AUFSÄTZE

The dysfunctional paradox of identity politics in liberal democracies

Simon Bein

Abstract Liberal democracy, according to a popular criticism, cannot create a common identity from sources of itself, is only a means to the end of fulfilling individual identity and autonomy needs. So, what holds the society of a liberal democracy together? A necessary common, explicitly political identity seems inevitably fragile under these conditions. Thus, the central question, then, is whether this paradox generates dysfunctionalities that endanger current liberal democratic orders and, if so, how to ground a functional model of democratic political identity. To this end, the paper shows, first, that the current identity crisis is related with the concepts of modernity and liberalism. Second, in the central theoretical section, the cause of this must be explored, namely the paradox of identity politics in liberal democracies. In connection with this, third, an anomic state is discussed as a possible consequence, which can manifest itself on several levels through loss of identity and trust, radicalization, or withdrawal, thereby manifesting dysfunctionalities. In the concluding part, it will be argued for an imaginable solution handling this tension between democratic universalism and relational demarcation that can ultimately point towards the possibility of a common democratic identity and thus the avoidance of anomie.

Keywords Anomie · Crisis of democracy · Liberalism · Hegemony · Collective identity

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Das dysfunktionale Paradox der Identitätspolitik in liberalen Demokratien

Zusammenfassung Die liberale Demokratie, so eine verbreitete Kritik, kann keine gemeinsame Identität aus sich selbst heraus erzeugen, sondern ist nur ein Mittel zum Zweck, um die Bedürfnisse nach individueller Identität und Autonomie zu erfüllen. Was also hält die Gesellschaft einer liberalen Demokratie zusammen? Eine notwendige gemeinsame, explizit politische Identität erscheint unter diesen Bedingungen zwangsläufig brüchig. Die zentrale Frage ist daher, ob dieses Paradoxon Dysfunktionalitäten erzeugt, die die gegenwärtigen liberal-demokratischen Ordnungen gefährden, und wenn ja, wie ein funktionales Modell demokratischer politischer Identität begründet werden kann. Zu diesem Zweck wird erstens gezeigt, dass die aktuelle Identitätskrise mit den Konzepten der Moderne und des Liberalismus zusammenhängt. Zweitens muss im zentralen theoretischen Teil die Ursache dafür erforscht werden, nämlich das Paradoxon der Identitätspolitik in liberalen Demokratien. Im Zusammenhang damit wird drittens ein anomischer Zustand als mögliche Folge diskutiert, der sich auf mehreren Ebenen durch Identitäts- und Vertrauensverlust, Radikalisierung oder Rückzug manifestieren kann und damit Dysfunktionalitäten offenbart. Im abschließenden Teil wird für einen denkbaren Umgang mit dieser Spannung zwischen demokratischem Universalismus und relationaler Abgrenzung argumentiert, der letztlich auf die Möglichkeit einer gemeinsamen demokratischen Identität und damit die Vermeidung von Anomie hindeuten kann.

Schlüsselwörter Anomie · Krise der Demokratie · Liberalismus · Hegemonie · Kollektive Identität

1 Introduction

Identity just has become one of the most polarized and conflicting terms in Western democratic societies, and not only there. Democratic political orders are more than ever faced with the question of how and which collective identity can guarantee sufficient social and political cohesion. Much has been written about identity conflicts and the individualization of modern societies, and the associated explanations are often of a more sociological or economic character: the striving for individual recognition is said to be due to a fixed component of the human soul, the *thymos* (Fukuyama 2018a), or is fostered by the structural transformation of modern mass societies into societies of singularities (Reckwitz 2017). 'New culture wars' (Kakutani 2018, p. 43) are the result, value differences divide societies into ever smaller groups that are increasingly hostile to each other, and often have different ideas about what constitutes democracy and what sources of identification the country's own democratic order provides (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Wilde et al. 2019).

According to Ingolfur Blühdorn, understandings of identity and thus also of democracy are becoming individualized, and collective orientations toward the common good as the meaning and goal of political participation belong to a time before the 'post-democratic turn' (2013, p. 151). One could say that the identity of liberal

democracy is in crisis because it has itself produced an identity pluralism that is increasingly displacing political compromise and decision-making as a negotiation of plural interests. One central reason for this identity crisis is that in many cases national identity, or the identity of the *ethnos*, no longer coincides with the identity of the *demos*. Since the foundation of nation-state democracies, their homogeneity has always been one of the main reasons for social cohesion and collective sentiments (Mounk 2019, p. 210). Thus, assimilation was the dominant principle of national identity formation until the beginning of the 'differentialist turn' (Brubaker 2001) in the 1980s. An 'apertist liberalism' (Reckwitz 2019, p. 242) that emphasizes openness, cultural pluralization and social mobility has become the hegemonic political paradigm and provokes its own crisis through right-wing populism and their ideas of a 'true' and homogenous people.

Democracies now face the fundamental challenge of establishing and promoting a common, specifically *political* collective identity that focuses on the democratic order as a source of identification. The central research question of the paper is therefore: *Is the political culture of liberal democracy becoming dysfunctional because of its focus on subjective identities and thus central points of common identification with democracy and democratic politics are being lost?* The question of dysfunctionalities of Western democracies has not yet been systematically brought into the context of identity conflicts. This is rather surprising, since it is sometimes assumed, especially under the catchword of *identity politics*, that the latter could cause considerable damage to democracy. As a single keyword, the term is present in the political science debate (for example Whitehead 2003; Bowen 2003; Wang et al. 2021), but there has been no systematic analysis of the causes, locations, and consequences of dysfunctionalities in established and liberal democracies.

According to Osterberg-Kaufmann et al. (2022), political systems, and thus democracies, are functional as long as they manage to adapt to permanently changing environmental requirements. Dysfunctionalities, instead, occur when these mechanisms of adaptation no longer function. From a systems-theoretical perspective, this first approach to the concept of dysfunctional democracy emphasizes the importance of the interplay of different levels of a political order, especially the connection between input and output. A central parameter at the input-side of political systems is the political culture: If its values, norms and policy preferences change, the system comes under stress and must react to this: 'At the heart of our discussion on political culture is the belief that political structures and political cultures are mutually reinforcing in stable political systems' (Almond et al. 2004, p. 62). Identities are a part of political cultures and in this respect also mark relevant input conditions into the political system. Consequently, the concept of identity has become an important subject of political culture research (Wiarda 2014; Pickel and Pickel 2018; Bizeul et al. 2019; Bergem 2019; Knobloch 2019; Bein 2020b, 2022) after being relevant initially in social psychological (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Jenkins 2008), philosophical (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Taylor 2012) and cultural studies (Hall 1994; Assmann 2000). Thus, building on this, the article aims to discuss the question of identity politics and identity conflicts in the context of systems and democratic theory to consider the extent to which dysfunctional effects can arise under the hegemony of a specific political identity, namely that of liberalism.

