Postcolonial Directions in Education
Volume 11 Issue 1, 2022

SPECIAL ISSUE:
"CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR POLITICAL AGENCY IN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES:
TRANSNATIONAL APPRAISALS AND DEBATES"
IN POSTCOLONIAL DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION DEBATES IN EUROPE
**Guest Editors: Taru Haapala, Maria Brown and Lilia Raycheva**

**ARTICLES**

MEDIA LITERACY CHALLENGES TO DEBATES ON CIVIC RIGHTS
**Lilia Raycheva**

'MEDIA-TED' ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS: EUROPEANISATION AND POSTCOLONIAL DYNAMICS OF VOTERS' USE OF MEDIA PLATFORMS IN MALTA
**Maria Brown and Vincent Marmarà**

THE DEBATE OVER CIVIC EDUCATION: ITS PLACE IN POPULIST RHETORIC
**Tomás Pacheco-Bethencourt**

POSSIBILITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A PRODUCTIVE CIVIL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF ALBANIA
**Gilda Hoxha**

EXTENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP? EXPLORING DIGITAL, GLOBAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
**Anna Björk and Claire Shaw**

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# Postcolonial Directions in Education

## Focus and Scope

Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

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**POSTCOLONIAL DIRECTIONS IN EDUCATION**
**Volume 11 Issue 1, 2022**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION DEBATES IN EUROPE**
   **Guest Editors: Taru Haapala, Maria Brown and Lilia Raycheva** 1-11

**ARTICLES**

2. **MEDIA LITERACY CHALLENGES ON DEBATES ON CIVIC RIGHTS**
   **Lilia Raycheva** 12-41

3. **'MEDIA-TED' ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS: EUROPEANISATION AND POSTCOLONIAL DYNAMICS OF VOTERS' USE OF MEDIA PLATFORMS IN MALTA**
   **Maria Brown and Vincent Marmarà** 42-78

4. **THE DEBATE OVER CIVIC EDUCATION: ITS PLACE IN POPULIST RHETORIC**
   **Tomás Pacheco-Bethencourt** 79-115

5. **POSSIBILITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A PRODUCTIVE CIVIL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF ALBANIA**
   **Gilda Hoxha** 116-139

6. **EXTENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP? EXPLORING DIGITAL, GLOBAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**
   **Anna Björk and Claire Shaw** 140-177

Postcolonial Directions in Education
Volume 11 Issue 1, 2022 | 1-11

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION DEBATES IN EUROPE

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This special issue discusses how under-representation, misrepresentation, dislocation, equity and equality challenges have been part of the reasonings and argumentations of critical postcolonial debates on citizenship education in contemporary Europe. It grows out of new, interdisciplinary and methodologically pluralist research and collaboration, made possible by financial support from the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action 16211 *Reappraising Intellectual Debates on Civic Rights and Democracy in Europe* (RECAST), funded by the European Union (EU) Framework Programme Horizon 2020.

Between September 2017 and September 2021, the RECAST network – comprising scholars from various disciplines as well as social and political practitioners – aimed at enhancing the relevance of intellectual debates on civic rights and democracy in Europe, arguing that this

was compromised in terms of informing policy due to theorisation from largely unrelated spheres as opposed to responses produced by joint approaches in the humanities and the social sciences. The RECAST project sought to bridge the gap between the study of politics and policy action and to develop new insights about the links (theoretical, political and institutional) between civic rights and democracy in Europe.

This special issue presents some outcomes emerging from workshops organised by the RECAST Working Group *Debates* that focused on studying firstly the argumentative links connecting practices with concepts and arguments in debates on civic rights and democracy in Europe; and secondly the practices and procedures of historical, moral, political and legal debates on civic rights and democracy (COST Association, 2017, p 12). In this context, debates provide crucial research material for the analysis of the argumentative links between concepts and practices; not only do they constitute the arenas for public controversy but also a fundamental means for politics. Debate differs from ordinary dialogue in that it involves presentations in favour and against an issue in which both sides actively seek to enlist support for their views. Whenever there is debate on a topic, it necessarily shows the controversies embedded (Wiesner, Haapala & Palonen, 2017). Therefore, debates often provide crucial information on the political concepts and the practices related to the controversies. In the Working Group these were taken as the nexus of studying democracy and rights in Europe and as a source for policy recommendations.

The Working Group *Debates* explored a range of case studies on political agency in various European democracies, experiencing controversies, emergencies and some even facing serious political, social as well as economic issues triggered by technological developments,

irregular and economic migrants, population ageing, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The research delved into how these issues, in some instances manifesting concurrently, directly or indirectly challenge the rule of law, equality and/or representation in Europe, which have only been aggravated in the recently applied state of emergency contexts due to the pandemic. Technology emerged as key in providing tools for communication, participation and knowledge production. However, even more so, the research findings underlined the dire need for citizenship education that fosters critical thinking and the ability to distinguish between reliable and untrustworthy information among the endless number of opinions and data available for consumption in the traditional and online media. This informed the choice to publish the work emerging from the Working Group together with intersections between the ongoing research and the postcolonial perspective. For example, similarly to the RECAST project and its Working Group *Debates*, the postcolonial perspective has been proposed as a response to challenges to democracy, among them growing authoritarianism and violence against the marginalised in the global North.

The term ‘epistemicide’ coined by de Sousa Santos (2014), referring to violence against indigenous knowledge by colonial powers, has inspired many postcolonial scholars (e.g. Darder, 2015; Bennett, 2007) seeking to appraise or reappraise such knowledge, to counter (or resist) more dominant views that gained dominance as an outcome of colonialism. Moreover, within EU studies, a scholarly discussion has emerged on ‘normative power Europe’ (Manners, 2002), in part advancing the idea that the EU exhibits imperialistic tendencies, especially in its *mission civilisatrice* towards the ‘neighbourhood’ in assuming that its norms and practices should be imposed on its ‘periphery’ (Del Sarto, 2016, p 218; Zielonka, 2013).

The Working Group *Debates* created opportunities to counter undemocratic, neo-colonial narratives in Europe. In this sense, opposition of postcolonial scholarship to epistemicide - evident in its appraisal of knowledge under the colonial threat of destruction or distortion (esp. de Sousa Santos, 2014) - resonates with the platform that the *Debates* afforded to explore. The results of the research conducted within the framework of the Working Group can thus offer counter-epistemicide attempts of citizenship education for political agency in European democracies.

This special issue brings together scholarly contributions resulting from participation and discussions in the Working Group *Debates* regarding citizenship education. The theme of education was deemed crucial to intellectual debates on civic rights and democracy. Policymaking in national and supranational contexts, tools and the honing of skills and competencies, and who has access to these and on what grounds, featured among the salient matters at stake and emerged as crucial factors for democratic political agency. Successful participation in political debates in European democracies demands knowledge and skills that are conducive to the effective and sustainable use of communication tools and, more importantly, an understanding of the content of what is (or is not) being read, watched, and listened to, particularly online.

In recent years, citizenship education has been increasingly advocated as a proactive or formative and sustainable response to the mounting threats to fundamental values such as peace, equality and human rights faced in Europe, and several countries are accordingly making changes to their policies in this area. In this context, the central concern addressed in the five-paper collection of this special issue is: What debates do

European democracies need to grapple with to foster sustainable citizenship education imbued with political agency? To answer this crucial question, the special issue has undertaken the endeavour equipped with RECAST's interdisciplinary network's expertise and methodological pluralism, ranging from case studies and empirical analyses to contributions on democratic and social theory.

The first article *Media Literacy Challenges to Debates on Civic Rights* by Lilia Raycheva examines three Bulgarian debates on civic rights reflecting on the 2021 report of the Media Literacy Index: the ongoing social protests, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 parliamentary (pre-election) campaign. She emphasises that the media are supposedly among the main forces of deliberative democracy developments ensuring fair and reasonable debate among citizens. In her article, the concept of media literacy addresses the potential of contemporary societies to resist the negative effects of such phenomena as diminishing public trust and severely polarised politics. Traditional and modern internet-based media affect citizens' daily lives, politics and society. In the social, economic and technological environment, there is a significant and growing need for professional training of journalists and media literacy education of citizens on the importance of the media - not only for critically reflecting, but also for shaping public opinion. This is because the risks to media trust are huge in today's post-truth age, the proliferation of fake news and the opportunity for almost anyone to become a "reporter" who creates and disseminates information via social media and messaging apps. The fine line between the right to freedom of expression and the dissemination of unreliable, spurious information also creates additional difficulties in identifying and screening relevant information. The article examines the political (P), economic (E), social (S) and technological (T) practices (in short, the PEST analysis) of

the literacy trends and disruptions in the Bulgarian media and communication ecosystem. This critical approach to the efficient engagement of all stakeholders participating in this process (legislators, regulators, media services and mobile communications providers, as well as content producers, professionals, researchers, educators and users) for upgrading the improving competences, tools and skills in media, information and digital literacy may lead to effective results. In contemporary knowledge-based societies, the information challenges posed to the media ecosystem by fake news, post-truth, echo chambers, filter bubbles, and the like, should be met responsibly, to support democratic debates on civic rights.

