

## The Paradoxes of Citizenship Education: Frames and Factors Influencing Dispositions toward Discussing Political Issues in the Classroom

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### Abstract

This article aims to explore two assumptions that have underpinned most research on teachers' perceptions of citizenship education (CE). These are, firstly, that teachers' perceptions of CE are relatively coherent, conscious and classifiable into citizenship models and, secondly, that these perceptions are strongly connected to their political ideology and civic engagement. In this article, we present a study conducted at a Spanish public university to test these two assumptions. We designed a questionnaire to investigate the possible effect of tacit framing on preservice teachers' perceptions of CE –by observing whether the use of different wording led them to reason about CE in different, or even contradictory, ways– and the relationship between preservice teachers' disposition toward discussing current political issues and their political ideology and civic engagement. The findings illustrate the power of framing in shaping CE perceptions and show a non-significant relationship between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology/civic engagement. Although the items used in the questionnaire cannot fully account for the diversity of views of CE, political ideologies and civic engagement experiences, the results provide enough evidence to begin questioning the assumptions that have dominated the research on teachers' perceptions about CE. These results have important implications for social studies educators and scholars.

**Keywords:** *citizenship education, teacher education, preservice teachers, civic engagement, political ideology, dispositions toward teaching political issues.*

### Introduction

As is widely known, citizenship education (CE) has received a considerable boost at an international level during the last few decades. Thanks, to a large extent, to the attention given by supranational organizations (UNESCO, the OECD, the European Commission, etc.), many countries have included CE in their national curricula as a discrete subject and/or as a cross-curricular goal (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). However, the available research is showing that its implementation is diverse and even contradictory (e.g., Bickmore, 2014; Evans, 2006; Sant, 2013). Of course, normative models of 'citizenship', like those of 'democracy', are plural and evoke

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different ideological worldviews. For this reason, there is a perennial discussion about what CE should be, and the comparative analyses of different CE programs have identified diverse political approaches. For example, Knight-Abowitz and Harnish (2006) distinguished up to seven discrepant approaches (civic republican, liberal, feminist, reconstructionist, cultural, queer, and transnational citizenship) and Shultz (2007) envisaged three major approaches (neoliberal, radical and transformational).

However, even though the educational program's delivery bias is obviously a conditioning factor, it is not the only factor explaining the uneven scope and meaning of the CE actually practiced in schools. Indeed, the implementation of an educational program is never a mere mirror reflection of the designers' intentions, among other reasons, because there is no implementation without the mediation of teachers. And this mediation, in turn, depends on their interpretations, dispositions and expectations and on other elements of the teaching culture (Meier, 2019; Romero & Luis, 2007). Therefore, numerous scholars have focused their attention on the study of teachers' understandings of CE (e.g., Marri et al., 2014; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019; Sim et al., 2017). Two main assumptions underlie most of these studies. The first is that the teachers' deliberate actions are the conscious and relatively coherent embodiment of their different ways of understanding CE, which can be classified in models such as the one developed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). The second is that these perceptions are strongly connected to their political ideology and civic engagement.

Although the previously mentioned studies have provided us with valuable insights, their starting assumptions can be revised because they have overlooked two important lines of research. First, they have not considered the implications of studies conducted in the fields of cognitive psychology, political science and other social sciences that have questioned the axiom of the rational actor (e.g., Haidt, 2012; Kahneman, 2012). Second, studies on teachers' perceptions about CE have often disregarded that CE understandings do not only pertain to how teachers become citizens but also educators. In this regard, we should not forget what we already know about the process of becoming a teacher within what Tyack and Cuban (1995) called the 'grammar of schooling'; that is, the institutional culture of school (Bullough, 1997; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Smith Crocco & Livingston, 2017).

The study reported in this article was conducted in the teacher education programs of a Spanish public university with the aim of empirically testing the above assumptions. It aims to investigate

both the rationality of CE perceptions and the relationship between these perceptions and preservice teachers' civic experiences. The interest of these inquiries is not merely academic; they have important implications for teacher education practice. If the implementation of CE is certainly influenced by teachers' civic perceptions and experiences, then the efforts of our social studies education courses should be focused on expanding preservice teachers' notions of citizenship and providing them with more opportunities for political participation. But if not, or at least not as much as it is presupposed, we should perhaps start thinking of other strategies such as helping future teachers to denaturalize the school conventions that eventually influence their CE practice or helping them to deal with the challenges of teaching CE in ethically and politically divided societies (McAvoy & Hess, 2013; Zembylas, 2020; Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021).

