How to Prepare Teachers to Teach Civic Engagement? Insights from a German University

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Schools and teachers are essential agents of political socialization, even in long-standing developed democracies. A teacher’s task is to transfer factual knowledge and nurture support for fundamental political values and interest in politics upon which a democratic classroom relies. To create a democratic classroom, teachers need to be politically interested, knowledgeable, and supportive of fundamental political values. This chapter focuses on the importance of strengthening pre-service teachers’ political knowledge, political interest, and support for fundamental political values while studying at universities. Our analysis shows that pre-service teachers differ in their political knowledge and political interest levels depending on their subjects. Furthermore, we show that some support authoritarian government modes and neglect general political values such as gender equality and free elections. For civic education, this result is highly problematic. Our results indicate the need for broader civic education at universities for future teachers.

KEYWORDS: Civic Education; Pre-Service Teachers; Democratic Values; Germany; Beutelsbacher Consensus

Introduction

Civic education is an essential facet of political socialization in a democratic system. Political socialization refers to how children and youth learn political values, norms, and behaviors and are influenced by socialization agents such as families, schools, or peers. Schools are essential for this process since attending school is mandatory, and most peer groups emerge in the context of schools. Studies of political support and political culture point out the importance of political socialization during childhood and youth.1 Schwarzer and Zeglovits showed schools’ crucial roles as agents of political information and knowledge in an Austrian youth election study.2 Young citizens need to learn and understand the norms and values of democracy that guide political interaction within the “common rules” in order to get engaged and involved as democratic citizens.3 Regrettably, the latest attacks from the far-right in Germany aim to diminish civic education’s importance in schools and, particularly, teachers’ role in civic education.4

Previous research on schoolchildren has shown that teachers have an essential role in nurturing schoolchildren’s civic engagement. The way that teachers present civic and social issues mat-
ters more than other aspects of teachers’ behaviors. As Knowles showed, teachers’ values impact how schoolchildren present civic and social issues. Further, Campbell showed that an open classroom climate is positively linked to schoolchildren’s knowledge about democratic procedures. According to Hooghe and Dassenville, experiences of an open classroom and collaboration in group projects, in addition to specific civic studies classes, have positive effects on political knowledge. Finally, Owen and Riddle showed that the construction of civic engagement courses matters at these levels, and foremost, an open democratic classroom climate supports nurturing civic engagement. In sum, teachers need political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values to create and sustain a democratic classroom. The perception of teachers and classroom climate influences schoolchildren’s engagement. It is necessary to empower pre-service teachers for civic education to strengthen young citizens’ civic engagement in the future.

Depending on the level of development of democracy, civic education has different needs and challenges. Even in established democracies, civic education is an essential facet of engaging young citizens. Building upon the nearly 50-year consensus regarding civic education guidelines in Germany, we aim to highlight how crucial civic education is for pre-service teachers to prepare them for their professional roles as socialization agents.

We begin this chapter by introducing the German educational system’s fundamental elements, reviewing the relevant literature on political socialization, and outlining our theoretical framework and research questions. Next, we describe the data set that we utilized for our study and the research design. Our survey data gathered from pre-service teachers allows us to analyze their political knowledge, political interest, and support for specific political values. Our analysis is complemented with information gathered at a focus group discussion with teaching staff from various schools. The purpose of the final section is to discuss possible findings on the importance and necessity of civic education for pre-service teachers at universities in established democracies.

Background

Recently, there has been growing interest and even conflict regarding civic education in German schools. The extreme right has focused on teachers who are “politically one-sided” and hold a liberal-democratic viewpoint. These teachers have been reported to websites hosted by the right-wing party Alternative for Germany, and teachers were publicly pilloried.

Before exploring the literature on teachers’ roles in political socialization and outlining our research questions, it is essential to provide background on the German educational system for teacher training and the particular background of civic education in Germany, the “Beutelsbacher Consensus.” As we explain below, the most crucial element of the Beutelsbacher Consensus states that civic education is not only restricted to specific politics or social studies classes; it is instead a general aim of all subjects.

Historically, the states were exclusively responsible for higher education in Germany, which has led to differentiation at the state level. State regulations differ regarding civic education in schools and the requirements for teacher training in the universities. Our research case is a single university in the German state of Hesse, centrally located in Germany. The training of pre-service teachers on all subjects and school levels in Hesse includes two different stages (see figure 1). First, future teachers must study their specific subjects and additional teaching skills at a university or a university of applied sciences. After the first state examination, pre-service teachers attend teacher training in schools as teaching staff members. Subsequently, pre-service teachers have to pass a second state examination before applying to be regular teaching staff. Pre-service teachers are students in both stages before they can officially apply for a teaching position at schools.