Hence, the paper shows, first, that the current identity crisis is related with the concepts of modernity and liberalism. This requires the concept of identity to be clarified initially. Second, in the central theoretical section, the cause of this must be explored, namely the paradox of identity politics in liberal democracies. In connection with this, third, an anomic state is discussed as a possible consequence, which can manifest itself on several levels through loss of identity and trust, radicalization, or social withdrawal, thereby manifesting concrete dysfunctionalities in political and social terms. In the concluding part, it will be argued for an imaginable solution handling this tension between democratic universalism and relational demarcation that can ultimately point towards the possibility of a common democratic identity and thus the avoidance of anomie.

2 The identity crisis of western democracies

If the current identity crisis is to be interpreted as a symptom of a possible dysfunctionality of liberal democracies, some central questions must be clarified. Why can the phenomenon be classified as a crisis? Is what is being discussed under identity crisis really a recent phenomenon? And if so, what can be considered as its cause?

John Charvet marks the lack of common identity for liberal democracies and its societies as crucial problem of our modern world, organized by nation-states: 'The problem of political authority in the modern world, in which the ultimate sovereign is supposed to be the people, is how to distribute the population of the world between states in a way that provides the members of each states with a sufficiently robust substantive common identity' (2019, p. 112). It becomes clear that the universal principle of freedom and equality of the individual collides with the claim to delineable political units. Francis Fukuyama (2006, 2018a, b), in particular, has been one of the most vocal proponents of this argument of an identity crisis in liberal democracy. According to Fukuyama, it is above all the extensive focus on a politics of difference and the acknowledgement of cultural groups that makes it difficult for liberal societies to reflect on what they have in common: 'Postmodern societies, particularly those in Europe, feel that they have evolved past identities defined by religion and nation and have arrived at a superior place. But aside from their celebration of endless diversity and tolerance, postmodern people find it difficult to agree on the substance of the good life to which they aspire in common' (Fukuyama 2006, p. 19).

If we ask to what extent this phenomenon is really new and can therefore also be referred to as a new crisis, we must first take into account the explanatory attempts that have already been made. For this purpose, two possible interpretations of the notion of *identity crisis* can be distinguished, which in turn build on each other in their explanatory power. First, liberal Western democracy is said to be in crisis because identity politics endangers democratic discourse. In some places, there is even talk of a replacement of the Political per se in the name of diversity and individuality. Second: liberal Western democracy is in crisis because its populations do not have a common (political) identity (anymore) or because it cannot generate

such a common identity. These two possible interpretations will now be explored in detail.

The first thesis on the identity crisis is that it has been triggered by left-wing identity politics (Lilla 2016; Fukuyama 2018a; Susemichel and Kastner 2018; Heyes 2020), which has then in turn also given rise to right-wing identity politics, and, thus, to critiques of identity politics (Jullien 2017; Hidalgo 2020; Feddersen and Gessler 2021). Opposing voices claim the necessity of identity politics in democracy, since only in this way can certain groups claim their universal basic rights to equality and participation (Müller 2021; Schubert and Schwiertz 2021). Identity politics is generally understood as a political strategy of a minority or marginalized group that advocates against a state of discrimination and for greater recognition and political participation: 'identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination' (Heyes 2020: n.p.). The point of contention as to whether identity politics causes or accelerates an identity crisis and possibly a general crisis of democracy seems to be whether identity-political groups legitimately insist on recognition based on universal rights, or whether those groups, by exaggerating and codifying differences, make political contestation and democratic compromise impossible. Usually, the judgement differs according to whether 'constructive' or 'fundamentalist' identity politics is the object of analysis, to use a distinction made by Thomas Meyer (2002, p. 34). The fact that fundamentalist identity politics, such as those that can arise from a religious context or are represented in the right-wing populist or right-wing extremist milieu, can lead to an identity crisis in democracy because they challenge fundamental democratic values, is widely recognized and will not be discussed further here.

The less clear challenge to democracy is identity politics that occurs *in the name* of democracy, freedom and equality: The form of identity politics meant here took its starting point in the 1970s with civil rights and women's rights movements, indigenous protests, and the inscription of formally established but socially neglected equalities (Auernheimer 2020; Heyes 2020). But soon, according to Oliver Hidalgo (2020, p. 16), the conflict between left and right, which is central to democracy and initially not dubious per se, became established in the field of identity politics as well, when projects of national identity or national *Leitkultur* were then formed in opposition to it (see also Bein 2020a, 2022). Thus, it is legitimate that, in the sense of rather right-wing identity politics, the importance of common social values or, for example, the preservation of cultural particularities are proclaimed in the name of the democratic community, and that, in return, left-wing identity politics want diversity and plural cultural identities to be recognized. In a democratic-theoretical way, Hidalgo tries to interpret this identity crisis of democracy, which is expressed in the aggravation of tensions between these identity politics: 'The "identity" of democracy itself is therefore only preserved if both left-wing and right-wing identity politics achieve at best partial successes, stage victories and/or temporary gains. The contradiction itself, the opposing political identities, which in different ways

emphasize the "same" and "different" that exist simultaneously in democracy, must remain intact' (Hidalgo 2020, p. 22).

Whether one sees (non-fundamentalist) identity politics as a danger to democracy because an agonistic discourse is lashed into antagonistic friend/foe schemas, or rather as a symptom of emancipatory self-empowerment of certain groups, one thing is clear: it can be read as a sign of possible dysfunctionality, either because social groups do not experience sufficient participation and recognition despite comprehensive democratic rights, or, depending on how it is read, because differences are being fixed and the general, unifying aspects are being lost from the democratic discourse. However, the answer to this question also depends on the second argument on Western democracies' *identity crisis*, which is now to be discussed.

This second point states that democracies depend on a common identity but are unable to generate it due to the liberal focus on divergence and individuality. This conclusion follows on the one hand, the criticism of identity politics already described as promoting the disintegration of society (Fukuyama 2018a) and, on the other hand, the assumption that a community needs a unifying element in order to govern itself. Whether democracies need a common collective identity is, of course, first of all a normative question, which has been discussed thoroughly at least since the so-called communitarianism-liberalism controversy in the 1980s (Honneth 1993; Taylor 2002). Nevertheless, it can also be shown from the perspective of modernization theory that in modernity, democracy and the nation-state belong together and that their collective identities have also largely overlapped (Guibernau 2007). However, when national identities lose their binding force and political orders remain as unifying elements, the question arises anew: do democratic systems need a collective identity of their own and why does liberal democracy find it so difficult to establish such an identity beyond national identities (Abizadeh 2002)?