### **Literature Review: Research on Teachers' Perceptions about Citizenship Education**

Despite the obvious discrepancies between models that normativize certain relationships between individuals, society and the political community, there is widespread consensus about the dimensions that should form an education for citizenship (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Of course, not everyone interprets these dimensions in the same way or attributes the same relative importance to each of them. However, to provide an example, the generic model promoted by the European Commission (Eurydice, 2012, 2017) has been accepted as a common reference for many European countries. This model considers that any CE should address four major purposes, described below.

The first is to develop the political literacy of students, which includes: (a) learning about social, political and civic institutions, national constitutions, citizens' rights and duties and Human Rights; (b) recognizing both the specific heritage and the cultural and linguistic diversity of society; and (c) analyzing the problems and controversies affecting the public arena. This last objective is not a mere addition but is derived directly from the very notion of democracy. As the political scientist Robert A. Dahl (1999) argued, if the *demos* recognizes all citizens as politically equal, then all citizens should be treated as if they were equally qualified to participate in the decision-making process. This, in turn, entails the requirement that all people have equal and effective opportunities to understand public problems and the alternative policies that can be followed to face these problems (Dahl, 1999, p. 47). The second major purpose of CE, according to Eurydice's definition, is to cultivate critical thinking skills. The third purpose is to develop civic virtues and essential

values for democratic coexistence. And the fourth, to train students to actively participate in the community and public life at different levels (school, local, national and international).

The evidence gathered from the available empirical research suggests that some of the generic purposes of CE are often devalued when implemented in schools. For example, several studies have found that a significant percentage of teachers consider education for citizen participation as something very disconnected from their teaching goals (e.g., García & De Alba, 2012; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019) and that teachers tend to avoid teaching about political controversies and issues (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Ho et al., 2017). This evidence has led many educational scholars to focus on the study of teachers and preservice teachers' understandings of CE as a possible handicap to developing a more comprehensive interpretation of CE in their classrooms (e.g., Marri et al., 2014; Martin, 2010). Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, these studies have examined teachers' perceptions of CE, by classifying teachers into citizenship types based on different models (e.g., Logan, 2011; Sim et al., 2017). The model articulated by Westheimer and Kahne (2004) that distinguishes between *personally responsible*, *participatory* and *justice-oriented* citizens has been frequently used in the field (see, for example, Faden, 2012; Marri et al., 2014; O'Brien & Smith, 2011; Patterson et al., 2012). We argue that this way of exploring teachers' perceptions about CE, although valuable and revealing in many ways, also has limitations.

The first limitation can be found in the focus of these studies, which is usually the explicit rationalizations of the teachers. That is, studies tend to focus on the teachers' declarative thinking and verbalized preferences, assuming that their conscious and self-regulated ideas accurately explain their CE teaching practices. Of course, expressed intentions are a constitutive element of CE teaching practice (see Evans, 2006). However, this approach overlooks the latest advances in political psychology and political science that have questioned the image of the purely rational actor provided with a Cartesian 'civic mind' (Haidt, 2012; Lakoff, 2008; Westen, 2008). As these advances have proven, our political opinions, judgments, decisions and behaviors cannot be solely understood in rational and deliberative terms.

Our representations of the public sphere, the common good and citizenship (and, therefore, education) are not only nourished by reflections, rational arguments and critically evaluated evidence, but also by affects, emotions, memories, intuitive forms of thought (Haidt, 2012; Kahneman, 2012) and tacit commonplaces (Wagner et al., 2012). All these elements are usually

articulated in tacit mental frames, which Lakoff (2008) defines as the ‘cognitive unconscious’. That is, latent networks of meaning, which are not directly accessible but are expressed through the ‘common sense’ and the many simplifying shortcuts of language (clichés, implicit tropes, intuitive associations, etc.). In particular, all words are defined in relation to these frames of meaning. Different words activate different frames of thought (Lakoff, 2008) shaping understanding, reasoning and decision making (Thibodeau & Borodisky, 2011). As several scholars have pointed out, the discourse of CE is full of metaphors: from the description of citizens as plants/seeds (Pashby, 2011; Estellés & Romero, 2019) to the nation as a family (Fischman & Haas, 2012). The study of these metaphors reveals a lot about how we reason about CE. This approach, however, has rarely been applied to the study of how teachers understand CE.