Maria Brown's and Vincent Marmarà's paper on *'Media-ted' electoral campaigns: Europeanisation and postcolonial dynamics of voters' use of media platforms in Malta* takes us to the EU Member State and formerly colonised island of Malta. It presents the findings of a quantitative empirical study of media platforms used by Maltese voters in the runup to the 2017 general election and voters' engagement with national politics in 2021, a few months before a yet-to-be-announced general election. Demographic factors affecting choice of medium to source news and political attitudes included gender, age cohort and education. The empirical findings are, perhaps, unsurprising: older and less educated cohorts sourced their news primarily from television, while the use of online sources (especially of Facebook) increased between the 2017 and 2019 elections, especially among younger and more educated voters. Yet these findings substantiate the authors' amplification of the remit of postcolonial communications and media scholarship to understand how tradition "tribalised socio-cultural milieu". The paper argues for continued investment in media literacy as a tool for discerning and potentially overcoming radicalising political agendas. Consequently, this study validates

media's (potential) agency in citizenship education, whilst identifying shortcomings. Since voters are adults, the study also informs on barriers that citizenship education in postcolonial settings needs targeting as part of the broader framework of adult education and lifelong learning agendas.

A conceptual analysis bringing the role of political parties in citizenship education under scrutiny features in Tomás Pacheco-Bethencourt's paper *The Debate Over Civic Education: Its Place in Populist Rhetoric*. The article focuses especially on populist rhetoric in the Spanish context with the research question: what value does citizenship education hold in populist rhetoric? Spain's main populist parties, *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos* (United We Can), right-wing and left-wing respectively, serve as case studies to illustrate how citizenship education has been operationalised for the purpose of constructing 'the people'. The theoretical discussion draws on the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005, 1996) to substantiate the fabrication of political identities through discursive means and the framing of empty signifiers in populist discourse. Pacheco-Bethencourt argues that the focus of populist rhetoric is on the fabrication of citizenship through discourse which gives meaning to the conceptual core of civic education. The paper offers a critical deconstruction of possible meanings and interpretations of 'populism'. Findings of the case studies on Spain's right-wing and left-wing main populist parties, *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos* respectively, corroborate how the two parties harnessed civic education to fuel conflict and polarisation.

Gilda Hoxha's article *Possibilities of higher education for a productive civil and social engagement: The experience of Albania* discusses a case study that analyses civil and social engagement (CSE) and possibilities for education based on the Albanian historical experiences and current

challenges to the democratisation process. The relationships between the concepts analysed are approached from two perspectives: the status quo of the institutionalised political system and the involvement of education in building productive civil democratic engagement. The article is organised in two main parts: first, the theoretical approach focusing on key issues related to civil and social education is laid out, and second, the outcomes of the civil and social engagement in the democratisation process are analysed. Three models of education are identified: the absolute education model, the sorting model, and the cumulative model. The article argues that based on the Albanian socio-political setup in recent decades, the country has stabilised its political representation and decision-making process, but nevertheless Albanian society still faces a chaotic development towards democratisation, including in education. Consequently, civic and social engagement concepts and collective behaviour are perceived as key factors to raise awareness in citizens about public policies, decision-making and governance. Additionally, while Albanian policy-makers widely recognise that education serves as an engine for economic growth through the accumulation of *human* capital, education is also strongly associated with boosting levels of *social* capital.

Finally, the analysis of this special issue queries the more globalised digital and environmental facets of contemporary citizenship in Anna Björk's and Claire Shaw's paper *Extensions of citizenship? Exploring digital, global and environmental citizenship education*. The authors note how extending citizenship's parameters "from its state-centric origins towards contemporary global governance structures and other points of reference" yields new demarcations and challenges to the legal dimension of citizenship. They examine how new forms of citizenship are presented on a national and transnational scale. The

curriculum and policy approaches of three European nations, three transnational organisations and one academic institution are analysed to assess how citizenship is recontextualised in the face of globalisation, climate change and digitalisation. Björk's and Shaw's reappraisal of citizenship on these terms evokes postcolonial possibilities that include novel tools for participation and a sense of belonging to a wider, global community. These unfold in sites of struggles for equal opportunity and equity in the politics of citizenship resulting from inequalities, particularly of access and impact.

Significantly, the contributions in this special issue engage with the project RECAST's commitment in the Memorandum of Understanding of the COST Association to tackle "the responses of European democracies to the growing conflicting claims" about civic rights. It thus aims at "widening" the interpretative outlook and enhancing "transnational understanding" to facilitate "constructive conditions to engage scholars as well as non-academic stakeholders" to better inform political reform (COST Association, 2017, p 3). It is hoped that, far from signalling the end of RECAST, the postcolonial thrust of the discussions examined in this special issue will further broaden the RECAST and the Working Group's research agenda in its established networks and result in further and novel interdisciplinary and methodologically pluralist reappraisals and collaborations concerning civic rights and democracy in a globalised Europe.

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Postcolonial Directions in Education
Volume 11 Issue 1, 2022 | 12-41

# MEDIA LITERACY CHALLENGES TO DEBATES ON CIVIC RIGHTS

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**Abstract** The concept of media literacy addresses the potential of contemporary societies to resist the negative effects of such phenomena as diminishing public trust and severely polarized politics. Traditional and modern internet-based media affect citizens' daily lives, politics and society. Although social media encourage individuals to express their opinions, share content and communicate in a personalized way, these are often open to manipulation and hamper the public debates on substantial civic issues. Using PEST analysis that examines political (P), economic (E), social (S), and technological (T), practices, the text investigates these areas in the Bulgarian media ecosystem. Based on the indicators for media freedom, education and peoples' trust, the Media Literacy Index assesses the abilities of prosumers (i.e. individuals who both produce and consume content) in 35 European countries to resist fake news. Levels of integrity, as well as distrust in scientists and journalists are related to media literacy about connecting practices with concepts and arguments in media debates on civic rights and democracy in three interrelated case studies in Bulgaria: the social protests (2013-2020), the COVID-19 epidemic and the April 2021 Parliamentary pre-election campaign.

**Keywords:** media literacy, politics, civic rights, debates, audiences, PEST analysis

**Резюме** Концепцията за медийна грамотност разглежда потенциала на съвременните общества да се противопоставят на негативните ефекти от такива явления като намаляване на

общественото доверие и въздействето на силно поляризирани политикии. Традиционните и съвременните интернет-базирани медии влияят на ежедневния живот, политиката и обществото на гражданите. Въпреки че социалните медии насърчават хората да изразяват мнението си, да споделят съдържание и да общуват по персонализиран начин, те често са отворени за манипулация и възпрепятстват обществените дебати по съществени граждански въпроси. Използвайки PEST анализ, текстът разглежда политически, икономически, социални и технологични практики в българската медийна екосистема. Въз основа на показателите за медийна свобода, образование и доверие в медиите, Индексът на медийна грамотност оценява способността на потребителите в 35 европейски държави да се противопоставят на фалшивите новини. Нивата на почтеност, както и недоверието към учени и журналисти са свързани с медийната грамотност относно свързването на практики с концепции и аргументи в медийните дебати за граждански права и демокрация в три взаимосвързани казуса в България: социалните протести (2013-2020 г.), епидемията от COVID-19 и предизборната кампания за парламент през април 2021 г.

**Ключови думи:** медийна грамотност, политика, граждански права, дебати, публика, PEST анализ

## Introduction

Understanding media literacy in contemporary communication processes calls for a manysided approach. Within a mere five decades the concept of the transition from an economy based on material goods to one based on knowledge (Drucker, 1969) intensified the knowledge divide (i.e. the gap between those who can find, create, manage, process and disseminate information and those who are disadvantaged in this process) (Rheingold, 2012). While in post modernity (Lyotard, 1984) diffusion between information and technology has been a prerequisite for blurring the lines between the physical, digital and

biological spheres, some 30 years later transmedia storytelling and participatory culture already represent a process where integral elements of a narrative are dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience (Jenkins, 2006). In today's flat globalized world "Never before in the history of the planet have so many people – on their own – had the ability to find so much information about so many things and about so many other people" (Friedman, 2007, p 177).

Thus, today's knowledge-based society upgrades the achievements of disseminating raw data by the information society to transforming this data into integrated resources allowing people to take effective action (UNESCO, 2005). Yet nowadays surveillance capitalism claims unilaterally human experience as free raw material to be translated into behavioural data, in order to be processed in 'machine intelligence'. The majority of this data is translated into advertising, i.e. into "prediction products" (Zuboff, 2019).

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning, enabling individuals of different educational backgrounds to find, critically and competently evaluate, accurately and creatively use, and responsibly communicate information in all its various formats efficiently and effectively, in regard to the acquisition of knowledge, as well as in situations requiring decision-making or problem-solving.

While information literacy lies closer to library science, media literacy lies closer to the social effects of content created by the media industry. In spite of much scholarly debate about whether information literacy and media literacy are subsets of each other or separate entities, the two fields have certain similarities. Both refer to the ability of people to make informed judgments as users of information and media, as well as to become

skillful creators and producers of information products and media messages (Livingstone, 2004; Dahlgren, 2005).