I will refer here to a modernization-theoretical and a democracy-theoretical approach (the arguments of which are put forward by various authors, not all of whom can be considered here), which will then be bundled into a systems-theoretical perspective in the following chapter three. From a modernization-theoretical perspective, Ingolfur Blühdorn has variously suggested interpreting the crisis of liberal democracy as a 'post-democratic turn' (2018): the liberal-representative democracy of the postwar period, the second modernity, can no longer satisfy the needs of individuals in today's societies of the third modernity. Following this assumption, liberal democracies, which have been organized around stable and long-term identities of political classes and ideologies, as well as the associated cleavages, are transformed into simulative democracies under the conditions of second-order emancipation: the individual subjects, their very flexible identity needs are the focus, and thus also the liberation from the central democratic premises of first-order emancipation: social equality, representation, genuine participation. According to Blühdorn, after this post-democratic turn, subjects on the one hand want to continue to experience and preserve the emancipatory values of democracy, but at the same time do not want to commit themselves to them: 'simulative politics, in contrast, is about the simultaneity of incompatibles. It allows for an experience of sovereignty that does not compromise the agenda of second order emancipation' (Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2019, p. 206). In short, the modernization of liberal societies has overtaken their own un-

derstanding of progress and emancipatory values. Referring to a famous sentence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, Blühdorn writes that first-order emancipation, for which the current liberal representative democracies embodied the proper system, can be compared to liberation *from* self-induced immaturity, while second-order emancipation and the transition to the third modernity (or late modernity) can rather be described as liberation *from* responsibility to maturity. Rather, it is no longer even possible, nor even wanted, to define criteria of common sense at all, understood as 'reliable orientation to the principles of a superior, general reason' (Blühdorn 2018, p. 167).

The late modern societies of the West are characterized by a focus on the self-determination of the individual, on the recognition of difference and the particular. The crisis of liberal democracy is thus both a crisis and a success story of identities. According to this modernization-theoretical explanation, the lack of a common identity is initially not to be seen as a problem or even crisis of democracy, but as a transformation and adaptation to changing emancipatory needs of citizens: 'traditional-style representative democracy is not only increasingly dysfunctional and inefficient in terms of its systemic performance (factual problem-solving capacity), but in terms of its emancipatory performance as well' (Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2019, p. 201). However, more than a few point to the dangers of such individualization and disintegration, which cannot be met by a return to traditional national majority identities, as Fukuyama (2018b) demands, but rather by a strengthening of the liberal basic ideas of tolerance, recognition and universalism (Nunner-Winkler 1997).

In addition, we can point to a democracies theory strand of argumentation to explain liberal democracies lack of common identity: Philip Manow (2021) has recently described how the liberalization of democracy, i.e., the extension of central political-liberal basic rights, has led to a democratization and de-democratization of democracy at the same time. Manow first applies this argument to explain the rise and success of populist movements and parties, which is rooted in this simultaneity: democracy has become more democratized through the liberal paradigm, because the scope and extent of political inclusion and participation have been significantly improved; at the same time, democracy has become de-democratized, in that political disputes are no longer fought within democracy, but are fought over democracy as a whole as antagonistic identity politics. In doing so, populist protest for Manow (2021, p. 13) highlights a dysfunctionality of representative democracy, as this is voiced in the name of democracy (true popular sovereignty) against (liberal) democracy. The expansion of political participation and inclusion rights has led liberal-representative democracy into a crisis because increased demands for recognition and participation do not fit with the previous mechanisms of political representation, whose central actors have been political parties. According to this reading, the identity crisis is also expressed by the fact that democracy, which is organized around parties, currently fails to have the organizational form to translate identity conflicts into political disputes and to shape them constructively (Pausch and Ulrich 2018).

Overall, it can be said that the identity crisis of liberal democratic societies can be interpreted in two ways: first, as the danger of identity politics for democratic discourse, thereby reducing the ability of democratic politics to compromise; and second, as simultaneously enabling a big variety of identities and thereby making

a common identity impossible. The emergence of identity politics has been enabled by liberalism and the politics of difference since the 1970s. Before that, in many postwar democracies, cleavage and thus political identity structures had been translated into regulated political conflict by means of political organizations such as parties and trade unions, usually additionally held together under the guise of a national identity. Globalization, migration and the growing social, cultural, and religious heterogeneity of societies, liberal cosmopolitanism and the dismantling of borders are posing the question of collective identity anew in many societies. Comprehensive political identities have lost significance and identity-political actors are demanding the recognition of specific cultural or other identities. All in all, the identity crisis of liberal societies can thus be a possible indication of a dysfunctionality of liberal democracy.

3 The cause: the paradox of collective identity in liberal democracies

My central thesis for explaining this identity crisis as a symptom of a dysfunctionality of liberal democracies is that modern democracy, under the hegemony of political liberalism, produces a freedom to and plurality of individual and collective identities, which at the same time endangers the identity of democracy. This represents the paradox of identity politics in liberal democracy. Robert Dahl (2000), among others, introduced to speak of a 'democratic paradox', pointing at the discrepancy between low support for democratic institutions and a generally high acceptance of democratic values and principles. Blühdorn (2013), instead, develops the argument of a 'post-democratic paradox': this refers to the fact that, although modern citizens are turning away from the ideal of active participatory and common good-oriented democracy for reasons of political overload and the exaggeration of individual subjectivity, at the same time the demand for democratic principles such as participation and responsiveness is increasing. My argument takes up these thoughts but wants to focus the paradox within liberal democracy here even more strongly regarding identity politics and to consider the consequences not only as a transformation (Blühdorn 2013, p. 159) of democracy, but also as possible dysfunctionalities. Therefore, first, the relationship between the concepts of identity, democracy, and liberalism must be clarified.

3.1 What is identity?

It is not easy to define a concept called identity, actually collective identity, hence some scholars argue for giving up the scientific term itself completely (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Niethammer 2000; Jullien 2017). While originally mainly psychologists (Erikson 1976), social psychologists (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and sociologists (Mead 1987) dealt with the concept of identity, the term has also found its way into the vocabulary of political science since the 1970s (Bußhof 1970; Mackenzie 1978), although the rapid increase in corresponding studies can only be observed since about the 1990s (Straub 1998; Jörissen and Zirfas 2010).

An understanding of identity that is appropriate to the research interest here regards identity in a constructivist, non-essentialist way: Identities are based on social attributions that are not inherently given and are never immutable, although fundamentalist or extremist identity politics proclaim this. While identities can also be constructed through primordial codes, i.e. natural characteristics such as skin color or biological sex (Giesen 1999, p. 32), inclusion or exclusion based on these characteristics is always socially erected. With Anthony Appiah (2020, p. 27–33), one can approach a definition of identity via the question of the meaning of identity for its bearers: Identity means, first, the construction of multi-layered categories, second, the enabling of self-determination within these, third, the imparting of certain instructions for action to oneself, and fourth, the influence on the behavior of others toward oneself. It is thus to be understood as the ordering framework of a social group and consequently as a way of the individual to locate itself in its social environment. Also concepts of individual, personal or social identity (Jenkins 2008; Straub 1998) cannot be explained in isolation from the involvement of the subject in social relations and collectives, but they remain limited to the relationship between the individual and the environment. In his definition, Francis Fukuyama insistently refers to the relational dimension, according to which identity always emerges only in the dissociation from the other and thus also through the awareness of one's own or other's attributions. Identity, thus, 'grows out of a distinction between one's true inner self and an outer world of social rules and norms that does not adequately recognize that inner self's worth or dignity' (Fukuyama 2018b, p. 6). Identity is about recognition and self-determination, about the feeling of being able to be and be valued as one sees oneself. It is clear that personal and collective identity cannot be separated, as identity cannot be thought of without categorizations, groupings, and the tailoring of a particular way of saying 'Us', as described by Tristan Garcia (2018). For Garcia, the 'essence of political discourse [...] lies in defining what we mean by this "Us", what our rights are, our legitimate claims, our idea of society as a whole, but also in identifying as negatives those who oppose us' (2018, p. 10).