The second limitation is that research on (preservice) teachers’ perceptions of CE has often inferred teachers’ approaches to CE from their views of citizenship (Logan, 2011; Marri et al., 2014; Patterson et al., 2012), democracy (Hahn, 2003; Price, 2008) or social justice (Carr, 2008). This seemingly obvious relationship should not be taken for granted. Firstly, because it overlooks other variables such as teachers’ conceptions about schooling and pedagogy (Gatti & Payne, 2011) or teachers’ educational background (Obiagu, 2019). Secondly, because there is little research actually exploring this relationship, especially in relation to the teaching of current political issues. The few existing studies, mostly conducted with teachers in the United States, do not offer conclusive results. It seems that the classroom climate and methods of instruction are coherent with the teachers’ political beliefs, yet the relationship between these beliefs and the type of civic knowledge taught is still unclear. Hess and McAvoy’s mixed-method study (2015) showed a connection between classroom climate and teachers’ political views in three US states. This result was also obtained by Gainous and Martens (2016) who analyzed the CivEd data from US civics teachers. The quantitative research conducted by Knowles (2018) found that US teachers’ instructional practices in CE are consistent with their ideological beliefs. That is, conservative teachers on average prefer teacher-text instruction more than liberal teachers and those teachers classified as critical have a better disposition to use instructional strategies such as discussions or debates. Rogers and Westheimer’s (2017) large study found no relationship between the frequency with which US teachers teach about economic inequality and their political ideology, although the teaching of this issue was positively correlated with their level of civic engagement.

As social studies teacher educators ourselves, we were genuinely interested in testing these two generalized assumptions because they have important implications for teacher education. If we want to move the education of future teachers for CE beyond models of subjectivity based on the Cartesian rational citizen (Estellés & Fischman, 2020; Estellés & Romero, 2019; Fishman & Haas, 2012), we need to better understand the nuances of the ‘irrationalities’ of CE. Also, understanding the factors related to a favorable disposition toward discussing political issues would better inform our teacher education courses.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims to investigate a) the possible effect of tacit framing on preservice teachers’ perceptions of CE by observing whether the use of different wording led them to reason about CE in different, or even contradictory, ways; and b) whether there is a significant correlation between preservice teachers’ disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology and civic engagement. Therefore, this study addresses the following two research questions:

- Does using different wording about CE lead preservice teachers to hold different opinions about CE?
- Is there a significant relationship between preservice teachers’ disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology/civic engagement?

### **Methods**

The study reported in this article is part of a larger research project aimed at exploring preservice teachers’ perceptions of CE funded by the Vice-rectorate for Research and Knowledge Transfer of the University of Cantabria (No. 11.VU03.64662). This study is a descriptive and correlational research, as it is aimed at both describing the effect of framing on preservice teacher’s perceptions of CE and determining the relationship between preservice teachers’ disposition toward including political issues in the classroom (dependent variable) and their political ideology and civic engagement (independent variables). This quantitative study was conducted at a public university in Spain during the 2017/18 academic year. It is a pilot study that we plan to expand across institutions and widen to include in-service teachers.

## Sample

This study gathered data from preservice teachers enrolled in a medium size public university in Spain. The preservice teachers that participated were chosen from the early childhood and elementary education teaching programs offered by this university. A simple random sample generated with Microsoft Excel software was used to select the participants. The target population of the study consisted of 1,335 students (both part- and full-time) enrolled in the previously mentioned programs during the 2017/18 academic year. In order to have sufficient statistical power to detect the associations of interest, a sample size of  $n = 299$  was obtained from considering a 95% confidence level, a precision of 5% and a variance of 0.5. After applying a 10% loss rate, the final sample size consisted of 334. In the end, a total of 324 preservice teachers participated in the study. The main characteristics of the sample are described in Table 1. 268 participants were females (82.7%) and 56 males (17.3%), with ages between 17.8 and 44.9 years old ( $M = 21.7$ ,  $SD = 4.0$ ). Participants were evenly distributed among the four years of early childhood education (42.9%) and elementary education (57.1%).