This chapter focuses on pre-service teachers in the first stage and their initial levels of political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values before they attend civic studies courses at universities in stage 1. Political science students might be more aware of the need for civic education as a cross-sectional task in schools because they chose to study and teach politics. This intrinsic motivation for politics could lead to higher levels of political interest and political
knowledge. To compare the difference between politics and non-politics students, we divided the sample in our analysis.

Despite all of the differentiation resulting from the federal German education system, a set of principles has been the common ground for all civic education in Germany in the last 45 years. In 1976, Germany adopted the Beutelsbacher Consensus, a program that settled a dispute among experts about the foundations and aims of civic education in Germany. Under the Beutelsbacher Consensus, civic education in schools is not restricted to the subject of politics or civic studies classes; it matters in all subjects. Overall, it aims to nurture schoolchildren’s ability to analyze a societal or political conflict, their interests, and their capacity to act on their interests.

These goals guide teachers and other practitioners in implementing civic education’s general tasks in their teaching. The Beutelsbacher Consensus includes three principles:

1. Teachers should not overwhelm pupils;
2. Teachers should present matters which are controversial in society controversially in the classroom;
3. Teachers should nurture schoolchildren’s ability to analyze a societal or political conflict, their own interests, and their capacity to act on their own interests.

All three principles are logically intertwined, and the third principle follows logically from the first and second ones. These principles focus on skills, and the third principle includes the ability to argue about political or societal issues. If teachers seek to nurture the democratic process of arguing, they should create a democratic classroom.

These required elements align with contemporary scholarship regarding civic engagement education, the need for a democratic culture in their classrooms, and educators’ professional development, which enables them to create such a culture. To fulfill the aims of the Beutelsbacher Consensus and create a democratic classroom, teachers need to be politically interested and knowledgeable and support a democratic classroom’s underlying political values.

Westheimer and Kahne introduced a more internationally known concept of citizenship. They differentiate three groups of citizenship conceptions, (1) personally responsible citizens, (2) participatory citizens, and (3) justice-oriented citizens. Compared to Westheimer and Kahne’s conceptions of citizenship, the Beutelsbacher Consensus aimed to create justice-oriented citizens who debate and question (established) systems. Furthermore, the Beutelsbacher Consensus puts
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weight on the individual’s interests. It encourages pluralism since one should develop their interests within the larger political and social arena.

Political knowledge and political interest create an informed background to help people make political decisions and enable people to recognize and articulate political preferences. Political knowledge refers to “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory.” According to a definition provided by van Deth, political interest is the “degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity.” Lupia and Philpot emphasize that political interest is a motivational component of engagement, and it represents a “citizen’s willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics.” It is widely acknowledged that political interest is a motivational prerequisite of political participation. While some schoolchildren have not accumulated political interest at home, external political influences, such as schools, can positively affect their development of political interest. In a study investigating the development of political interest in early adolescence and young adulthood, Russo and Stattin stated that the “impressionable years are the years of early adolescence, and possibly even before.” During early adolescence and childhood, young citizens attend schools. Thus, schools and teachers as socialization agents can have a major role in nurturing political interest.

In civic education, fundamental political values build the foundation of a democratic classroom. Fundamental political values restrict the possible output of the political system and restrict all areas of political interaction to the “common rules.” As for socialization agents, pre-service teachers need to support a system’s underlying political values positively since they convey these rules and values to create a democratic classroom as teachers. This support’s development is mainly based on political socialization processes and one’s own experiences with the system.

To date, several studies have investigated the civic education of pre-service teachers. Studies by Castro as well as Kickbusch examined the political knowledge, political interest, and political values of social studies pre-service teachers, and the effects of special teaching programs on the pre-service teachers’ political interest levels and support for political values were evaluated. Among others, these studies show that social studies pre-service teachers hold differing understandings of or beliefs about citizenship when they enter the university, which affect their beliefs about civic education. Pre-service teachers who support a conservative-based definition of citizenship focus on classroom rules, build a classroom community, and practice deliberate or cooperative exercises with students. Pre-service teachers who support an awareness-based definition of citizenship focus on individuals’ awareness and ability to act in the community. Journell also showed that pre-service teachers differ in their political knowledge levels: they score high on knowledge about governmental institutions and processes but low on parties, political actors, and recent domestic and foreign political issues. In a study of German pre-service politics teachers’ different dimensions of knowledge and professional role understanding, Weißenso, Weschenfelder, and Oberle showed that interest in politics is moderately positively correlated to political knowledge.

