

Personalizing politics and realizing democracy

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Abstrak

Few people today would challenge the legitimacy of democracy as the form of government most congenial to modern citizenship, as it requires members to treat each other as equals and to cooperate in the pursuit of conditions that may maximize both the promotion of individuals potential and the achievement of public welfare. Yet a number of facts challenge these ideals. Declining political participation, as well as skepticism and dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy among citizens of established democracies, attests to a kind of paradox. Citizens increasing capacity to control their own circumstances within their private, social, and economic spheres is at odds with their decreasing capacity to exert control over their political representatives and over the domain of politics in general. The shift of opposing political coalitions toward more pragmatic and ideologically elusive platforms, aimed at attracting a larger sphere of the electorate, has greatly diluted the ideological identity of parties that have replaced traditional class movements. All politics has become more personalized as political preferences are increasingly dependent on the likes and dislikes of citizens, and ultimately on the personality characteristics of political candidates capable of attracting voters preferences. These pressures urge legislators to better appreciate the significant changes that have occurred in citizens political reasoning and action, as well as the diversities among citizens of different political contexts. Likewise, scientists are urged to disclose the psychological structures and mechanisms that set the conditions for individuals democratic participation.