**Table 1**

*Main characteristics of the sample*

Variable			
Age (years)	Mean, SD	21.7	3.7
Gender (n)%	Category		
	Male	56	17.3
	Female	268	82.7
Degree (n)%	Category		
	Early childhood education	139	42.9
	Elementary education	185	57.1
Grade level (n)%	Category		
	First	88	27
	Second	94	29
	Third	68	21
	Forth	74	23

## Instrument

Our data drew from a questionnaire that was collaboratively designed and based on previously conducted studies (Arroyo, 2013; Estellés & Romero, 2019; Rogers & Westheimer, 2017;

Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). The questionnaire was organized into two main sets of questions. The first set of items was designed to assess the coherence of preservice teachers' perceptions about CE. The second aimed to characterize the participants' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom, self-reported political ideology, and civic engagement. In addition, the questionnaire included variables to characterize participants' gender, age, teacher education program and grade level.

To assess the coherence of preservice teachers' perceptions about CE, we developed a set of inquiries based on studies conducted in other fields that have used surveys containing a series of similar questions formulated in different ways to explore the impact of framing on the opinions of individuals regarding current affairs (see Arroyo, 2013; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Our previous research with the teacher educators of the participants in this study (Estellés & Romero, 2019) helped us generate a clear set of predictions. In this previous study, we found that the discourses of CE, children's participatory rights and values education generated a powerful and inspiring narrative among the participants that conflicted with a generalized reluctance to include 'politics' in schools. While the framing of CE evoked ideas of progress and democracy, there seemed to be a clear opposition between the framing of childhood (joyful, pure and innocent) and the framing of politics (corrupted, stained and conflicting). For the present study, we decided to contrast these apparently conflicting frames.

Drawing upon our previous research and the literature on teaching political controversies, we identified a set of keywords to induce lexical associations. These keywords were extracted from common arguments used by teachers to avoid addressing current political issues in the classroom. One of these arguments is that children are too innocent and immature to be exposed to complex and controversial political issues (López Facal, 2011). This protective paternalism rests on a Rousseauian conception of what it means to 'be a child' promoted by most naturalistic, romantic and psychological pedagogies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ariès, 1962; Romero & Luis, 2005; Wyness, 2006). This view is still very present in schools (Ho et al., 2017), even though most current pedagogies have embraced the discourse of the Rights of the Child that explicitly recognizes the right for children to reflect upon and participate in issues that affect their lives. Another common argument against teaching about current political issues points out the need to be impartial and avoid indoctrination (López Facal, 2011; Ross, 2017), a supposed danger that conventional school subjects, still seen by many teachers as 'natural' and 'neutral' bodies of



knowledge, would prevent (Romero, 2014). From these arguments, we selected words such as ‘innocence’, ‘manipulation’, ‘neutrality’, ‘children’s rights’ and ‘political discussion’. For the framing of CE, the words ‘democracy’, ‘values’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘participation’ were chosen, as they are included in most CE definitions (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Eurydice, 2012).

Once keywords were identified, we took the four dimensions of CE described by the Eurydice reports (2012) (2017) –political literacy, critical thinking, values and participation– and designed two or three statements per dimension, plus two general questions about the importance of CE. Each group of items presented similar statements formulated in different ways to verify the impact of framing in the preservice teachers’ perceptions about CE (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Statements used in the questionnaire to assess the coherence of preservice teachers’ perceptions about CE*

Dimension of CE	Frames in conflict	Statements
Political literacy	Children and politics	I think that children have the right to reflect on the problems that affect their lives I think that schools cannot isolate children from what happens in social and political life I think political issues should be discussed in schools
Critical thinking skills	Critical thinking and children’s immaturity	It is important to develop critical thinking so that children can better understand what happens around them Children are too young to critically examine the social world. It is better to leave this for more advanced stages of education
Values	Values education and neutrality	Teachers should teach values of respect for diversity and conflict resolution through dialogue Teachers should teach in a neutral manner, leaving their beliefs aside and avoiding conflict
Participation	Children’s innocence and right to participate	Children should be given a voice and involved in the decisions that concern them Children are too innocent, and their decisions could be easily manipulated, not pursuing what is best for them