Unifying information literacy and media literacy as a composite concept considering the right to freedom of expression and access to information through ICTs has been tackled by UNESCO in an unprecedented and significant publication. *Media and Information Literacy. Policy & Strategy Guidelines* offers a multifaceted approach to developing national policies, legal frameworks and regulatory mechanisms for a better media and information environment. These guidelines are a part of a comprehensive media and information educational toolkit, including: Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Curriculum for Teachers; Global MIL Assessment Framework; Guidelines for Broadcasters to Promote MIL; online multimedia MIL teaching resources tool; and a model for online MIL and intercultural dialogue courses (UNESCO, 2013). A UNESCO handbook *Journalism, "Fake News" & Disinformation* provides an internationally relevant open model curriculum, responding to the emerging global problem of disinformation that confronts societies in general, and journalism in particular (Ireton & Posetti, 2020).

Digitalization has led to significant proliferation of information spread by the Internet. Nowadays people all over the world can connect via mobile devices with unprecedented speed, scope, processing power, storage capacity and access to knowledge virtually without limitation. In 1997 the citizens of the Net representing the new globalized way of communication were named netizens. (Hauben, 1997). Later, other terms were introduced for internet users, such as digital natives, digital immigrants, smart mobs (Prenscy, 2001; Rheingold, 2002). However, many users lack awareness of the mechanisms that frame their digital engagement with information online and offline. Moreover, content personalization and private moderation may have various

positive or negative effects and also pose serious threats to access to information and freedom of expression (Spitzer, 2012). Age-based inequalities and socio-economic disparities may deepen the digital divide, thus inhibiting citizens' informed participation in democratic processes. Hence the ability of digital literacy to find, organize, evaluate, create, and disseminate information in various platforms using digital technology supplements the managerial particularities of information literacy and the communication specifics of media literacy, thereby contributing to knowledge development.

Given the radically transforming media economy due to mobility, user-generated communication, Internet and the burgeoning availability of digital products, in 2007 the Commission launched the Communication *A European Approach to Media Literacy in the Digital Environment.* This defines media literacy as "the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts" (European Commission, 2007, p 3). Recital 59 of the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive states that:

> [I]n order to enable citizens to access information and to use, critically assess and create media content responsibly and safely, citizens need to possess advanced media literacy skills. Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies, but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgment, analyse complex realities and recognise the difference between opinion and fact. It is therefore necessary that both media service providers and video-sharing platforms providers, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, promote the development of media literacy in all

> sections of society, for citizens of all ages. (European Parliament, 2018, pp 77-78)

Media literacy has for more than two decades been a focus of research and discussion by the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA). Recommendations for the improvement of the campaigns on disinformation carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Code of Practice have been issued in the *Improving Media Literacy Campaigns on Disinformation* Report, published by the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA, 2020).

Media literacy is a complex issue. Nowadays it comprises the functioning of all factors shaping the media ecosystem – political, economic, social and technological. It is therefore important to study the extent of the audience's awareness regarding distributed media content in order to support meaningful deliberative debates on civic rights.

## Methods

This study aims to provide an overview of research on media literacy in Bulgaria. Using PEST analysis, focusing on the macro-environmental factors of the political (P), economic (E), social (S) and technological (T), practices in the Bulgarian media ecosystem are analysed. The research presents three interrelated case studies on the potential to withstand the negative impact of fake news and misinformation due to the quality of education, free media and high level of trust among people based on the European media literacy index, notable for the sustaining of democracy: the social protests, the COVID-19 epidemic and the parliamentary pre-election campaign of April 2021.

### ***The PEST Approach to Media Literacy Concept Developments***

Usually PEST analysis concentrates on the political and regulatory commitment to the fundamental values when developing new trajectories in the domains of technology, business and governance; the transformation of business models for meeting customers' expectations for personalized interaction at all points of their consumer experience; the scaling up of citizen-centred technologies as phenomenal opportunities for human progress that also pose serious societal challenges (Aguilar, 1967).

Rapid progress in ICTs stimulates the diversity of platforms through which audio-visual content is disseminated. Of particular importance is the consideration whether the European democratic model will retain its resilience in the highly competitive communication markets. No matter how positive the impact of ICT applications and media developments on progress in all areas of life may be, it is nevertheless true that they pose challenges concerning the social stratification of society (Castells, 2004).

#### *Political Aspects*

For the contemporary media ecosystem to function properly, several political issues are important, among them freedom of expression and access to information; plurality of opinion and variety of content; professional standards and journalistic ethics; transparency of ownership and accountability to the audience; protection of underaged and vulnerable social groups; cooperation between regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation; and the expansion of social media. The sustainability of these principles is decisive for the democratic functioning of these human-centred societal developments.

Based on assessing the above principles, the political aspect of the PEST analysis focuses on the effects of legislation ands regulation in which government policies affect the media environment. Despite the rapid development of ICT and online services, television continues to be the most preferred source of information and entertainment for most European households (European Commission, 2021). The current media legislation in Bulgaria has been closely aligned with the EU regulations. The two national institutions that regulate the electronic media are the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) and the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC). CEM is the regulatory body that monitors compliance with the Radio and Television Act (CEM, 1998). The CRC enforces the Electronic Communications Act and manages the radio frequency spectrum (MTITC, 2007). Self-regulation is managed by the Ethical Code of the Bulgarian Media (UBJ, 2007).

Nowadays, according to data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI), 209 newspapers (33 dailies) with annual circulation of 123,287,000 and 519 magazines and bulletins with annual circulation of 8,416,000 are available. In 2020, 77 radio stations and 120 television stations were listed, operating on national, regional and local level terrestrially, via cable or via satellite (NSI, 2021).

In addition to traditional media and online-only news sites, the use of other social media platforms and of networking and microblogging services such as Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram, Twitter and hashtags is becoming increasingly popular. Use of online social networks every day or almost every day is 56% (in the EU it ranges from 46% in Germany and France, to 77% in Lithuania) (European Commission, 2021). The dynamics of the developments in communication is so intense that it is difficult to determine whether due to technological and economic convergence it will evolve in the context of ever-increasing deregulation in favour of the market or in the

process of co-regulation serving the public interest.

*Economic Aspects*

The economic approach of the PEST analysis targets the key factors of the media industry developments. The internationalization of the economy and convergence of modern communications currently favour the prevalence of multi-sector and multinational corporations. At the same time, the globality and uniformity of the Information Society are merging into the separatism of glocality (Blatter, 2013). The media and telecommunications sectors remain among the industries that have felt the strongest impact due to digital transformation (Raycheva, 2018).

Media pluralism in the contemporary e-communication environment can be assessed through the number and type of media outlets, the number and structure of their owners, the editorial content and the access in different societal groups to media channels. The World Economic Forum (WEF), in its White Paper on *Digital Transformation of Industries: Media, Entertainment and Information* (MEI), points out the widespread recognition among different stakeholders that the role of digital technology is rapidly shifting from being a driver of marginal efficiency to an enabler of fundamental innovation and disruption. Thus, some basic challenges occur, among them customer expectations; demographic and cultural attitudes; and media and communication literacy skills (WEF, 2016).

The trend towards media concentration in Bulgaria resulted from the process of media market build-up and structuring after the political and economic changes of 1989. It was characterized by an inflow of foreign capital and players, especially after the country’s accession to the European Union in 2007. This facilitated the establishment of some successful business models across

the entire range of media production, but it depersonalized media diversity in the more sparsely populated places.

In an open and liberalized market, consumers are among the factors ultimately determining the speed of penetration and dissemination of digital services. Hence pan-European and national measures stimulating the further efficient use of the radio frequency spectrum are of great economic, social and cultural importance (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008).

*Social Aspects*

The social factors in the PEST analysis include demographics and trends in media consumption. In the information age (Castells, 2004) telecommunications networks are defined as the digital nervous system of modern economic and social life (Gates, 1999). Since the beginning of the 21st century, alongside the intensive social, economic and technological developments, the very paradigm of the media has also been changing. Situated in the context of globalization processes, they are undergoing multi-layered transformations with the dynamic advances of technologies, business models, regulatory policies, professional practices and the behaviour of the audiences. Media are becoming convergent phenomena with respect to content production and the dissemination of audiovisual products. The rapid development of ICTs has transformed the media communication process – from linear to non-linear services – and the public – from passive consumers to active prosumers, individuals who both produce and consume content. (Toffler, 1980). The inclusion of audiences in the process of content creation, regulation, distribution and perception conditions the remodeling of the media ecosystem (Council of Europe, 2011).

Converged communication reality and the use of hybrid products prompt energetic moves towards the

personalization, contextualization and fragmentation of content. These moves are pivotal to understanding such phenomena as the information overload and digital fatigue that consumers are facing. In addition, the artificial intelligence of the future will significantly affect the creative process among the media and challenge its human-centred design of communication.