I want to suggest, following the approach of Jan Assmann (2000, p. 17), three elementary dimensions of collective identity in general, before the concept can be specified in more detail for the context of a political (democratic) community: a normative, a narrative, and an affirmative dimension. Even if each constitutes an elementary part of collective identity, yet they cannot be considered separate from each other. These three dimensions of identity can be extracted as a unifying theme both from the theoretical-philosophical debate on the concepts of collective (Connolly 2002; Emcke 2018; Delitz 2018), cultural (Hall 1994; Bizeul and Rudolf 2020), or national identity (Eisenstadt 1991; Anderson 2006; Guibernau 2007; Smith 2000), as well as from numerous empirical studies on the concept, especially in the field of social movements and collective action (Bader 1991; Melucci 1995; Schmidtke 1995), although often the focus in previous definitions of the concept is not on the simultaneity of these three aspects, which in turn I want to proclaim as the benefit of my own approach in the field of identity studies.

The normative element forms the basis and the answer to the question of common standards, of purpose and values of good and evil, right and wrong. Without a consensus on what is considered normatively desirable and what serves the common

good, the collective cannot remain stable in the long term and achieve a transposition of this order of values and norms into a formalized structure and legal order. Appiah refers to this as the concrete 'contents' (2020, p. 64) of any identity, and yet Alexis de Tocqueville noted, 'without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action people exist, but never a social body' (1985, p. 219). What should collective identity look like without a unifying value base, without a shared idea of what values and norms guide action and of how life and the environment should ideally respond to them? Heike Delitz (2018, p. 25) also describes this as an external reason for justifying the collective, a sometimes even transcendent and normative ultimate justification (see also Vorländer 2013). Such a normative reason can be the transmission of a religious message or calling, a universal political principle such as freedom or equality, or the exaltation of regional uniqueness. According to Andreas Reckwitz, 'valorization' (2017, p. 78) and normative charging can nowadays be attached to almost any object, building, leisure activity, or personal characteristic. They thus become an end in themselves of identity formation, but their value can just as quickly be withdrawn again.

Then, throughout the second dimension of a functional collective identity, the normative basic order finds harmony in the cultural life-worlds and everyday practices, which, moreover, bear witness to the common past and thus carry the collective specificity into the present (Delitz 2018, p. 24). Without the idea of a narrative continuity, or identity in time, no stable collective feelings can develop. A shared cultural memory does lead to the normative basis not standing in a vacuum and collective identity merely remaining a 'pseudo-identity' (Straub 2004, p. 299). Without that, collective identity would not go beyond stereotypical and generalizing attributions and standardizations and thus not fulfill a basic function of identity, namely the communicative construction of a social group. Only the subjective understanding that one's own collective is something special and that common history, communal places and tellings, regional or linguistic continuities, represent a shared commonality with the other members can lead to an internalization of this order of values and norms. Cultural practices and rites thus represent the everyday action basis of any collective identity, and the symbolization of a narrative continuity marks a crucial distinguishing feature (Abdelal et al. 2006, p. 697). Besides this, the embedding in this second dimension also fulfills another function of identity: normative ultimate justifications and value concepts do not remain static, but identities must always be contestable and offer possibilities of change by arguing about the question of what actually constitutes identity, 'who belongs, how the people in question are constituted, how they behave and how they should be treated' (Appiah 2020, p. 33). The designation as *historical*, as I labeled this dimension in an earlier work (Bein 2022) should therefore not lead to the assumption that what was once established is only handed down in a backward-looking way, but that the narrative of continuity can always be re-established. Cultural practices and narratives derived from this, which define ingroup and outgroup in everyday actions, are also variable, but they must exist in some form, otherwise we could not speak of identity (Bizeul 2020, p. 38).

Third, the basis for subjective communization lies also in the reflexive awareness of the collectivity and the coming together in cultural practice, which also implies the recognition of their normative foundations. So, only through self-reflection and

the opening of one's own view for the 'other', a positive affirmation can take place (Weber 1964, p. 29). Guibernau (2007, p. 11–13) also refers to this as the psychological dimension of identity: in order to become virulent, in order to acquire meaning for the bearers of the identity, and in order to bring about corresponding behavior towards those bearers of the identity, affirmative ties must develop between the members of an identity group. Conversely, of course, the subjective level is also decisive for confrontation with other identities, for identity-political action toward outsiders. The knowledge of this psychological, or affirmative, dimension of identity goes back to the origins of class theory (Susemichel and Kastner 2018) or even sociological research on the functional differentiation of societies (Durkheim 1992; Zoll 2000). Solidarity and feelings of cohesion and community are not based on objective criteria, the existence of a *class per se*, but on the subjective feeling of a *class acting for itself*, which is aware of its common situation and interests and ideals derived from it. In other words: collective identity is affectively generated identity (Delitz 2018, p. 34).

3.2 Identity and democracy

Identities, and thus also collective identities, are part of the political culture of a political system, since they emerge in and out from society. Heike Delitz (2018, p. 29) therefore always denotes collective identities as cultural identities as well. When we look at ourselves as societies in democratic systems, identities are thus also necessarily to be considered as a relevant input for democracy, understood here in terms of systems theory, as the interplay of input and output to produce collectively binding decisions with regard to system preservation.

I want to set out now some crucial considerations arguing on the connection between collective identities and the general functioning of a democratic political system. A crucial definition of a political system calls it 'a set of institutions [...] that formulate and implement the collective goals of a society or of groups within it' (Almond et al. 2004, p. 15). Following this structural-functional approach, a political system is equivalent to any other form of societal systems, and thus the understanding of functions, structures and processes holding alive a (political) community can be generalized in a systematic manner: First, the political system gets input from intra- or extra-societal environments like the economic or cultural sphere. Easton's (1965, p. 114) key indicators to identify these inputs are support and demands. Second, the political system obtains structures to handle the input and generate output as result of the political decision-making process. Third, these structures are able to generate a certain output and thus fulfill one of the central functions of a political system. Fourth, there is a feedback loop between input and output characterizing the permanent flow of exchange within the system. Following on from this last point, one can also insert the brief observation of why the relationship between identities, identity conflicts, and the political system can be presumed to be entirely different in an autocracy or dictatorship: the permeability between input and output is not present in a non-democratic system, the possibilities for the expression of identity-political conflicts and demands within the system are limited, and access to identity construction is hegemonically controlled. Indeed, a recent study showed that civic

identity beliefs based on recognition of democratic institutions and equal rights for all are more likely to be associated with preference for democracy, and 'thick' ethno-national or exclusive identity beliefs are more strongly correlated with preference for authoritarian forms of government (Erhardt et al. 2021). A correlation between democratic regime type and openness to plural identities can thus be assumed.