Westheimer and Kahne examined the effect of two different teaching programs in the US. Although the programs had a different focus (participatory-oriented citizenship vs. justice-oriented citizenship), they showed positive effects of the programs’ intended directions: the program focusing on justice-oriented citizenship nurtured students’ social critique and social activism, and the program focusing on participatory citizenship enhanced participants’ capacities for and commitment to civic participation. In another study, Lake et al. tested the effect of service-learning on pre-service teachers’ pedagogical skills and enthusiasm. Hands-on-activities, such as service-learning, had a positive effect and increased pre-service teachers’ enthusiasm about the subject. Additionally, Duffin, Ziebarth-Bovill, and Krueger revealed positive effects of a program designed to enhance democratic norms, such as the process of democratic arguing, listening to different perspectives, or acceptance of democratic decisions (by majority rule), on pre-service teachers’ support for democratic norms. Fischer, Lange, and Oeftering showed that German politics pre-service teachers emphasize direct-democratic ideals and the acquisition of democratic competencies within their civic studies classes.

In light of recent attacks in Germany and teachers’ vital roles during young citizens’ political...
socialization, the relevance of pre-service teachers’ civic education needs to be explored and better understood. Much of the literature on democratic classrooms points out the positive influence of such pre-service training on developing political interest, political knowledge, and political values of politics teachers. However, for the general task of civic education, a democratic classroom also matters in non-politics classes. By focusing on a German case, this chapter enhances the research on civic education in developed democracies. It offers a perspective, particularly for non-politics pre-service teachers, based on the background of longstanding civic education experiences operating under the Beutelsbacher Consensus.

The discussion of the Beutelsbacher Consensus, its prerequisites for its goals, and the prerequisites of sustaining a democratic classroom leads us to the following research questions regarding civic education at universities:

1. What are the levels of political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values of pre-service teachers before they attend civic studies courses at German universities?

2. To what extent do preconditions in levels of political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values differ between politics and non-politics pre-service teachers?

3. What problems and challenges do politics teachers highlight regarding the implementation of pre-service teachers’ civic education at universities?

In the following section, we present the research design and method before presenting the twofold analysis results.

**Research Design and Methods**

This study uses quantitative analysis to gain insights into pre-service teachers’ levels of political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values (research questions 1 and 2). Additionally, we used qualitative data to gain insights from current teaching staff from various schools to highlight the importance of pre-service teachers’ civic education at universities and their challenges (research question 3). By discussing both results in the final section, we highlight the importance and necessity of civic education for pre-service teachers.

The quantitative data comes from a survey of pre-service teachers conducted by colleagues from Justus-Liebig-University Giessen in November 2016 (https://www.uni-giessen.de/fbz/zmi/projekte/emel). The university is a medium-sized regional university with a broad focus on pre-service teachers’ education in all school subjects and school levels in the German state of Hesse (https://www.uni-giessen.de/study/courses/teaching). The survey aimed at gaining first insights into political attitudes (e.g., free and fair elections, gender equality), civic engagement (e.g., in political parties, NGOs), media use (e.g., print/online, frequency), and trust in media of pre-service teachers. This chapter focuses on the data from this survey related to political interest, political knowledge, and support for political values.

The target population of this survey was a specific cohort of pre-service teachers at a German university. Pre-service teachers study two to three different subjects (e.g., math, languages, art, or even physical education). They choose between primary schools and different levels of secondary schools. Besides their specific school subjects, pre-service teachers in Hesse must study four basic sciences (Grundwissenschaften) (https://www.uni-giessen.de/study/courses/teaching). The four basic sciences should provide pre-service teachers with essential knowledge and skills to fulfill their general tasks in their role as teachers. This category includes courses in educational science, psychology, sociology, and political science. In the basic science political science category, the courses focus on civic education in democratic societies regarding the Beutelsbacher Consensus. Pre-service teachers learn how to link democratic aspects of society to schools and their profession. They study basic science political science in their fifth or sixth term (second last academic
The survey was conducted within the first weeks of the “Introduction to Civic Education” for pre-service teachers, which all pre-service teachers attend first in the basic science political science sequence.

The survey was administered to those in attendance in basic science (a population of 1209). Due to the moderate attendance regulations in the basic sciences, the response rate is 33%. Overall, the sample consists of 399 completed surveys: 122 male, 244 female, four non-binary, and 29 without an answer on gender. Ninety-five percent of the sample are aged from 18 to 31 years (minimum: 17, maximum: 55). The sample includes 89 politics pre-service teachers and 310 non-politics pre-service teachers. The sample was not randomized and measures the initial levels of pre-service teachers’ political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values. It does not evaluate or measure the impact of the actual program.