To evaluate preservice teachers’ disposition toward including political issues in the classroom, the following question was asked: ‘Do you think current political issues should be discussed at schools?’. Similarly, preservice teachers’ self-reported political ideology was assessed by the question: ‘How would you characterize yourself?’ (*very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, or very conservative*), as previously employed by Rogers and Westheimer

(2017). Preservice teachers' civic engagement was also measured following Rogers and Westheimer's (2017) work. Civic engagement is a composite variable that considered the frequency with which (*never, once or twice, monthly, weekly, or a few times a week/daily*) preservice teachers follow political news (Civic Item 1), talk about politics with family and friends (Civic Item 2) and participate in organizations that aim to make a difference in their community or broader society (Civic Item 3). Following Rogers and Westheimer (2017), answers to these questions were coded as: *never* = 0; *once or twice* = 1; *monthly* = 2; *weekly* = 4; *a few times a week/daily* = 8. Responses were entered into the following formula, which ascribed more weight to Civic Item 3:

$$\frac{(\text{Civic Item 1} + \text{Civic Item 2} + (2 \times \text{Civic Item 3}))}{4}$$

The result was then categorized according to the following ranges: 0–3.5 = low engagement, 4.0–5.5 = moderate engagement, and 6–8 = high engagement.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was distributed in November 2017, after being trialed with a small group of preservice teachers. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants via email. Google Forms was the platform used for the questionnaire. The time used for the completion of the questionnaire ranged between 10 and 15 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the preservice teachers' perceptions about CE, their willingness or reluctance to introduce political issues in the classroom, the categories on the ideological spectrum and the prevalence of low, moderate, and high civic engagement. To address the first research question, the statements related to preservice teachers' perceptions about CE in the questionnaire were contrasted, using the frames presented in Table 2, to assess the coherence of their perceptions. To respond to the second research question, the chi-square test was applied to assess whether there were significant differences between the self-reported political ideology of preservice teachers (independent variable), their civic engagement (independent variable) and their

disposition toward including political issues in the classroom (dependent variable). Verification of normality of quantitative variables was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Statistical procedures were conducted using the R-3.3.1 software along with the R Studio.

### **Ethical considerations**

Due to the sensitivity of the objective of the study, ethical issues were carefully contemplated from the beginning. Prior to data collection, an information session was given to the selected preservice teachers to explain the objectives of the study, the characteristics of their participation and the guarantees that would protect their confidentiality and anonymity. Those who voluntarily agreed to participate signed a consent form. This study has received the ethical approval of the Ethics Committee of the University of Cantabria [Project No. 07/2017].

## **Findings**

### **Research Question 1: Does using different wording about CE lead preservice teachers to hold different opinions about CE?**

The results of the study associated with the first research question reveal a clear effect from framing in the preservice teachers' perceptions of CE, as the use of different wording led them to change their agreement/disagreement in similar statements (see Table 3). The responses to the statements related to the 'political literacy' dimension provide a good example of this shift. As can be seen in Table 3, it is widely accepted that children have the right to reflect on the problems that affect their lives. However, such acceptance becomes gradually diluted as the word 'political' gains weight in the development of this idea. As shown in Table 3, the support declines from 89.8% to 35.8%, even though any careful consideration of the implications of such right of the child would easily infer that the problems that affect children's lives are also political. Participants' opinions on the inclusion of political issues in schools is, therefore, highly conditioned by the framing that is utilized.

Preservice teachers' perceptions about the 'critical thinking' dimension of CE are also susceptible to variations in framing. The majority of the participants think that it is important to develop children's critical thinking, while more than a half of them recognize that children are 'too young' for this and that it would be better to postpone the development of this skill until they are older

(see Table 3). This indicates that around 40% of the participants hold both contradictory views at the same time.

Contradictions could also be observed in the ‘values’ and ‘participation’ dimensions of CE. As can be seen in Table 3, both the ideas of neutrality in education and the teaching of values coexist, despite their contradictory character. These ideas are very widespread in the mentality of the future teachers surveyed. Another paradox emerged in the participants’ perceptions about children’s participation: while 72.5% of the participants openly embraced a children’s right to participate in the decisions that concern them, 62% of the participants subscribed a paternalistic view of childhood agreeing that children are too innocent to make their own informed decisions.