It has already been pointed out on various occasions that although the plurality of lifestyles and political ideas is part and parcel of a plural democracy, this also creates a dilemma, because a minimum of supportive attitudes toward the democratic system, its actors and values is necessary for its stability (Almond and Verba 1963). A democratic state cannot, and here we come back to the difference to autocracy, define the 'common' of a democratic identity and, according to a well-known dictum, democracy is dependent on normative foundations which it cannot create itself (Böckenförde 1976).

Liberal-representative democracy in nation-states involves a paradox between universal principles and specifically national, ethnic, religious, gender, racial and linguistic interests (Benhabib 1998). It therefore requires a certain democratic ethos, an ethical impregnation as Habermas (1993, 2006) has called it, or even a superior democratic identity, which is not to be misunderstood as homogeneity, but as an identity of the unequal (Benhabib 1998, p. 97). Thus, if the necessary overarching support for the political community is no longer to be gained from the resources of national identities, to contradict Russell Dalton (1999, p. 72) here, a ground is needed that can be gained from democracy itself. In his analysis of identity politics, Thomas Meyer (2002, p. 178) proposes to distinguish between particular political identities and a common democratic identity (or culture): what is common are then minimal prerequisites of a political culture, which is therefore also considered meaningful by other specific identities, since only in this mutual recognition can the basis of one's own identity and its right to self-assertion be guaranteed. Christoph Möllers, emphasizing the procedural dimension, says, 'whoever decides democratically has a democratic identity' (2008, p. 48). And Will Kymlicka considers what political sources of common identification a multinational and multicultural state can offer, outlining the idea of 'deep diversity': 'this means that the members of a polyethnic and multinational state must not only respect diversity, but also respect a diversity of approaches to diversity' (Kymlicka 1995, p. 190).

To bring these exemplary discussions of the connection between identities and democracy to a common denominator, I would like to return to Hidalgo's (2019, 2020) argument. Accordingly, democracy, as a collective organizational form of political decision-making, has its own identity, that of balancing and tolerating irresolvable but legitimate tensions. Such tensions then include specific identity conflicts, especially those that seek to achieve interpretive sovereignty in the context of political disputes. Thus, while Fukuyama (2006, p. 12) accuses liberal democracy of having no identity in a negative sense, this identity of democracy can certainly be normatively charged and positively interpreted; at the same time, this reveals its dangers under the hegemony of the liberal paradigm: The identity of democracy is to endure and keep in balance identity-political tensions. This must be the identity of democracy, which I have also called democratic identity, in which all the 'pillars' (Jörke 2011) or different basic principles of democracy that have characterized it,

Table 1 Democratic collective identity dimensions and their functional expression. (Source Bein 2022)

Identity dimension	Functional expression
Normative basics	General values and norms provide orientation and guarantee integration of social groups based on a liberal constitution
Narrative continuity	Narratives of collective permanence lay the groundwork for cultural habits and everyday traditions but remain open for transformation
Affirmative bindings	Mutual feelings of solidarity and collective belonging ensure the cohesion of the political community

especially since the second transformation toward modern representative democracy (Dahl 1989, p. 24–33), are to be preserved.

Based on this, we can now consider, in accordance with the three dimensions of collective identity, what such a functional identity of democracy (or democratic identity) might look like in concrete terms (see also Bein 2022; Sebaldt 2015, p. 189). Democratic identity is then understood as identity of the democratic system which includes and embeds the political conflict of various particular identity politics. Thus, democratic identity is not a form of identity that emerges from below, from a certain social group or individual, and brings its demands to bear on the political system, but rather the form an identity necessarily inherent in democracy per se, which is then optimally internalized and adopted by a large part of its citizens. Table 1 presents the three-dimensional differentiation of a functional democratic identity: 'Ideally, democracy provides an inclusive identity offer to which a large proportion of citizens feels connected and which, in addition to providing a common normative basis, can also create an emotional, solidarity-based connection between members of a society. But this offer must also be open to joint negotiation and dynamic adaptation to new life circumstances, a changing population, and newly arriving population groups who can participate equally in the process of identity formation' (Bein 2022). Seyla Benhabib has called this the process of democratic iteration, that means of 'collective shifts of meaning' (2008, p. 48), because the contradiction and simultaneous necessity of inclusion and exclusion must be constantly and repeatedly renegotiated. The approach to a functional elaboration of the three dimensions of democratic identity should also be understood in this sense.

3.3 Democratic identity and the paradigm of political liberalism

To further advance the argument of the dysfunctionality of liberal democracies due to the paradox of identities, we now need a concrete analysis of the liberal paradigm and its influence on the shaping of a functional identity of democracy. Can such a functional democratic identity emerge under the paradigm of political liberalism, or does not a specific dysfunctionality of liberal democracy consist precisely in the fact that it emphasizes individuality and difference, but at the same time thereby endangers the identity of democracy? According to Heyes (2020), the liberal democratic order is a precondition for identity politics. But: 'The challenge to democratic and liberal theory at the present is how to recognize some of the legitimacy in group identity claims without undermining the universalist principles of the liberal

Table 2 Liberal political identity. (Own illustration)

Identity dimension	Ideal-typical expression in the liberal paradigm
Normative basics	Negative freedom and autonomy of the individual (*freedom as non-interference*)
Narrative continuity	Universalism and neutrality exclude specific-dominant reference points of the collective beyond political-institutional narratives
Affirmative bindings	Instrumental commitment through the value of a cooperative society for one's freedom

democratic state' (Benhabib 1998, p. 87). The liberal paradigm is thus constructed hereafter as a specific political identity that has been dominant in most of Western societies for the last decades and, according to my thesis, increasingly endangers the functional identity of democracy and thus proves dysfunctional in its dominant form.