Notwithstanding this limitation, this survey’s use helps us to understand the levels of political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values that pre-service teachers have when they start engaging in their professional roles and general tasks of civic education. As we argued before, in order to meet the criteria of the Beutelsbacher Consensus and provide a democratic classroom, pre-service teachers need political knowledge, political interest, and support for fundamental political values.

Pre-service teachers who chose to teach politics in their futures might be more aware of civic education as a general task in schools. This intrinsic motivation for politics could lead to higher levels of political interest and political knowledge for pre-service teachers who study politics (with any other subjects combined). Furthermore, politics pre-service teachers attended political science courses (4–5 modules, 11–14 courses) before the courses of civic education (basic science political science) start, so there is reason to expect higher political knowledge and political interest levels among these pre-service teachers. To compare the difference between politics and all other pre-service teachers, we divided the sample in our analysis (see figure 2). Pre-service teachers who study politics together with any other subject (e.g., math, art) are in the group of politics pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers who study any other combination of subjects (e.g., Latin and math or art and music) without politics are non-politics pre-service teachers.

The survey included items measuring political interest, political knowledge, and political values. All variables are at least measured on an ordinal scale. Political interest was measured using a five-point scale from not at all interested to very interested. Regarding political knowledge, the survey included four items. The index of political knowledge combined two open and two single-choice questions on the survey. Only participants who answered at least three questions were included in the index calculation. Wrong and do not know answers were coded as wrong.

The survey included items on support for democracy in general, expert decisions, and a single leader. In studies of democratic support, it is well established to contrast support for democracy in general with statements on alternative (authoritarian) forms of government. The theoretical framework holds that democratic citizens would positively evaluate the democratic form and eval-

**Figure 2. Example of Sample Division**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>politics pre-service teachers</th>
<th>non-politics pre-service teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1 Politics Math</td>
<td>Student 1 Latin Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2 Art Politics</td>
<td>Student 2 Art Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3 German Politics</td>
<td>Student 3 German French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4 French English Politics</td>
<td>Student 4 French English Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5 Chemistry Politics Biology</td>
<td>Student 5 Chemistry Physics Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student n Politics English Spanish</td>
<td>Student n Biology Spanish Math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
uate all alternative (authoritarian) modes of government negatively. Respondents evaluated the statements on an ordinal four-point scale from very poor, rather poor, rather good, to very good.

Furthermore, the survey included specific statements and political attitudes that build upon the fundamental political values within a liberal democracy. These items capture individual political value orientations and reference the general political values that an individual wants to see in the political system. These items capture the two distinct overall political values of freedom and equality within a liberal democracy.44 The items include support for civil rights, free elections, obedience to the government, and gender equality. Respondents answered the items on a seven-point scale from disagree completely (lowest number) to agree completely (highest number).

We inspected the variables of interest for our analysis by comparing their distribution within the two relevant groups (politics and non-politics pre-service teachers). We then conducted tests of central tendency to check if the two groups differed significantly. We used unpaired t-tests for all variables on a (pseudo-)metric scale and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests for all variables on an ordinal scale. As argued earlier, differences in political knowledge, political interest, or support for political values might foster differences in teachers' attainment of civic education goals. We would expect those pre-service teachers who have low levels of political knowledge, political interest, or support for fundamental political values to have difficulties in providing a democratic classroom and, thereby, unable to meet the aim of the Beutelsbacher Consensus.

In addition to the survey data, we conducted a focus group discussion with current teaching staff from different schools in Hesse to get initial insights into their recommendations for pre-service teachers' civic education. We used the format of a focus group discussion to engage practitioners in the conversation about teachers' professionalism and why civic education is essential. In doing so, we wanted to counter some potential challenges that might come with such an approach. Focus groups are a valuable form of data collection when a phenomenon under investigation is socially constructed. It is also useful when the researcher wants to know how individuals think and act in social settings, especially when the research topic is sensitive.45 Educational processes are, per se, socially constructed. Teachers and students engage in a social setting, the school. Research that touches on the professionalism of a given teacher might have sensitive implications for the participants. Focus groups allow participants to take over or own the interview space, which usually results in richer, deeper understandings of whatever is being studied.46