The creative potentials of the new information and communication environment appear to be a key factor in the development of the media reality in the country. More than 76% of the Bulgarians use Facebook for any purpose and 64% for news; 70% use YouTube for any purpose and 64% for news; 54% use Facebook Messenger for any purpose and 17% for news; 61% use Viber for any purpose and 16% for news; 36% use Instagram for any purpose and 12% for news; and 13% use Twitter for any purpose and only 8% for news. Thirty-eight per cent share news via social media, messaging or e-mail (Reuters, 2021). After the massive civil protests of 2013 fomented by the widespread involvement of social networks, the influence of various communication channels was acknowledged by the Bulgarian citizens.

*Technological Aspects*

The technological part of the PEST analysis considers the specific role and development of technologies within the media and communication sector. Of all the factors affecting the construction rate of the new global information society, technology is undoubtedly the most dynamic. Santiago Lorente identified two stages in technological development: convergence between telecommunications and informatics (telematics) and convergence between telematics and audio-vision (mediamatics) (Lorente, 1996). The notions of 'total technocracy' (Postman, 1992) and the 'technetronic' (Brzezinski, 1982) internationalization of communication

processes imply the maximum involvement of the whole of humanity in the construction of the Global Information Society. Thus the 'network of networks' forms the 'networked society' (Wellman, 2001). In order to measure the impact of the internet on the traditional media one should seek interlinked processes between them: in the mediatization of the net, both fixed (computer/internet) and mobile (internet/mobile phone) and in the 'internetization' of the classic mass media (Fortunati, 2005). Therefore, media and information literacy skills acquire additional importance in today's intercultural dialogue in the communication environment.

Bulgaria is a country with some of the fastest Internet connections in the world (Akamai, 2017). According to the 2021 ranking among 91 countries worldwide, Bulgaria ranks sixth (after South Korea, Lithuania, Norway, Austria and the Netherlands) with a median mobile (cellular only) download internet connection speed of 27.985Mbit/s. Regarding open data access, Bulgaria ranks among the ten countries setting the new trends in the EU (Internet Speed Check, 2021). Today, transformations in the communication environment are catalysed by the capacity of the blogosphere and social networks, and of mobile communications, which have also led to a paradigm shift in the media – from mass media means to individual media services (Council of Europe, 2011).

## Bulgaria: Three Case Studies on Media Literacy

Valuable contributions to the topic of media literacy have been made by the European Media Literacy Expert Group (set up in 2011 and composed of members from academia, consumer and business associations, government ministries and public authorities); the European Media Literacy Education Study (EMEDUS), which initiated the proposal for the creation in 2014 of a *European Media Literacy Observatory*; the Media Literacy Task Force,

established in 2011 in the COST Action IS0906 *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies,* etc.

A noteworthy report entitled *Mapping of Media Literacy Practices and Actions in EU-28* by the European Audiovisual Observatory was published in 2017. Over two thirds of the 939 main media literacy stakeholders identified (categorized as 305 in "civil society", 175 among "public authorities", and 161 in "academia") had no statutory responsibilities in this area. Out of the 547 projects identified, the most common project type was "resources" (173), followed by "end-user engagement" (107). Regarding media literacy skills, the majority of the respondents linked them to the topic "critical thinking" (403), followed by "media use" (385). For the top 145 projects the most common audience group consisted of "teens and older students", and only seven projects had as their target group "older people" (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2017).

Created in 2017, the Media Literacy Index aims to measure the potential for resilience to 'post-truth', 'fake news' and their consequences and to contribute to finding solutions. Its most recent report of 2021 scores and ranks 35 European countries, using indicators for media freedom, quality of education, interpersonal trust and e-participation that can serve as predictors of the level of resilience of a society to misinformation. The media freedom indicators carry the most weight (Freedom House and Reporters without Borders) along with the education indicators (PISA). The e-participation indicator (UN) and trust in people (Eurostat) carry less weight relative to the other indicators. The main aim is to measure the potential for resilience to the negative effects of diminishing public trust, severely polarized politics and fragmented media. Only Turkey, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia are behind Bulgaria (30), which ranks last in the European Union in terms of imperviousness to the spread of fake news (OSIS, 2021).

Thus, according to the *World Press Freedom Index 2021,* Bulgaria is ranked 112th (out of 180 countries), which shows that there is considerable room for improvement in freedom of speech and independent journalism for most of the media outlets and for many non-government organizations disbursing the funds of European and Transatlantic institutions (Reporters without Borders, 2021). The 2021 annual *Nations in Transit Report of Freedom House* ranks Bulgaria ninth out of 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia in terms of the level of democratic governance, measuring the national and local governance, the electoral process, independent media, civil society, corruption, judicial framework and independence (Freedom House, 2021). In the OECD, the PISA 2018 Report *21st Century Readers. Developing Literacy Status in a Digital World*, exploring how 15-year-old students in 69 countries are developing reading skills to navigate the technology-rich world of information, Bulgaria scores below the OECD average of 47% with regard to ability to distinguish between fact and opinion and access to training in detecting biased information (OECD, 2021). According to open data on trade and competitivenes *TCdata 360* of the World Bank for 2020, Bulgaria ranks 35th among 130 countries in online e-participation (The World Bank, 2020). With regard to these disturbing rankings, media debates on civic rights and democracy were examined in three interrelated case studies in Bulgaria: the social protests (2013-2020), the COVID-19 epidemic and the April 2021 parliamentary pre-election campaign.

## *Social Protests: Faking the Debates over Civil Rights*

The social protests in Bulgaria are a telling sign of the activities of civil society mainly against the monopoly of the oligarchic corporate structures and for the integrity of the political parties and the state institutions. Usually,

frustrated people, who have been forced into living conditions without security or predictability, thus gaining the identity of 'precariat', go out into the streets to defend the limitations on their social existence. The main grievances and causes of outrage are connected to the deficiency of real democracy in the political system, including economic injustice; corporate influence; corruption; lack of transparency and accountability of the government; insufficient surveillance of citizens, etc.

All the protests were extensively covered and commented by the mainstream media, and also via social networks. In most cases the social discontent in Bulgaria was leaderless. People gathered horizontally through decentralized social networks and acted in a direct, participatory democracy of equals, which managed to simultaneously mobilise citizens from different age groups, educational backgrounds and social status. They were united by the desire to freely express their previously unrecognized and neglected identities.

Over the last decade there have been significant changes in the dynamics of the protest culture in Bulgaria and in the communication between protesters and rulers. Noticeable maturation of civil society and its struggle for better functioning of democracy has been observed. Thus the social protests at the beginning of 2013 were more violent (self-immolations, bloody clashes, street blockades with trashcans, park benches, paving stones, etc.) than those in the middle of 2013 and in 2018 (theatrical performances, children present at the protest marches, music concerts, etc.). In the long-term these large-scale protests resulted in public awareness, which had to be prioritized by the ruling powers, which is some cases even led to the resignation of the government or dismissal of high-ranking officials). In recent years, however, this democratic tool of the social networks to fuel protests as a corrective to socially unacceptable problems and government actions has been distorted by the increasing

use of fake news and hate speech in the interests of certain business and political circles paying protesters to take to the streets.

The mass protests spontaneously organized via the social networks have managed to redefine the communication discourse. In the new media ecosystem, combining traditional offline and new online media, people could join in an unmediated, direct dialogue. However, while the traditional media could rely on codes of ethics, self-regulation and co-regulation in compliance with professional standards, the content in the online environment could hardly be regulated and it is difficult to organize public rectification of the messages delivered. Hence such phenomena as dissemination of alternative facts and fake news disrupt professional journalism and can have long-term negative impacts on society causing audiences to mistrust media content.

The public concern that the digital interface of information and communication technologies could threaten the professional standards of journalism stresses the need to strengthen regulatory actions and self-regulatory awareness. The globalisation processes continuously erode the professional norms of the traditional media, thus putting journalism practitioners at greater risk. The awareness of the new vulnerabilities of the media ecology is of major importance to the whole array of stakeholders: media institutions, content producers and providers, advertisers, regulators, academia, civil society, prosumers, etc. (European Commission, 2007).

The Council of Europe therefore adopted a special recommendation, CM/Rec (2011)7, which explains not only the concept of the media ecosystem, but also emphasizes the trends in its development. The Member States are encouraged to adopt a new, broad notion of media, encompassing all actors involved in the production and dissemination – to potentially large numbers of people

– of content and applications (Council of Europe, 2013). The main purpose of social media literacy is to assist the general public to become more proficient at reading and understanding the nature and function of social movements by developing such skills as reading the conditions, communication, frames, tactics, perspectives and debates necessary to understand social movement activity (Del Gandio, 2017). The civil society structures and the non-governmental organizations in the country have not so far succeeded in raising public media literacy awareness about the social movements, thus mocking up the meaningful debates about the protection of civil rights for sustaining the fundamentals of democracy.