**Table 3**

*Results showing the impact of framing in CE perceptions*

Dimension of CE	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		n	%	n	%
Political literacy	I think that children have the right to reflect on the problems that affect their lives	291	89.8	33	10.2
	I think that schools cannot isolate children from what happens in social and political life	222	68.5	102	31.5
	I think that political issues should be discussed in schools	116	35.8	208	64.2
Critical thinking skills	It is important to develop critical thinking so that children can better understand what happens around them	271	83.6	53	16.4
	Children are too young to critically examine the social world. It is better to leave this for more advanced stages	182	56.2	142	43.8
Values	Teachers should teach values of respect for diversity and conflict resolution through dialogue	301	92.9	23	7.1
	Teachers should teach in a neutral manner, leaving their beliefs aside and avoiding conflict	265	81.8	59	18.2
Participation	Children should be given a voice and involved in the decisions that concern them	235	72.5	89	27.4
	Children are too innocent, and their decisions could be easily manipulated, not pursuing what is best for them	201	62.0	123	38.0

**Research Question 2: Is there a Relationship between Preservice Teachers’ Disposition toward Including Political Issues in the Classroom and their Political Ideology/Civic Engagement?**

In this section, we present the findings in response to the second research question that explores whether there is a significant correlation between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology and civic engagement. Table 4 shows the descriptive results of the participants' disposition toward addressing political issues in the classroom, self-reported political ideology and civic engagement. Regarding participants' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom, 35.8% (95% CI: 30.8-41.2) of the participants were favorable to including these issues in the classroom, with no significant differences between males and females. In relation to the self-reported ideology of the participants, most participants were moderate (42.2%; 95% confidence interval [CI]: 36.9–47.7), with no significant differences between males and females. Regarding civic engagement, 259 of the 320 participants showed low engagement (80.9%; 95% CI: 76.3–84.9), 41 subjects a moderate engagement (12.8%; 95% CI: 9.6–16.9), and 20, high engagement (6.3%; 95% CI: 4.1–9.5). No significant differences were found between male and female engagement ( $p = 0.578$ ).

**Table 4**

*Preservice teachers' self-reported political ideology, disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and civic engagement*

Variable		Gender				p
		Male		Female		
		n	%	n	%	
Ideology	Category					
	Very liberal	10	18.2	39	15.0	0.449
	Somewhat liberal	11	20.0	72	27.7	
	Moderate	25	45.5	108	41.5	
	Somewhat conservative	9	16.4	32	12.3	
	Very conservative	0	0.0	9	3.5	
Political issues in class	Category					
	Favorable	17	30.4	99	36.9	0.435
	Reluctant	39	69.6	169	63.1	
Civic Engagement	Category					
	Low	43	76.8	216	81.8	0.672
	Moderate	9	16.1	32	12.1	
	High	4	7.1	16	6.1	

The relationship between the preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their self-reported political ideology has been analyzed (see Table 5), as well as the relationship between the participants' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their civic engagement (see Table 6).

**Table 5**

*Relationship between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology*

	Very liberal		Somewhat liberal		Moderate		Somewhat conservative		Very conservative	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Favorable	8	28.6	45	43.3	47	35.3	8	19.5	3	33.3
Reluctant	20	71.4	59	56.7	86	64.7	33	80.5	6	66.7

As can be seen in Table 5, liberal preservice teachers are more willing than conservative preservice teachers to include political discussions in the classroom, yet there is not a statistically significant association ( $X^2 = 7.943$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.094$ ). No significant relationship has been found either between participants' disposition toward addressing political issues in the classroom and civic engagement ( $X^2 = 5.470$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.065$ ).

**Table 6**

*Relationship between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and civic engagement*

	Low civic engagement		Moderate civic engagement		High civic engagement	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Favorable	88	34.0	15	36.6	12	60.0
Reluctant	171	66.0	26	63.4	8	40.0

### Discussion and Implications for Teacher Education

This study has explored whether the use of different wording leads preservice teachers to hold different opinions about CE (Research question 1) and whether there is a significant correlation

between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology and civic engagement (Research question 2). The findings of this study show how using different words in CE leads preservice teachers to reason in contradictory ways. Also, this study has not found any statistically significant correlation between preservice teachers' disposition toward one of the main dimensions of CE (teaching about political issues) and their political ideology/civic engagement. Below, we discuss these results in detail, considering their implications for teacher education.