The focus group discussion included teaching staff of the subject of politics who teach in primary, secondary, or vocational schools. We chose to invite politics teachers because professional knowledge concerning civic education and its application is a sensitive topic (evaluation of teachers). Non-politics teachers themselves might not indicate their own shortcomings, but their politics peers might do so from observing their colleagues. The teachers varied in work experience (teachers' training, medium or long-term work experience, and nearly retiring teachers). Eleven politics teachers attended the discussion (7 female, 4 male). The focus group discussion was part of an advanced training day for politics teachers who registered voluntarily after a public call.47

The focus groups were structured as 30 minutes of discussion in groups of 3–4 persons and then 40 minutes of plenary discussion with all participants. We recorded only the plenary discussion, which was, to a limited extent, moderated. Additionally, the moderator took notes on certain points of interest. Before the small group discussions, we introduced the teachers to the survey mentioned above. In preparation for the plenary discussion, the groups considered and discussed four questions in small groups.48

We used the grounded theory methodology following Strauss and Corbin to analyze the focus group discussion's content.49 After transcribing the audio recording, we started with an open coding to break down the data and delineate concepts in the raw data. We searched for occurrences in which recent teachers emphasized and problematized teachers' general roles in civic education. We then proceeded by axially coding to establish relationships between the concepts. The transcript of the group discussion is available upon request of the authors.

We recognize that this research design has methodological limitations. First, the project used a sample that only includes pre-service teachers of a specific cohort from a single university in...
Germany. Generalizations are, therefore, not possible. However, the state of Hesse has the highest number of hours of civic education taught in secondary schools in Germany. Thus, this case can be seen as a vanguard in civic education. The problems and challenges we encountered in this research might be even more pressing in other German states or countries. Second, the group discussion was comparatively short and moderated only to a limited extent. The length of the group discussion may have influenced the depth of the observed conversation. Notwithstanding the limitations, this study enhances research on pre-service teachers and civic engagement education by focusing on a German case.

**Pre-Service Teachers’ Prior Political Knowledge, Interest, and Support**

Our quantitative analysis centered around exploring the political interest, political knowledge, and support for political values of pre-service teachers and the differences between politics and non-politics pre-service teachers. As theorized, given teachers’ roles as agents of political socialization, the overall aim of nurturing the development of democratic citizens as proposed in the Beutelsbacher Consensus, and the needs of a democratic classroom, teachers need political knowledge, political interest, and support for fundamental political values.

Figure 3. Political Interest, Frequencies (in Percentages)

The figures below show bar plots of the distribution on each survey item of the split sample. Approximately 65% of politics pre-service teachers were medium interested or interested in politics, and 34.8% were very interested in politics (figure 3). Non-politics pre-service teachers showed only little interest: 3.6% were not at all interested in politics, 22.3% were only a little interested, and 51.5% showed medium interest in politics. Only 22.6% were interested or very interested in politics.

Figure 4. Political Knowledge, Frequencies (in Percentages)

The level of political knowledge differs between pre-service teachers who will teach politics and those who will not teach politics (figure 4). The questions included basic knowledge of voting rights, the year of the constitution’s entry into force, and the foreign minister’s name, who was one of the most publicly known politicians in Germany. While 72.8% of the politics pre-service teachers answered two or more questions correctly, only 46% of non-politics pre-service teachers managed to do so. Up to 53.5% of non-politics pre-service teachers answered one or fewer questions correctly. Surprisingly, a quarter (27.2%) of the politics pre-service teachers answered one question correctly. This result shows the need to enhance basic contemporary political knowledge in pre-service teachers’ education.

Table 1 shows the tests of central tendency between both groups on these survey items. In this use, significant tests only show essential data patterns; due to the sample selection, results cannot
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be generalized. On average, politics pre-service teachers revealed a higher interest than non-politics pre-service teachers, and they had higher political knowledge than non-politics pre-service teachers do. Both effect sizes are strong between the two groups.

### Table 1. Political Interest and Political Knowledge, Comparison of Central Tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>W-Value / t-value</th>
<th>Cohen's D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>1.25***</td>
<td>3780.5</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge</td>
<td>0.91***</td>
<td>-6.3374</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p > 0.0001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

The frequency tables and the central tendency tests show that politics pre-service teachers began with higher levels of political knowledge and political interest. Both are a prerequisite for civic education as a general task. A teacher who is not interested in politics or does not have substantial political knowledge might be less focused on the general aim of civic education.

Regarding support for democratic values, a vast majority of respondents supported the statement that democracy is needed; however, this item's wording limits our complete understanding of this finding. As worded, the question does not specify if it is important for one to live in a democracy or important for all people worldwide (see survey instrument). None in both groups rated this statement as very poor; surprisingly, 2.2% of politics pre-service teachers and 0.3% of non-politics pre-service teachers rejected the necessity of democracy in a country (figure 5).