## *The COVID-19 Epidemic: the "Infodemia" Challenge*

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused drastic changes in people's lifestyles worldwide. It has exposed people to psychological distress, fatigue, occupational burnout, fear, economic insecurity and forced social isolation. The purpose of the public debate in the media about the corona virus was not so much to challenge the constitutional right of governments to impose vital measures during a pandemic, nor to instruct people on how and whether to comply with the measures taken. The main purpose was to protect people against "infodemia", i.e., from the curtailment of their access to other important information, and also from the risk to fall prey to unreliable messages and rumors on the adequacy of these measures and the accompanying sanctions spread mostly through social networks.

Thus, the programme broadcasting regulator, the Council for Electronic Media (CEM), issued a *Position* with a call for media service providers to inform citizens responsibly, timely and accurately, avoiding sensationalism in presenting information, not disseminating unverified facts, and to adhere to high

professional standards and ethical standards. In line with ERGA's initiative that the role of the media in critical and complex situations is to contribute to citizens' awareness of public health, the CEM prepared a report on the behaviour of national radio and TV broadcasters during the pandemic (CEM, 2020).

The Association of European Journalists in Bulgaria (AEJ) was particularly active in defending professional standards. It published *COVID-19: Guidelines for Responsible Reporting*, addressing various aspects of the pandemic coverage - from ethics and journalistic responsibility to countering misinformation and protecting personal safety - physical and mental, with an emphasis on expertise and compliance with professional standards. The AEJ also supported the *Appeal to the Presidents of the EC, the Council of the EU and the EP for Europe to preserve journalism and the free flow of information in dealing with COVID-19*. In order to assist journalists in covering COVID-19, AEJ organized various training initiatives for journalists and media professionals (Cheresheva, 2020). The Union of Bulgarian Journalists (UBJ), an organization taking a firm position against fake news, has joined the expert proposal for the development of a special European programme for the support and protection, including financial protection, of media independence and the social and professional rights of journalists (UBJ, 2020).

Despite these efforts, however, the media in the country and society have not succeeded in responding effectively to the initiatives of of renowned international organizations on media and social media platforms. They have scarcely publicized researchers, technologists, civil society leaders, and influencers to further strengthen their actions to disseminate accurate information and prevent the spread of mis- and disinformation (WHO, 2020). Thus, at the end of 2021, the level of vaccination in the country was low, and among the reasons for this are the

mixed messages in the media about its effectiveness and the inadequate professional media competencies and public media literacy.

## ***The April 2021 Parliamentary Pre-election Campaign: Mediatization of Politics and Politicization of Media***

The pre-election campaigns in Bulgaria during the period of democratization since 1989 have developed alongside two interrelated processes – politicization of media and mediatization of politics (Raycheva et al., 2021). Nowadays the political environment is characterized by a permanent merging of political entities, which gradually escalates the usage of populist approaches, styles and rhetoric by all political parties. Traditional mainstream media, especially radio and press, are lagging dramatically behind the high-speed spread of the social networks for prosumers' attention.

The parliamentary elections in April 2021 were conducted in the anti-epidemic restrictions of COVID-19. In the summer of 2020, street protests broke out mainly against corruption and in favour of judicial reform, calling for the immediate resignation of the government in office and the Prosecutor General. Although the protests were mostly rhisomatic, at a certain point they were backed by an oligarch facing a number of legal allegations, who has fled from the country. The tense relationship between the Prime Minister and the President further polarized the political environment.

Candidates from 67 political parties stood for election to 240 seats in the national parliament. Voter turnout was 50.61%. Two political parties and four coalitions, representing 20 political entities were elected. However, they could not form a government. A caretaker government assumed power until the new by-elections on 11 July 2021.

The results from various studies showed that during the pre-election campaign, the Bulgarians preferred to be informed first by television and thereafter by online platforms and especially by Facebook (Exacta, 2021). However, the number of posts, the frequency of Facebook usage, as well as the funds invested did not prove directly proportional to the success achieved. Judging by the quality of the content of the posts, counting on populism in various dimensions proved the most successful strategy. For some of the new political formations aggressive rhetoric also proved productive. Of the Facebook profiles studied belonging to eventually elected political leaders, only few presented their intentions in such a way that voters could make an informed choice.

The findings of the study showed that funding invested in political advertising, scope of media activity, populism, hate speech, and Facebook communication were not sufficient for electoral success. It also became evident that the risks in the communicative competencies of political and media entities in the country are related to insufficient level of media literacy among media users, who, lost in a plethora of contradictory information, could not impartially exercise their informed election vote. Deficits in purposeful political messages and in clear party programmes were the more serious challenges to the development of deliberative democracy.

## Conclusion

The rapid advance of ICTs has outstripped the theoretical rationalization, regulatory framework, business models, professional practices and audience participation in contemporary democratic processes. This new 'mosaic culture' is characterized by the breaking of the 'mass' into separate units, or the 'demassification' of media and of society itself (Toffler, 1980). A virtual online culture has

been created which, due to its interactive nature, serves to integrate elements of society while having an alienating and restrictive impact on people in the sense of destroying 'live' communication.

The media and information literacy (MIL) concept has been used to explore the effects of media and audience awareness on the information content distributed. The purpose of assessing these effects is not only to learn about the tools and technologies used to disseminate media products but also to provide media users with the critical thinking skills needed to analyse complex realities and to distinguish between fact and opinion. Although the Media Literacy Index provides indicators to measure the potential of societies for resilience to misinformation (including 'post-truth' and 'fake news'), it is still challenging to cope with the negative effects of diminishing public trust, severely polarized politics and fragmented media.

Thus, for the successful participation of citizens in public debates on protecting, sustaining and developing civic rights and democracy, a serious awareness of the risks and opportunities of the deliberative communication process needs to be enhanced. A complex approach to the efficient engagement of all stakeholders participating in this process (legislators, regulators, media services and mobile communications providers, content producers, professionals, researchers, educators and users) for upgrading the training competences, tools and skills in media, information and digital literacy may yield effective results.

The analysis of the media practices in the three interrelated case studies highlights important shortcomings in the contemporary Bulgarian media environment in terms of covering significant social issues. The problems arising as a result of insufficient media literacy mechanisms for the informed involvement of people in comprehending social processes are also

outlined. The results of studying these shortcomings are indicative for media researchers and professionals to engage in further research on media literacy.

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# 'MEDIA-TED' ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS: EUROPEANISATION AND POSTCOLONIAL DYNAMICS OF VOTERS' USE OF MEDIA PLATFORMS IN MALTA

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**ABSTRACT** Media are an agent of citizenship education. The ways citizens consume media are impacted by socio-demographics, perceptions as well as past and ongoing social dynamics. The study discussed in this paper investigated if media consumption is related to citizen opinion formation, particularly during electoral campaigns; and to voting behaviour. The paper presents the findings of a quantitative study of media platforms followed by voters in Malta to source news in the run-up to the 2017 general elections and the 2019 elections of members of the European Parliament (MEP) and the local councils (LC). The study also investigated voters' engagement with national politics in 2021, a few months before a yet-to-be announced general election. The main findings of this study are that use of television predominated (76.0% in 2017, 62.5% in 2019) - particularly among older, female and less educated cohorts. Use of online sources was prevalent among younger and more educated cohorts ($p < 0.001$). The study investigated values attributed to Maltese politics, consideration of party position when forming opinions, past and prospective voting trends. There was a preponderance of younger cohorts among those considering voting for a different political party (50.3% among those aged 16-25, 42.0% among those aged 26-35). Older cohorts predominated among the 83% who reported always voting for the same party. Postcolonial communications and media studies inform the paper's analysis of Malta's long-standing

partisan duopoly; risks of polarisation and radicalisation; and recommendations on media literacy to resist sensationalised or fake news and radicalising agendas.

**RIJASSUNT** Il-midja huma aġent ta' edukazzjoni dwar ċittadinanza. Fatturi soċjo-demografiċi, perċezzjonijiet, kif ukoll dinamiċi soċjali kurrenti u tal-imgħoddi jaffettwaw il-konsum tal-midja. L-istudju diskuss f'dan l-artiklu investiga jekk il-konsum tal-midja huwiex relatat mal-formazzjoni tal-opinjonijiet fost iċ-ċittadini, partikolarment waqt kampanji elettorali; u ma' kif iċ-ċittadini jivvutaw. L-artiklu jippreżenta r-riżultati ta' studju kwantitattiv li xtrarr liema pjattaformi tal-midja uża l-elettorat Malti għall-aħbarijiet waqt il-kampanji elettorali tal-elezzjoni ġenerali tal-2017, u l-elezjonijiet tal-membri tal-Parlament Ewropew u l-Kunsilli Lokali tal-2019. L-istudju investiga wkoll dejta miġbura fl-2021 dwar perċezzjonijiet u esperjenzi politiċi tal-elettorat – ftit xhur qabel tħabbret elezzjoni ġenerali. L-istudju sab li l-użu tat-televiżjoni iddomina (76.0% fl-2017, 62.5% fl2019) – speċjalment fost votanti li huma ikbar fl-età, votanti nisa u votanti ta' livell ta' edukazzjoni formali iktar baxx. L-użu ta' pjattaformi onlajn spikka fost votanti iżgħar u dawk ta' livell ta edukazzjoni ogħla ($p < 0.001$). L-istudju investiga l-valur li lelettorat jagħti lill-politika Maltija; kif ukoll l-influenza talpożizzjoni tal-partiti politiċi fuq opinjonijiet personali; u anki xejriet ta' kif wieħed ivvota fl-imgħoddi, u kif bi ħsiebu jivvota filġejjieni. Kien hemm aktar votanti li jikkunsidraw li fil-ġejjieni jivvutaw partit differenti minn dak li vvutaw fl-imgħoddi fost dawk iżgħar fl-età (50.3% fost dawk ta' età bejn 16-25, 42.0% fost dawk ta' età bejn 26-35). Kien hemm aktar votanti li dejjem ivvutaw għall-istess partit fost dawk ta' età ikbar (83.0%). Mnebbħa mill-perspettiva postkolonjali ta' studji ta' kommunikazzjoni u midja, id-diskussjoni tal-artiklu tanalizza dduopolju partiġjan stabbilit f'Malta; kif ukoll riskji ta' polarizzazzjoni u radikaliżmu bħala kollaterali ta' użu ta' pjattaformi onlajn biex jinkisbu l-aħbarijiet. L-investiment fillitterżmu nazzjonali tal-midja huwa rakkomandazzjoni ewlenjia fil-konklużjoni tal-artiklu; bħala għodda kontra aħbarijiet sensazzjonalizzati jew foloz, u aġendi bi skop ta' radikaliżmu.