Regarding the first research question, the findings of this study illustrate the power of framing in shaping judgments and perceptions related to CE. These results call into question rationally based approaches in the exploration of teachers' perceptions of CE (e.g., Marri et al., 2014; O'Brien & Smith, 2011; Patterson et al., 2012). The contradictions between responses to statements formulated in different ways show the influence of intuitive associations in CE representations. The nature of these automatic ways of thinking about CE deserves more attention from educational scholars, as other studies have previously warned (Bougher, 2014; Fischman & Haas, 2012).

The proven effect of framing in preservice teachers' CE beliefs has relevant implications for teacher education. Firstly, this effect casts doubt on the effectiveness of simply introducing future teachers to desirable discourses and principles related to CE. As other scholars have also suggested (Adams, 2014; Romero, 2014; Thornberg, 2008), these ideal principles are often not enough to undermine deep-rooted beliefs about childhood, values education or the school curriculum. Secondly, the proven effect of framing also denotes insufficient training of preservice teachers to educate children as citizens. As several studies have previously pointed out, teachers do not receive enough training to teach CE (Barr et al., 2015; Chin & Barber, 2010; Obiagu, 2019; Rahmadi et al., 2020) and feel underprepared to teach about politically sensitive issues (Oulton et al., 2004; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Dealing with dialogue and dissent (Davies, 2014), community pressures (McAvoy & Hess, 2013) and emotional reactions (Zembylas & Kambani, 2012) becomes a difficult challenge for teachers to undertake.

In relation to the second research question, the present study, in contrast to other studies (e.g., Knowles, 2018), cannot confirm the existence of a significant correlation between preservice teachers' political ideology/civic engagement and their disposition toward including political issues in the classroom. Although the results obtained do not allow us to make categorical statements given the low number of 'highly engaged' preservice teachers, they suggest that we

cannot delimit the generalized reluctance to include political issues in the classroom –also detected by other studies (e.g., Misco & Patterson, 2007; Oulton, et al., 2004)– to a particular ideology or level of civic engagement. This seemingly generalized attitude appears to be more strongly related to certain views about childhood, the role of teachers or the curriculum that are deeply rooted in the institutional culture of the school. This circumstance should be taken into account by teacher educators. This does not imply, however, that offering opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in political and social issues should not be a goal of social studies education courses. Indeed, the low levels of civic engagement found, although similar to those obtained by the Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE, 2017), reveal how greatly this approach is needed.

In summary, the findings of this study call into question two of the assumptions that have underpinned most studies about (preservice) teachers' perceptions of CE. First, that these perceptions are classifiable in coherent models of citizenship. Second, that these perceptions are strongly connected to (preservice) teachers' political ideology and civic engagement. The findings illustrate the power of framing in shaping CE perceptions and show a non-significant relationship between preservice teachers' disposition toward including political issues in the classroom and their political ideology/civic engagement. These results encourage us to more seriously consider other factors that may influence teachers' perceptions of CE.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study have some limitations. First and foremost, the statements used in the questionnaire cannot fully account for the diversity of views about CE, political ideologies and civic engagement experiences. We are aware that each of these constructs themselves are complex and multidimensional and would require further study. However, the statements used provide enough evidence to start questioning the assumptions that have dominated the research on teachers' perceptions about CE and have important implications for social studies educators and scholars. For further studies, it would be interesting to delve into each of the different dimensions of CE, expanding the scope of the questionnaire and complementing it with qualitative data collection techniques.

The sample of preservice teachers, although representative of the Spanish university where the study was conducted, cannot be generalized to preservice teachers in other contexts. Therefore, future research should cover larger populations including preservice teachers from other



universities in Spain and other countries. Yet, this study is a first step toward including greater diversity of contexts in this field, which is currently dominated by research conducted in North America and the UK (Geboers et al., 2013; Goren & Yemini, 2017; Sant, 2019).

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