Furthermore, most in both groups clearly reject the authoritarian notion of a single leader. Around 98% of non-politics pre-service teachers and around 95% of politics pre-service teachers disagreed with the notion of preferring decision-making by a single leader over decision-making in parliament. A few pre-service teachers supported this statement, as 2.5% of non-politics and around 5% of politics pre-service teachers judged this governance mode as good or very good. This support is a problem: as latent socialization agents, teachers should reject this authoritarian notion. One cannot expect (pre-service) teachers who support this authoritarian notion to fulfill civic education’s general pro-democracy task.

Another mode of governance which participants were asked to judge was expert decisions. Participants evaluated how poor or good it would be if experts made decisions about policy issues instead of governments. Although experts’ inclusion (especially from science) is fundamental in a democratic decision process, elected representatives, not experts, should make final decisions. More than half of non-politics pre-service teachers supported expert decisions compared to around

![Figure 5. “A Country Needs a Democratic System,” Frequencies (in Percentages)
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35% of politics pre-service teachers (rather good or very good) (figure 7).

Table 2 shows the tests of central tendency for the different governance modes. Pre-service teachers did not differ in support for democracy in general or a single leader—a clear authoritarian mode of government. On average, politics pre-service teachers favored the statement regarding expert decisions slightly less (table 2). However, the effect size is only medium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. “Democracy in General”, “Expert Decisions,” “Single Leader,” Comparison of Central Tendency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support of...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy in General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single Leader</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*** p > 0.0001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

This result is somewhat counterintuitive. Democratic decision-making depends on the process of arguments and the exchange of ideas. This process should hear from scientific experts, so-
cial groups, or other agencies. The Beutelsbacher Consensus underlines this component of democratic deliberation and decision-making as a core component of a well-functioning democratic system. Principles 2 and 3 support the idea that schoolchildren learn how to act on arguments and interests. Support for outsourcing political decisions to experts contradicts this principle and the general aim of civic education in schools.

The following figures (figures 8–12) show the distribution of statements regarding fundamental political values such as civic rights, free elections, or gender equality. As seen in figures 8 and 9, it is apparent that the dispersion on the items differs between politics and non-politics pre-service teachers. However, if we compare the total of the positive scale (codings 4 to 6), 93.2% of the politics pre-service teachers and 91.7% of non-politics pre-service teachers supported the idea of civil rights. Regarding free elections, the difference is somewhat higher: around 91% of politics pre-service teachers supported the statement compared to 86.1% of non-politics pre-service teachers. Surprisingly, a small but not insignificant group of persons in both groups disagreed completely or disagreed somewhat (coded 0 to 2) with the idea of free elections (politics: 5.7%, non-politics: 5.4%) and civil rights (politics: 1.1%, non-politics: 2.3%). Both items represent statements referring to fundamental political values of liberal democracy. Disagreeing with these statements is problematic for the task of teachers as political socialization agents in schools.

Figure 8. “Civil Rights Defend Citizens from State Oppression,” Frequencies (in Percentages)

Figure 9. “Citizens Should Vote the Government in Free Elections,” Frequencies (in Percentages)
Additionally, figure 10 shows the distribution of the item *obedience towards the government*. Politics pre-service teachers supported this statement slightly more. Around 38% of politics pre-service teachers and a quarter of non-politics pre-service teachers supported this statement (4 to 6). Just 43% of politics pre-service teachers and 45% of non-politics pre-service teachers disagreed with this statement. The high support for this item is surprising. We might suspect that the pre-service teachers are not fully aware of the regulations regarding being a state official and misinterpret obedience in this item. If they do not, these results are problematic for civic education in schools: Civic education aims to nurture discussions and schoolchildren’s ability to question authority while forming their own opinions. Schoolchildren need to learn how to question authorities before they decide to obey these authorities.

Both groups broadly supported the statements regarding gender equality (figure 11). Overall, the vast majority within both groups disagreed at least somewhat on the instrumental statement of gender equality (non-politics pre-service teachers: 88.9%, politics pre-service teachers: 86.2%, see figure 12). Just 11.5% of the politics pre-service teachers are indecisive (neither disagree nor agree, middle scale point) compared to 5.7% of non-politics pre-service teachers. About 5% of non-politics pre-service teachers and around 2% of politics pre-service teachers agree on the instrumental statement (figure 12). We see that, in both groups, pre-service teachers supported the general statement of gender equality strongly. However, if the statement is instrumental, support was lower and more dispersed in both groups.
Table 3 shows the results of the unpaired t-tests between the two groups on each item. Politics pre-service teachers showed more support for the principles of civil rights and free elections. However, only the difference in civil rights is significant (effect size is medium). Additionally, we see that the mean support in both groups differed regarding obedience towards the government. Politics pre-service teachers were more in favor of this statement than non-politics pre-service teachers were. However, this effect is not significant.