**KEYWORDS:** Media, Communications, Political education, Local government, Critical literac

## Introduction

Citizens' increased access to information is consistently recommended and attempts are made to improve the quality of democratic elections and government performance (Boudreau et al., 2019). The role played by the availability of information in the acquisition of political knowledge has attracted scholars' attention (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). In the context of the study informing this paper's discussion, citizens' use of one or more media platforms around election time is considered as having potential to gain control over one's social environment and, consequently, as nurturing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 1977). Empirical evidence suggests that citizens' engagement with the media is positively associated with political efficacy, knowledgeability, and participation. Many of these studies refer to Internet use in particular (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2009; Tedesco, 2007; Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Johnson & Kaye, 2003). However, this study also considered the literature on the risk of radicalisation arising from people accessing information that confirms their existing views and undermines their level of trust in the institutions of society (Kydd, 2021). In this sense, radicalisation can result from the combined impact in the consolidation of an existing standpoint that motivates estrangement from the social contract and, possibly, extremist practices. For example, the attack on Capitol Hill in the United States of America on 6 January 2021 was associated with the combined impact of the rise in the use of social media, political and media polarisation, widespread dissemination of conspiracy theories and the formation of armed right-wing groups (Kydd, 2021). These insights corroborate the relevance of media for citizens' political

education, political agency, engaged citizenship and participatory democracy.

Informed by the foregoing, this paper presents the findings of a quantitative study that comparatively analysed quantitative data on the use of media platforms during the 2017 general election campaign and the campaigns preceding the 2019 elections to the European Parliament and to the local councils in the EU island state and former colony of Malta, as well as data on voters' perceptions of politics collected in 2021, a few months before a yet-to-be-announced general election. More specifically, the study ascertained which media platforms (local television and radio stations, printed and online newspapers, Facebook) Maltese voters used during the thirty days preceding these elections in 2017 and 2019; whether this differed between the two election campaigns and/or different cohorts of participants, with special reference to age, gender and votes cast at the preceding election. The study also elicited perceptions of political issues in 2021, a few months before the announcement of an election date that would bring to an end the 2017 legislature.

Postcolonial media and communication theory were used as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of the findings to examine the implications for citizenship education; specifically, as regards the media's reach and role in fostering an informed electorate in the island state's formerly colonised societies. Before discussing the tenets of postcolonial media and communication theory that informed the data analysis, the next section presents the context of the study, with special reference to the long-standing political bi-party system and Malta's partisan, tribalized and colonial legacies.

## Context

The Maltese Islands are in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. With a total area of just over 315 square kilometres and a population of 514,600 (NSO, 2020), Malta is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Colonised by various rulers for centuries, Malta gained its independence from the British Empire in 1964, albeit many parts of the country remained under British control until 1979. In 1974, Malta became a republic and, in 2004, it became an EU Member State. Malta's democratic government comprises the President of Malta and the House of Representatives.

Malta's electoral system uses proportional representation and the single transferable vote (PR-STV). In the ballot, voters can rank as many candidates as they wish in order of preference. They can also float votes from one party to another, as well as to any independent candidates (Farrell, 2001). Whilst participation in elections is keen and features a 'near universal turnout' (Hirczy, 1995) (e.g., 92.1% turnout in the 2017 general election (Electoral Commission of Malta, 2021)), strong party loyalties (Vella, 2018) and "intense and pervasive partisanship" (Hirczy, 1995, p 255) exist. Only 1% of the electorate reported cross voting (Bezzina & Buhagiar, 2011) and research on non-voters revealed that the type of election affects turnout because "the Maltese electorate is more likely to abstain and to utilize non-voting as a form of protest in local and European rather than in parliamentary-level elections" (Vella, 2018, p 410). Although the PR-STV is associated with multi-party politics and enjoyed this influence in Malta until the first post-independence election (1966), Malta has consistently elected bi-party parliamentary compositions (Hirzcy, 1995). For decades, members of parliament (MPs) and MEPs have hailed solely from the Labour Party (PL) or the

Nationalist Party (PN). Unless, as in the case of the 2017 general election, a third party managed to get candidates elected by coalescing with one of the two main parties prior to election day. This happens because the number of votes achieved by a party does not determine the allocation of parliamentary seats. The latter is contingent upon winning at least one seat quota in at least one of the 13 electoral districts (Bezzina et al., 2021).

It is only as an outcome of internal party conflict during term in office that an MP has come to sit as an independent. Notably, internal party conflict also precipitated the establishment of all the political parties in Malta challenging the PL or the PN (e.g., Partit Demokratiku, Alternattiva Demokratika – the Green Party), save for the very recent establishment (2021) of Volt Malta, which forms part of Volt Europa. Conflictual narratives of 'betrayal of constituents' have been inevitable for MPs crossing the floor to a new party or sitting as independents. The latter is generally perceived and experienced as a temporary expedient until the end of the term in office, rather than an attributed inherent value.

Such 'us and them' has neither beginning nor end, nor a single identifiable independent or dependent variable in Maltese society. Tribalism, often featuring binary engagement, is endemic in how the Maltese interact with politics but also with patron saints, band clubs, football teams, immigrants and lobby groups advocating for or against issues such as divorce and abortion. The Maltese socio-political culture has been described "as a culture that accommodates both a *tribal duopoly* (where the tribes are in competition with each other) and a *duopoly of tribes* (where they collaborate…for their mutual benefit) at one and the same time" (Baldacchino, in Baldacchino & Wain, 2013, 86–87).

Malta's significant economic growth in recent years (OECD, 2021) raises questions of comparability with other southern European countries, such as Greece and

Portugal, where “the economic crisis…deepened the legitimacy crisis” (Freire et al., 2014, p 413). In Malta, however, legitimacy concerns arise primarily from geopolitical and partisan matters resulting from its smallness, ‘islandness’ and contradictions (Bezzina et al., 2021) between stability and change; seclusion and exposure; conservatism and modernity; tradition and innovation (Vassallo, 2012). Malta’s postcolonial, island state and Europeanisation dynamics are further characterised by a growing secularisation in response to a predominantly Catholic recent past; increasing sociocultural differentiation resulting from economic and irregular immigration and a growing middle class coexisting with increased income polarisation (Eurofound, 2021).

In this context, the use of media platforms during electoral campaigns can inform an understanding of media as agents of citizenship education; particularly with respect to opinion formation and especially on matters of public interest – including voting at elections. As an agent of citizenship education, media do not operate in a vacuum; they interact with the complexities inherent to citizens and their contexts. In Malta, for instance, it is relevant to think of media as agents of citizenship education operating in a formerly colonised, small EU island state with media prosumers[1] engaged with the tribal, partisan dynamics explained. Notably, shortly before the time of writing, the Maltese private media company Lovin’ Malta - a media company that operates solely online - filed a crowdfunded legal bid to “declare the perceived bias of party-owned

[1] ‘Prosumer’ is a derivative of the term ‘prosumption’, coined by Alvin Toffler (1980) and refers to a combination of production and consumption. Reference to ‘prosumers’ can also be found in the article “Media literacy challenges to debates on civil rights” in this special issue.

broadcasters unconstitutional" (Walsh, 2021). *Euronews* reported the case by underlining how

> The hegemony of Malta's two establishment parties over its broadcast media has been a *fait accompli* for three decades, acknowledged openly over the years by politicians from both tribes and exacerbated by the setting up of competing media companies wholly owned by the Labour Party (PL) and Nationalist Party (PN) in opposition to each other. (Walsh, 2021, para 4)

In light of the foregoing, the discussion in this paper draws on postcolonial media and communication theory to inform the implications that can be discerned from the study's data analysis. The main tenets are reviewed in the following section.