Political liberalism in its variant aiming at cultural dynamism and openness, diversity and deregulation, has been the dominant political paradigm of Western democratic states since the 1970s (Reckwitz 2019, p. 262). Now we can first ask what an ideal-typical political identity of liberalism looks like, before going on to discuss why the real-existing paradigm of political liberalism endangers the identity of democracy and thus exhibits dysfunctional tendencies in this respect (see Table 2). The search for liberal concepts of political identity ultimately revolves around the question to which much of John Rawls' (1979; 2003) work is devoted: under what conditions do free individuals agree on common political principles? Rawls' conception of a democratic community hints at a certain conception of identity, but without ultimately becoming concrete. What is clear is that there must be no comprehensive doctrine that holds a society together for its own sake, which according to Rawls would be impossible in a plural society anyway. A political conception of justice that serves as the basis of community cohesion must maintain neutrality. But beyond that, Rawls nevertheless assumes that citizens recognize justice and self-fulfillment as a common overriding goal and therefore seek to maintain the basic structure of society. Charles Taylor summarizes this liberal-procedural model with the basic thesis that 'the principle of equality and non-discrimination would be broken if society itself advocated one or another conception of the good life' (1993, p. 109). But Rawls wants to show that citizens in the well-ordered society nevertheless have common ultimate goals, because what they have in common is the political goal of justice (Rawls 2003, p. 300).

To systematize these arguments according to the three-dimensional approach of identity, I want to first consider the normative basics of that liberal political identity: there stands primarily the central liberal element of freedom and autonomy of the individual. A strong collective identity that constitutes a community on the basis of a comprehensive, normative doctrine of the particular cannot and must not exist according to the ideal-typical criteria of liberal democracy. The normative basis of the liberal conception of identity is strictly limited to the realm of political equality and freedom and must always be derivable from the interests and goals of the autonomous individual. The normative basis that ultimately holds the collective together is instrumental in nature and is recognized by individuals because they expect

liberal society to provide the best realization of their own interests and guarantee of their own rights and freedoms. Political participation, consequently, tends to be seen as the exchange of individual interests, and political action as a rational means of fulfilling one's own goals of life (Schaal and Heidenreich 2016, p. 127). A normative basis, that goes beyond this instrumental purpose for the individual and becomes an end in itself, is excluded and would contradict the normative premises of liberal democratic theory. In liberalism, the normative reference to the pre-political rights of freedom of the individual, from which any order must be consequential, is made in a transcendental manner. The normative core of negative freedom and individual autonomy overrides any form of communal association and collective self-empowerment, and the pre-political derivation takes place as natural law, divine right, or contract-theoretical argument, depending on the type of liberal theory.

In the realm of narrative continuity, the liberal principles of universalism and state neutrality exclude specific historical-traditional reference points of the basic social order that go beyond the value of individual freedom. Strictly speaking, the historical, narrative embedding of the collective constitutional factor must not exist, or, if necessary, must be very weak. For even a narrative continuity that goes beyond particular memories of the values of freedom and individual autonomy, which society and the political order must exclusively serve, would contradict the basic liberal assumptions. Moreover, the historically charged interpretation of the purpose of society risks violating the principle of universalism and the exclusion of outsiders would follow. The basis of narrative continuity must remain the civic, purely political element of equal and free citizens, and is therefore necessarily limited in its depth and culture-specific scope of meaning. It becomes clear that the cultural center of a society in the sense of liberal identity must thus remain rather an open space to be filled by political universalism, as is also expressed in the ideas of constitutional patriotism (see also Bein 2022, Table 2): 'Political loyalty [...] is not owed to the nation—a collective defining itself through culture—or to humanity per se, but to universalistic principles and (in a rather indirect way) to the procedures of liberal democracy, which usually crystallize in a constitution' (Müller 2010, p. 9).

Finally, affirmative bonding is to be understood as instrumental bonding through recognition of the value of a free and cooperative society and participation in politics as a transaction in the logic of market trades. Even if Keller (2007) and others proclaim a compatibility of patriotism and liberal universalism, there are tensions with the immutable basic principles of liberal theory that cannot be overlooked: the state must be able to justify its political principles and the basic institutional order detached from any particularity, which could be endangered by an overly strong patriotic or even nationalistic embedding of the political order. Costa (2009, p. 97) shows in this respect that both the concrete term 'patriotism' and its content play no role in Rawls' theory and ultimately a strong attachment to a particular community would contradict the self-understanding of all as free and equal. In a new line of conflict, numerous authors contrast the accompanying aspect of cosmopolitanism as a trait of a liberal, global elite of 'anywheres' with the more community-based 'somewheres' (Goodhart 2017; Zürn and De Wilde 2016). The purpose of the social order, i.e., the political collective, is to guarantee and implement one's own rights, freedoms and interests, for which citizens are precisely dependent on the other

members of society. In this respect, this element is also present, but it is instrumental and not to be understood as a substantially strong connection that comes about through a normative and morally comprehensive basis.

Thus, while political liberalism in theory designs an identity centered on the values of tolerance and recognition of individual autonomy and dignity, in reality there is a rather difficult relationship of the liberal paradigm to the identity of democracy, which points to the paradox of identity politics in liberal democracy. Charles Taylor now identifies two key problem areas with this liberal model: Taylor refers to the first objection as the 'problem of viability' (1993, p. 110) of liberal societies. Without the voluntary identification of citizens with the polity, strong cohesion and a stable society cannot emerge, but on what should this identification be based in liberal democracy? According to Taylor, this identification succeeds primarily only through a sense of particularity and a shared historical embeddedness, both of which are difficult to achieve in liberal democracy. The liberal 'common sense' of the twentieth century, however, had told the story of liberal societies as 'collections of individuals' in order 'by acting together, to obtain advantages which they could not secure individually' (Taylor 1993, p. 112). The second fundamental problem of liberal democracy is characterized by with the catchword 'ethnocentrism' (1993, p. 129), which is quite problematic from today's perspective. According to this objection, the model of political liberalism in conjunction with free institutions cannot be applied to heterogeneous societies with many different identities. Taylor explicitly cites the familiar example of the Canadian, but French-speaking province of Quebec has a clear 'cultural-linguistic orientation' (Taylor 1993, p. 130) and forms the basis of patriotic identification. The liberal requirement to exclude specific non-political continuities from the political sphere already reaches its limits here.

One of the central consequences of this liberal conception of political identity is the emergence of irresolvable identity conflicts, in which individuals and groups confront each other with their own conceptions of identity. To stay with Rawls's terminology, there is a clash of different conceptions of the Good Life and consensus on some common ground diminishes. Marc Lilla (2016, 2018) blames liberalism and the absolute primacy of individual desires for recognition as main reason for the loss of the unifying power of this political paradigm—at the expense of the divisive emphasis on diversity and identity politics: "But how should this diversity shape our politics? The standard liberal answer for nearly a generation now has been that we should become aware of and 'celebrate' our differences. Which is a splendid principle of moral pedagogy—but disastrous as a foundation for democratic politics" (Lilla 2016). For the situation in the USA in particular, Lilla outlines a paralyzed liberalism that can no longer guarantee cohesion due to the identity-political charging of any political debate and has focused its observation only on the respective identity groups and their striving for recognition. Even in a liberal society, Lilla argues, the contemplation must go beyond the interests and goals of individuals and specific associations and focus on society as a whole. But the exacerbation of the principles of neutrality and individual autonomy have produced a generation of liberalism and progressivism 'narcissistically unaware of conditions outside their self-defined groups' (Lilla 2016).