Regarding gender equality, we see no difference between politics and non-politics pre-service teachers on the general item. The mean difference increases with the instrumental statement, but it is still insignificant. The two groups do not differ statistically; however, small groups of pre-service teachers in both groups disagreed on statements regarding free elections (politics: 5.7%, non-politics: 5.4%) and gender equality (politics: 1.3%, non-politics: 1.2%). For civic education, this result is highly problematic because those teachers might negatively influence students.

Prior studies have noted the importance of a democratic classroom and teachers’ unique roles to ensure this democratic space. Overall, the results indicate that regarding political knowledge and political interest, non-politics pre-service teachers showed less political knowledge and less political interest compared to politics pre-service teachers. While this result may be expected, lower political knowledge levels and lower political interest among non-politics pre-service teachers might hinder civic education in German schools because civic education is not only part of the specific subject; it is also related to the classroom environment and all teachers’ actual behavior. We see high support for the fundamental values of a democracy (free elections, civil rights, and gender equality) in both groups.
According to the Beutelsbacher Consensus, the overall aim of civic education is that schoolchildren should learn to act on their own opinions and interests in discussions on political or societal conflicts. For example, teachers who favor expert decisions—a majority of non-politics and just 35% of politics—might be less aware of civic education’s general task (i.e., nurturing interest in political decision-making). They might not be interested in engaging schoolchildren in political discussions and nurturing their political interest and political judgment capacity.

**What Do Teachers Emphasize Regarding Civic Education of Students?**

Using the focus group discussion, we tried to learn more about practitioners’ understandings in the field. The politics teachers we invited had first-hand experience with their non-political colleagues due to interaction in the same workplace. We expected them to be aware of shortcomings in the teaching of their colleagues. Specifically, we were interested in finding out how the problems we encountered in the survey results may present themselves in the everyday practice of teaching in school.

The group discussion was comparatively short and moderated only to a limited extent. The length of the group discussion may have influenced the depth of the observed conversation. In summary, the participants raised attention to three major topics:

1. lack of political knowledge and political interest among non-politics teachers;
2. challenges for non-politics teachers;
3. the capacity for political judgment by non-politics teachers.

First, the participants problematized the gap in political knowledge of pre-service teachers. They emphasized a general lack of trust in political institutions or actors and society overall among non-politics pre-service teachers. They treated the lack of knowledge and interest of non-politics teachers as problematic for civic education awareness in schools. On one hand, they highlighted that teachers are a representative subgroup of a society. Hence, support for fundamental values may be similarly distributed amongst the general population. On the other hand, a single participant argued that teachers, as socialization agents, are a unique subgroup of the population. Hence, it is dramatic if even a small number of teachers neglect fundamental democratic values. As theoretically argued, the participants highlighted teachers’ specific roles and pointed out that teachers should support fundamental democratic values like gender equality.

Second, the focus group participants were aware that teaching civic education is a challenge for their colleagues who do not teach politics or civic studies classes. They identified a problematic lack of knowledge among their colleagues regarding political institutions and actors. They experienced a tendency to deliver measurable results matching predefined subject objectives in their work as teachers. Other aspects of the educational process—like civic education in a biology class—tend to get lost within these processes. Thus, non-politics teachers are less aware of their task of civic education. Based on their own educational experience at universities, they criticized the structure and content of civic education for pre-service teachers as rather vague and uninteresting, especially for non-politics pre-service teachers. In their experience, their former study peers (non-politics pre-service teachers) evaluated the basic science political science as somewhat abstract and irrelevant. Their peers indicated a lack of specific and practical examples and instructions regarding linking civic education to their specific subjects (like biology or math). A consequence might be that non-politics teachers and pre-service teachers are less aware of civic education’s general task and have fewer tools to include civic education.

Third, they stressed the necessity of teaching political judgment capacity as a fundamental civic education task. Teaching that focuses on the capacity of political judgment is based on the third and overall principle of the Beutelsbacher Consensus. Nonetheless, the participants did not
mention a concise example of political judgment capacity and how it can be included in teaching. They mentioned vague ideas of how politics and non-politics teachers can implement the principle of the capacity of political judgment in classes. However, they stressed the importance of pre-service teachers gaining hands-on experiences in civic education while studying at universities.