## Postcolonial media and communication theory

The contributions that postcolonial theory can make to media and communication studies include the former's historicised analysis of global power, politics, economics, culture and conflict, and its potential to decode "blatant inversion of emancipatory discourses… (and)… the deployment of essentialized discourses of alterity" (Kumar & Parameswaran, 2018, p 348). Yet postcolonial theory has been criticised for failing to consider popular culture and contemporary media practices in its investigation of narratives and representations of colonised cultures (Cere, 2011). However, media studies have articulated concern with "representation, stereotyping, identity formation and ideological workings of popular media cultures", with "emphasis…on the new and the now and…little attention to the historical and to the intersection…with the colonial and postcolonial" (ibid., p 3).

By productively dwelling on the existing affinities between these two branches of scholarship, Sangeet Kumar and Radhika Parameswaran (2018) built a case for a newly emerging area of inquiry, namely postcolonial communication and media studies. Communication and media studies would betray “ideals of social justice, global solidarity and an acute awareness of power relations” if they were to disavow “the vast historical reach of colonialism that profoundly changed the world as we know and experience it today” (Kumar & Parameswaran, 2018, p 348). Postcolonial media and communications elucidate “complex mediations through which our “realities” are constantly being shaped and produced” and illuminate “new vocabularies and logics (especially related to postcolonial mediations) for understanding our mediated world” (Shome, 2016, p 261). While it is widely accepted that media are not politically neutral resources, postcolonial media and communications theory can help to ascertain how the role of media as citizen educators is at risk (or possibly guilty) of a colonising approach if embracing the ‘civilizing mission’ of earlier colonialisms (Fernández, 1999); particularly because the humanitarian rhetoric of media is an asset to the imperialist project. It is through this rhetoric that decent people become supporters of imperialism (Said, 1993).

## Method

In response to the review of the literature on the Maltese context discussed above, selected aspects of national and party politics queried in the study address the importance of Maltese politics for the participants of this study. These aspects were, namely, the extent to which these participants considered the position taken by the party supported (if any) when forming personal opinions, the extent to which participants voted for the same or different

parties in the past, and the likelihood of their doing so in the future.

The overarching research questions of the study discussed in this paper are:

1. What media platforms did various cohorts of the electorate of Malta follow during the 30-day run-up to the 2017 general election, 2019 MEP and local council elections?

2. What were the electorate's perceptions of selected aspects of national and party politics in 2021, a few months before the announcement of the next general election?

3. What similarities and differences emerge between various cohorts of the electorate (gender, age and way of voting in the last election) with respect to the media platforms followed by the various cohorts and their engagement with national and party politics?

Table 1. Samples and Population Characteristics

| **Population** | | | **2017 data collection round *n*1=5200** | | **2019 data collection round *n*2=5200** | | **2021 data collection round *n*3=1064** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Margin of Error** | | | +/- 1.35% | | +/- 1.35% | | +/- 3.0% | |
| **Variables** | ***f*** | **%** | ***f*** | **%** | ***f*** | **%** | ***f*** | **%** |

| **Gender** | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 228,634 | 49.7 | 2,646 | 50.9 | 2,725 | 52.4 | 527 | 49.5 |
| Male | 231,663 | 50.3 | 2,554 | 49.1 | 2,475 | 47.6 | 537 | 50.5 |
| **Age Group** | | | | | | | | |
| 16-25 | 56,892 | 14.5 | 638 | 12.3 | 569 | 11.0 | 144 | 13.5 |
| 26-45 | 137,270 | 35.1 | 1,819 | 35.0 | 1,586 | 30.5 | 389 | 36.6 |
| 46-65 | 115,968 | 29.7 | 1,630 | 31.3 | 1,793 | 34.5 | 326 | 30.6 |
| 66+ | 80,919 | 20.7 | 1,113 | 21.4 | 1,251 | 24.1 | 205 | 19.3 |

The study draws on the analysis of quantitative data collected by telephone in 2017, 2019, and 2021 as part of more extensive studies on national trends. The respective samples of the Maltese population (*n*1=5200; *n*2=5200; *n*3=1064) reflected the demographics of Malta (NSO, 2018) (Table 1). Using a 95% confidence level, it was possible to compare population and sample to calculate the margins of error in the extent to which the sample of respondents represented the population. The data collection rounds of 2017 and 2019 featured samples that differed from the actual population (margin of error) by +/- 1.35%. The 2021 data collection round comprised a sample that differed from the actual population (margin of error) by +/- 3.0%. Table 1 details how these variations translated into relatively minor differences in the sizes of the gender and age cohorts of the 2017, 2019 and 2021 samples.

The 2017 and 2019 questionnaires elicited the media platforms (local television and radio stations, printed and online newspapers, Facebook) that respondents followed in the 30-day run-up to the 2017 general election and the 2019 MEP and local council elections. The 2021 dataset informing the discussion in this paper comprises responses to questions administered between April and May 2021, a few months before a yet-to-be-announced general election. Questions elicited voters' perceptions of and engagement with politics, with special reference to national politics and political party allegiance.

Descriptive and bivariate analyses informed the examination of trends and testing for associations between socio-demographic variables and responses – more specifically Chi-Square testing with a p-value of .05 as the level of statistical significance. Using this test made it possible to determine if responses differed in a statistically significant manner within the population under study, as informed by the sample of responses available. Attention was paid to differentiating between general, European, and local council elections in view of varying interest and mobilisation among members of the Maltese electorate with respect to different types of elections (Vella, 2018).

## Results

The study found that figures on news sourcing during the 30-day period leading up to the 2017 general election were higher across all media platforms than for the 2019 European and local council elections (Figure 1). During the 2017 general election campaign voters primarily kept themselves informed by watching television, followed by online newspapers, Facebook, radio and printed newspapers, whereas during the 2019 European Parliament and local council electoral campaigns there

was an increase in Facebook followers and a decline in the readership of printed newspapers. It is noteworthy that Facebook and online newspapers together surpassed television viewing during both electoral campaigns, albeit by less than half a percentage point during the 2019 campaign (Figure 1).

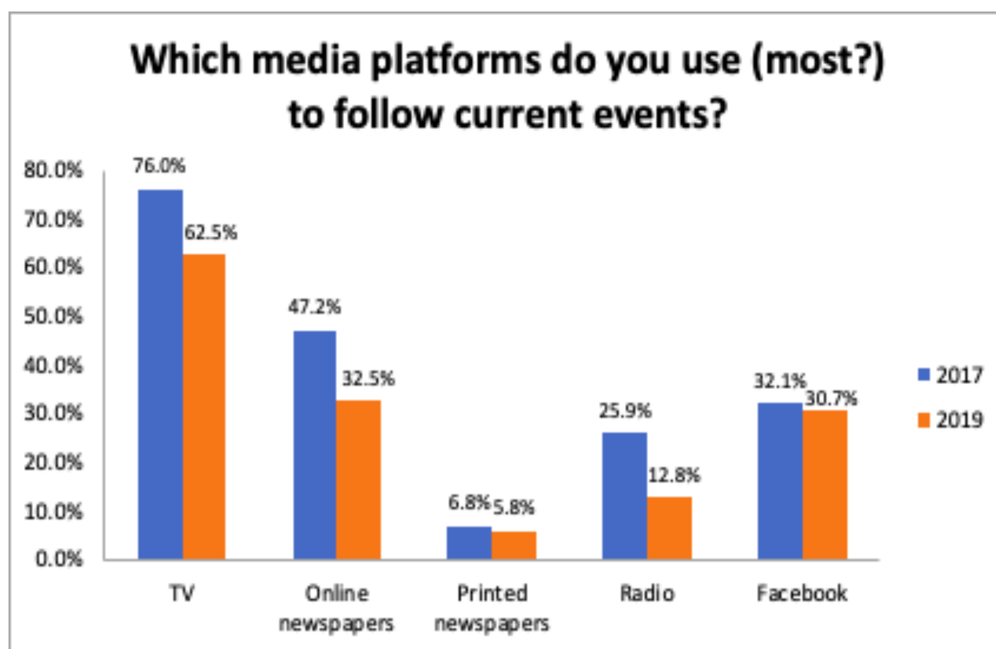

Figure 1. Media platforms

The study also found that the youngest cohorts and voters with the highest level of education were more likely to follow online newspapers (Chi Square Test: x2(1) = 977.55, $p < 0.001$, Table 2) and Facebook (Chi Square Test: x2(1) = 109.96, $p < 0.001$, Table 3). The reverse was found when analysing television followers (Chi Square Test: x2(1) = 543.37, $p < 0.001$). These included more people in the older cohorts and voters with lower levels of education (Table 4).