Lilla's critique of real-existing liberal democracy reports what Rawls has already attempted to address theoretically: The neglect of the common good due to a primacy of individual interests and desires for recognition. Lilla sees the solution, similar to Fukuyama's call for an inclusive national identity, in a post-identitarian liberalism that addresses citizens as citizens, not as individuals with a specific identity, that again raises political issues of general importance on the agenda and also demands a certain degree of solidarity. This should also include the republican idea of civic duty, which, together with negative rights and freedoms, should ensure that liberal democracy can once again develop an idea of commonality: 'Liberals bring many things to electoral contests: values, commitment, policy proposals. What they don't bring is an image of what our shared way of life might be' (Lilla 2018, p. 7).

Andreas Reckwitz (2019, p. 246) suggests that in every political paradigm that has become dominant is inherent the paradox that, starting from its own track record, it will at some point generate problems for which it cannot itself provide solutions. I assume that this paradox is particularly valid for the paradigm of liberalism and its associated hegemonic political identity, and thus may be a source of dysfunctionality in liberal democracy. This will now be substantiated with a look at possible effects of this paradox, namely a state of anomie.

4 The consequence: anomie as a multidimensional challenge

Anomie describes a condition of systematic decrease of norms and order within a social and political system with several consequences for individual action (Bohle et al. 1997; Sebaldt 2020a, b). Two important sociologists have explained anomie as a social phenomenon of loss of orientation in modern industrial and mass societies, caused in particular by the division of labor and dynamics of social differentiation (Durkheim 1992) as well as by the discrepancy between individuals' cultural goals and their available means (Merton 1968). If one goes beyond a sociological analysis of these phenomena, a political-democratic dimension also becomes clear: anomie is a challenge to democracy, when *loss of and uncertainty about generally binding political norms and values* endanger the cohesion of the democratic community (Bein and Enghofer 2020). In this sense, anomie here has its starting point in the missing and unclear answer of modern democracies on the question of what holds our democracy together. In addition to that comes the fact that the modern subject strives for individual and collective identities that always embody the value of something special and singular.

In the context of identity politics and its paradox in liberal democracy, anomie can be understood as the discrepancy between the respective specific or particular identities and resulting ideals/goals on the one hand and the corresponding effects or implementations on the other. The reason for this discrepancy is: Identity politics can never be fully realized in a democracy, at least if democracy itself, and thus the identity of democracy, is to be preserved. But they must, as Hidalgo (2020, p. 22) puts it, be able to achieve 'partial successes' and hope for substantial recognition of their own identity in the political dispute (and to do the same to the other identities). But if a political paradigm has a permanently hegemonic position, the aforementioned

Table 3 Potentials of anomie due to a one-sided collective identity. (Source: Based on Sebaldt (2020)a) and Bein (2020)b))

Dimension	System level	Individual level
Structures	*Pathological architecture:*	*Divergent identity:*
	Identity rigidity, hegemony of a certain one-sided conception of identity	Insecurity and disorientation due to lack of recognition of own democratic identity needs
Processes	*Pathological formation of will:*	*Divergent action:*
	Exclusion of the antinomian counterparts of a hegemonic identity constellation from the process of identity formation	Reinforcement of pathological behavior patterns, especially ritualism, withdrawal, rebellion, and innovation
Policies	*Pathological norms:*	*Divergent maxims:*
	Rigid dogmatic determination of political norms and values with simultaneous devaluation of others (policy rigidity)	Receptivity to radical positions, loss of trust in democracy, appreciation of competing collectives

discrepancy arises. The following concept of anomie is thus intended to explain the effects that the dominance of the political identity of the particular and the concomitant loss of generally binding norms and values can have. It can also explain how the resulting discrepancy can affect other identities that push for recognition and identity-political success but sometimes do not have the necessary means to do so. Dysfunctional potentials on the input side of the political system are to be expected if the hegemonic political identity neglects permanently the antinomian counterparts of central democratic principles and thus other legitimate political identities within liberal democracy. The identity model is thereby one-sided and leads to a disregard of a necessary openness and balance within democracy. Therefrom, in the long run, an alienation and identity crisis can be generated among those members of the democratic community who identify more strongly with other collective identities.

But what is the expression of this kind of political anomie? Martin Sebaldt and others have synthesized previous theories of anomie, primarily sociological, into an explicitly democratic theoretical approach (Sebaldt et al. 2020). Extending these thoughts, political anomie can become evident on the individual level, the level of collective actors or institutions and the macro or system level (see Table 3). The separate levels and their interactions can never be regarded as completely distinct from each other, but they overlap and are of course mutually dependent. Accordingly, the paradox of identity politics can serve as an explanation for political anomie when, first, a one-sided pathological identity architecture at the system level generates a sense of devaluation and insecurity of individuals' own divergent identities, which in turn are promoted and created almost extensively; if, second, a pathological will-forming process, in which other identity constellations are excluded or devalued, produces or reinforces pathological and anomic behaviors; and if, third, at the level of policy content, a dogmatic fixation on one-sided priorities leads to loss of trust, susceptibility to radical positions, or affirmative rejection into other collectives.

The rigid, essentialist adherence to a certain form of political identity is a pathological architecture. Those anomic potentials also have an effect at the individual level, when insecurity and disorientation are the result of a lack of recognition of one's own conceptions of identity. Canada and Australia, for example, are seen

as prototypes of a change in identity construction from one extreme to the other, from the dominance of a white, Anglo-Protestant identity in the British tradition to the paradigm of multiculturalism and the indispensable recognition of diversity (Conway 2018; Moran 2011). Both phases, however, exhibit potentials of a pathological architecture: Although immigration was also characterized by cultural diversity early on, the, first ethnic, then political-cultural understanding of British ancestry was maintained. This led to a discriminatory immigration policy, the aim of which was 'the cultural training in British traditions' (Igartua 2006, p. 223). Beginning in the 1960s, Canadian and Australian societies then developed political identities that emphasized more strongly the political universalism and liberal constitutional traditions of British ancestry. Multiculturalism became the central paradigm here: narrative continuity was to be established through a shared identity of 'deep diversity', as Will Kymlicka (1995, p. 190) called it. However, this extreme form of political identity then also revealed pathological potentials: the focus on cultural and linguistic communities not only strengthened francophone nationalism and separatism, which sometimes even took on terrorist characteristics (Lehmkuhl 2018, p. 115), but also generally raised doubts about the cohesion of society. The central point of contention here is the construction of narrative continuity, i.e., the second dimension of collective identity. But similar examples could also be given for normative and affirmative aspects from many other democracies, such as the tension between individual autonomy or personal responsibility and the demands for state protection in the U.S. (normative dimension) or the West German debate about national pride and the question of whether its object can be an ethno-culturalist concept of the nation or rather the universal attachment to European enlightened values (narrative and affirmative dimension) show.