**Conclusion and Call for Action**

This chapter aimed to explore the importance and necessity of civic education of pre-service teachers at universities by focusing attention on expectations of pre-service teachers to fulfill the general aims of the Beutelsbacher Consensus once they are in the classroom. Thus, we examined political knowledge, political interest, and support for political values amongst pre-service teachers and paid particular attention to differences between politics and non-politics pre-service teachers, as both are responsible for offering students civic education.

Furthermore, this chapter has examined what current teaching staff perceives as problematic in their peers’ degree of knowledge and political interest. We also explained what the politics teachers who took part in the focus group emphasized as important in pre-service teachers’ civic education. Despite its limited scope, this study offers insights into why pre-service teachers’ civic education is still needed at universities and suggests that improvements are needed in non-politics teachers’ civic education training to maintain our democracies. Teachers are essential socialization agents and mediators of political interest, political knowledge, and support for political values.

In a time of rising populism and continued attacks from the far right to diminish the importance of civic education in schools, not just in Germany but worldwide, civic education is a means of protecting democracies against these threats. Focusing on the civic education of pre-service teachers in Germany, our analysis showed that in training future teachers of all subjects, particular attention must be paid to increasing knowledge about political institutions, processes, and parties, arousing students’ interest in political events, and fostering an awareness of the relevance of civic education across all subjects of teaching. With the Beutelsbacher Consensus, Germany is unique in its expectation that teachers of all disciplines participate in teaching democratic citizenship. Yet, as threats to democracies rise and memories of large-scale wars in which many fought against authoritarianism fade, it is critical that we fully appreciate all countries’ levels of teacher preparedness for and disposition to teaching democracy. Teacher education is an oft-forgotten, but much-needed means to preserve peace, maintain democracy, and advance human rights at home and across the world.

**Endnotes**


4. In 2018, the right-wing party AfD launched websites in several states, on which schoolchildren and students can inform against teachers who are “politically one-sided” and act against a specific party. The AfD faction of the Saxonian parliament launched the website www.lehrersos.de initially. Right-wing groups launched similar websites in the US (https://www.professorwatchlist.org/) and the UK (https://tpointuk.co.uk/education-watch/).


13. The amount and content of the additional teaching skills varies widely between the 16 Bundesländer.

14. In 1976, the agreement on the “Beutelsbacher Consensus” solved a conflict of the tasks of civic education in Germany. During a conference of the *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg*, various political didacts settled an academic dispute about the foundations and purpose of civic education in a minimal consensus to which every party in a polarized debate among scholars and practitioners could agree on.


33. Ibid.


37. Campbell, “Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement”; Owen and Riddle, “Active Learning and the Acquisition of Political Knowledge in High School”; Hooghe and Dassonneville, “The Effects of Civic Education on Political Knowledge.”

38. The survey was conducted by Prof. Dr. Dorothée de Nève and Dr. Jutta Hergenhan (Justus-Liebig-University Giessen) in the project “Einstellungen-Medien-Engagement-Lehren” (EMEL). For project details see: https://www.uni-giessen.de/ fbz/zmi/projekte/emel.

39. Since education falls exclusively under state regulation, the curriculum of teacher education at universities varies between the 16 Bundesländer.

40. Due to the study regulations, there is no attendance register in lectures and hence students do not have to attend lectures.

41. The index of political knowledge includes the following two open and two single choice questions: (1) In which year was the “Grundgesetz” implemented? (open) (2) What is the name of the recent (2016) foreign minister? (open) (3) What do you vote for with your first vote in federal elections? (single choice) (4) What do you vote for with your second vote in federal elections? (single choice)


47. In Hesse, teachers can enroll in additional training voluntarily and on these days they are exempt from teaching.

48. These four questions were: (1) “To what extent do you think there might be problems for future teachers in daily school life knowing the results of the survey?” (2) “As professionals, what would you emphasize in the civic education of future teachers at universities?” (3) “To what extent are the results problematic for the daily school tasks and tasks of civic education for teachers?” (4) “As professionals, what do you think future teachers, in particular, should learn at universities?”


53. Focus Group, 252–54.

54. Focus Group, 21–22; 266–267.

55. Focus Group, 591–94.


57. Focus Group, 27–30; 316; 355–356.


59. Focus Group, 641–45.

60. Focus Group, 278–280; 556–561.
