people in advanced democracies trust their elected politicians less than second-hand car salesmen (Tormey, 2015). Ordinary citizens have become increasingly convinced that the political class is not truly representative of their interests and that representative democracy is not necessarily a trustworthy vehicle to safeguard social justice. In consequence, there is a lacuna of knowledge about how and why individuals to a different degree become politically active (or non-active). Today, we are living in a situation of a complex mix of identities and with a disparate assemblage of cultures that are too heterogeneous to fit old moulds. Indeed, in the era of declining collective identity and grand ideologies (also known as 'reflexive individualization'), people are increasingly becoming an unrepresentable jumble of individuals and identities (Tormey, 2015). The changing character of political affiliations, societal cleavages and representative politics has given rise to a number

26 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/political-identity-democratic-empowerment-and-political-learning/257971

Related Content

Critical Examination of the Implications of Youth Unemployment in Zimbabwe
Tawanda Zinyama (2019). *Participation of Young People in Governance Processes in Africa* (pp. 148-175).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/critical-examination-of-the-implications-of-youth-unemployment-in-zimbabwe/230219

A Comparative Examination of Developments in the Modern Civil Service in South Korea and the Philippines and Their Divergence After the Post-War Era

Ador R. Torneo, Enzo Miguel M. De Borja, Junmo Kim and Seung-Bum Yang (2025). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-21).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-comparative-examination-of-developments-in-the-modern-civil-service-in-south-korea-and-the-philippines-and-their-divergence-after-the-post-war-era/382477

Spatial Planning and Flood Resilience: Lessons From the 2021 Bozkurt Flood, Türkiye

Yasin Bektaand Zarife Demirezen (2025). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-36).

www.irma-international.org/article/spatial-planning-and-flood-resilience/388553

Terrorist Psychology and Its Impact on International Security

Ketevan Chakhava (2022). *World Politics and the Challenges for International Security* (pp. 165-185).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/terrorist-psychology-and-its-impact-on-international-security/298959

Impact of Mentoring and Support Programs on Academic Performance of African American Males: Analysis Through a Critical Race Theory Lens

Andrew S. Herridge and Montelleo DeLeon Hoble Jr. (2022). *Research Anthology on Racial Equity, Identity, and Privilege* (pp. 1069-1078).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/impact-of-mentoring-and-support-programs-on-academic-performance-of-african-american-males/296992