In the process dimension, the pathological exclusion of relevant and legitimate identity configurations from the will-forming process can cause anomie in the long run if divergent forms of action by the individual are thereby strengthened (Klandermans 2014). According to Merton, Sebaldt (2020a, p. 397) distinguishes here between two passive and two active types of anomic action: Defensive behaviors either amount to superficial conformity to the dominant identity without any affirmative attachment (ritualism) or to openly display denied support (withdrawal). Offensive behavior risks destabilizing the political order when anomic and illegitimate instruments are used to implement a new identity (innovation) or are accompanied by a general rejection or turning away from the democratic community (rebellion). In this sense, the rise of right-wing populism (Knobloch 2019; Blühdorn and Butzlaff 2019) and the emergence of a new line of conflict in Western European party systems are repeatedly described, owing initially to a representation gap and the hegemony of apertist liberalism *across* the political boundaries of left and right. Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2018; see also Bohle et al. 1997) has described in numerous studies how social disintegration processes, accelerated by liberalism and capitalism, lead to social destabilization and radicalization and how citizens are thus attracted to authoritarian solutions.

It is already clear that not all anomic forms of divergent action are necessarily dysfunctional in character. Above all, innovation can apparently also have productive effects for democracy: If, for example, advocates of a republican or communitarian

political identity, that includes a pronounced sense of community and the protection of collective goods such as the environment, do not insist on a dogmatic counter-position to the liberal majority identity but instead gradually infiltrate their normative positions into the will-forming process, this is more likely to be seen as a gain for a balanced democracy. The success of recent climate change movements under the slogans of intergenerational justice and the protection of the environment as the common good of all can serve as an example: in many cases, climate change targets have been tightened, legislation has been adapted, and, moreover, the protests have also had a lasting impact on the political socialization and thus possibly also the notion of democratic collective identity of an entire generation (Parth et al. 2020). On the other hand, it is obviously problematic when fundamental rebellion or total withdrawal from the community make any understanding on that topic impossible.

At the policy level, a one-sided rigid political identity has an anomic and dysfunctional potential regarding the pathological determination of output norms and, thus, the outcome. The key point here is that citizens' evaluations of outputs and outcomes depend on their normative preferences, which in turn are significantly influenced by the prevailing political identity. For instance, a rather negative or rather positive understanding of freedom generates different assessments of welfare-state activism, and the endorsement of political-cultural neutrality or adaptation to a republican civil-religious citizenship ethos leads to different perspectives on decisions in migration policy: 'One of the hard facts about political goods is that though each may be desirable, they cannot all be had simultaneously' (Almond et al. 2004, p. 195). Michael Sandel has argued that the dominance of the liberal paradigm in U.S. economic policy and its conception of the state shows a fatal neglect of especially republican and public welfare goals. On the one hand, the classical ideal of education is abandoned, in that the virtuousness of the individual takes a back seat to the overall functionality of the economic system, and education or character formation becomes an element of individualistic freedom (Sandel 1995, p. 97). A rigid dogmatic determination of political norms and values, coming along with simultaneous devaluation of other legitimate norms, can also cause loss of trust in democracy, openness for radical positions and the strengthened identification with other collectives at the individual level. For example, Philip Manow (2018, p. 100) argues that the success and rise of right-wing populist parties such as the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) must be seen as an articulation of protest against the economic consequences of globalization.

5 Conclusion: how is a functional democratic identity possible?

To sum up my thoughts, I want to recapitulate some main points regarding the connection of liberal political identity and its dysfunctional potentials for a functional identity of democracy. Under the hegemony of political liberalism, modern democracy produces a multiplicity of individual and collective identities, each of which demands its own recognition and particularity, but thereby simultaneously endangering the identity of democracy. This has been described as the identity-political paradox of liberal democracy. The identity politics of the liberal paradigm

has, according to Reckwitz, 'the function of preparing the space for markets and the function of securing the subjective rights of individuals' (2019, p. 263). The cause is the polarizing and essentializing charge of these identity conflicts and the affiliated difficulty in recognizing the legitimate positions of others. Political anomie on all levels of the political system can result therefrom, when a rigid and one-sided democratic identity leads to exclusive will-forming processes and policy goals, resulting in individual identity and trust crises. The current identity crisis in many Western democracies shows the danger of identity-political fragmentation, the radicalization of entrenched positions and the loss of trust in the democratic community.

A democratic system can be understood as dysfunctional if it cannot adapt to changing environmental conditions in the sense of system preservation (Osterberg-Kaufmann et al. 2022). The negligence of what has been described as democratic identity, or identity of democracy, can thus be described as dysfunctionality of liberal democracy when anomie leads to the further radicalization and polarization of opposing identity politics. Thereby the identity of democracy is violated, and the system renders incapable of collective, compromise-oriented decision-making and thus to adapt to key environmental conditions. Finally, in this respect, it should be considered that the most important changing environmental conditions for contemporary democratic systems (climate change, social inequality, pandemics, among others) may very well require collaborative efforts. Not to create a false impression: it is not the liberal model of political identity per se that is dysfunctional, but its enduring hegemony, which on the one hand neglects the communal poles of political identity, and on the other creates a paradox through its enormous fixation on individuality.

Reckwitz expects an 'embedding liberalism' (2019, p. 285) as the paradigm of the future, now that the apertist, opening liberalism of deregulation and cultural pluralization has become dysfunctional. This new paradigm, he argues, should then be expected to be more regulatory and strive for 'social order formation' (ibid.). At the same time, however, Reckwitz argues that the fundamental opening in economic, cultural, and political terms is not (and cannot be, contrary to the assumption of some conservative identity-political designs) reversed, but rather embedded in a new order: 'apertist liberalism clearly suffers from a lack of social regulation—a lack of order formation vis-à-vis maximally liberating markets, multinational actors, individual rights, and cultural identities' (Reckwitz 2019, p. 286). As accurate as this diagnosis seems, pointing to dysfunctionalities I have described, it is hard to imagine that especially in the field of identity politics *embedding* based on liberalisms' central assumptions can succeed. Instead, it will be suggested that, in the spirit of the identity of democracy constructed here, a greater balancing of the various meanings of democracy and their political identities should be sought, especially the community-oriented, republican tradition. This can also counteract what Buchstein and Jörke (2003, p. 474) call the 'rationalization' of democracy in favor of a purely institutionalist, liberal understandings and bring back into focus not only the participatory momentum but also a discussion of the common good and commonalities beyond specific identities. At the end of this process, this is a main thesis of this article, there may stand a complementary form of democratic identity that makes it possible to recognize and balance legitimate political identity configurations, while at the same

time distinguishing it from non-democratic domains. The functional adaptation of democracy to those environmental changes which increasingly require community-oriented behavior, which overwhelm the nation-state democracies in their single problem-solving competence, and which can be an alternative to anti-democratic, nationalist or populist identity configurations, could then possibly succeed due to the weakness of the liberal political identity and its identity-political paradox itself.

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