Table 2. Online newspapers

| | 16-25 | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | 56-65 | 66+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 82.0% | 72.1% | 57.8% | 47.1% | 29.6% | 12.7% |
| **2019** | 52.6% | 50.5% | 42.7% | 41.4% | 21.1% | 11.8% |

| | Females | Males |
|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 42.7% | 51.9% |
| **2019** | 28.8% | 36.6% |

| | Primary | Secondary | A' Levels/ Diploma | Tertiary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 10.4% | 40.8% | 71.9% | 77.9% |
| **2019** | 8.3% | 27.6% | 46.5% | 61.0% |

| | Unemployed | Employed | Domestic tasks | Pensioner | Student |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 41.4% | 64.1% | 26.5% | 15.9% | 83.5% |
| **2019** | 32.0% | 46.8% | 19.0% | 13.0% | 50.6% |

| | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 44.3% | 45.5% | 36.4% | 67.3% | 45.5% |
| **2019** | 30.0% | 34.9% | 30.0% | 32.0% | 36.6% |

Table 3. Facebook

| | 16-25 | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | 56-65 | 66+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 47.3% | 47.3% | 51.7% | 40.4% | 11.3% | 5.1% |
| **2019** | 56.7% | 57.6% | 45.7% | 28.5% | 18.0% | 7.3% |

| | Females | Males |
|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 38.5% | 26.0% |
| **2019** | 31.3% | 30.4% |

| | Primary | Secondary | A' Levels/ Diploma | Tertiary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 8.5% | 27.5% | 39.4% | 47.6% |
| **2019** | 4.5% | 28.6% | 55.1% | 52.1% |

| | Unemployed | Employed | Domestic tasks | Pensioner | Student |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 23.3% | 46.5% | 20.5% | 7.0% | 40.0% |
| **2019** | 48.0% | 44.9% | 18.8% | 8.6% | 43.8% |

| | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 30.8% | 32.3% | 33.0% | 40.3% | 35.9% |
| **2019** | 28.9% | 24.7% | 30.0% | 36.0% | 34.9% |

Table 4. Television

| | 16-25 | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | 56-65 | 66+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 55.9% | 70.3% | 67.0% | 84.2% | 86.7% | 86.7% |
| **2019** | 18.6% | 32.0% | 51.9% | 62.2% | 82.8% | 88.4% |

| | Females | Males |
|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 83.2% | 69.0% |
| **2019** | 66.1% | 58.6% |

| | Primary | Secondary | A' Levels/ Diploma | Tertiary |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 90.9% | 78.5% | 80.1% | 42.0% |
| **2019** | 90.8% | 70.7% | 42.0% | 24.5% |

| | Unemployed | Employed | Domestic tasks | Pensioner | Student |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 58.3% | 74.1% | 80.3% | 91.8% | 55.2% |
| **2019** | 60.0% | 44.9% | 82.6% | 87.7% | 28.1% |

| | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 81.7% | 83.8% | 75.0% | 52.2% | 77.4% |
| **2019** | 67.4% | 62.2% | 30.0% | 55.3% | 57.9% |

Since analysis of the 2021 data showed that the importance of politics among the Maltese voters increased with age (Chi Square Test: x2(1) = 154.49, $p < 0.001$, Figure 2), the findings of this study suggest, albeit in a preliminary manner requiring further targeted research, that those attaching importance to politics followed television more than other media platforms during the election campaign under study.

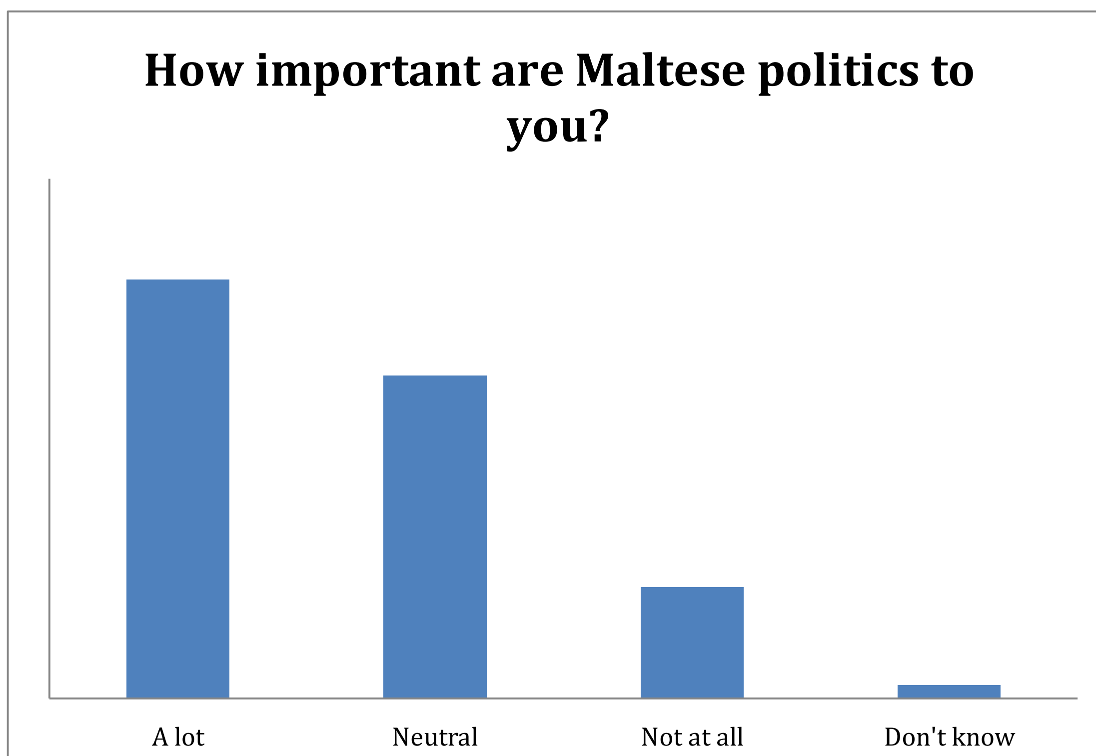


Figure 2. Importance of Maltese politics

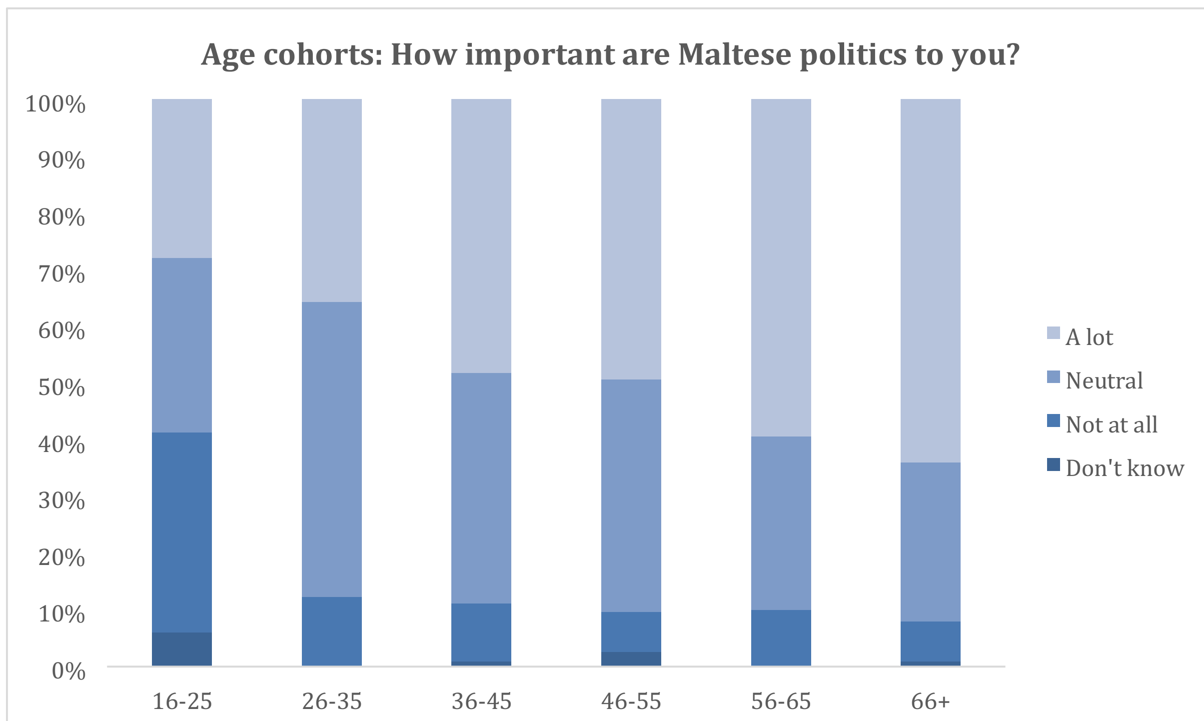


Figure 3: Age cohorts - Importance of Maltese politics
Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 154.49, p < 0.001$

Additionally, the study found that women followed more television than did men during the 2017 general election campaign (Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 22.61, p < 0.001$; Table 3). Interestingly, the analysis of the 2021 dataset showed that the percentage of participants who reported considering the line of the party they support when forming an opinion did not constitute a majority (Figure 4); and among the 43.9% who reported considering the party line, there was a decided preponderance of men (Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 22.26, p < 0.001$). This raises questions requiring further targeted research on the impact of television viewing during election times on the possibility of considering (and, possibly), eventually embracing the party line. However, given that 27% stated 'I do not know' there is room for speculation that more than 70% of participants could be considering the party's position when forming an opinion.

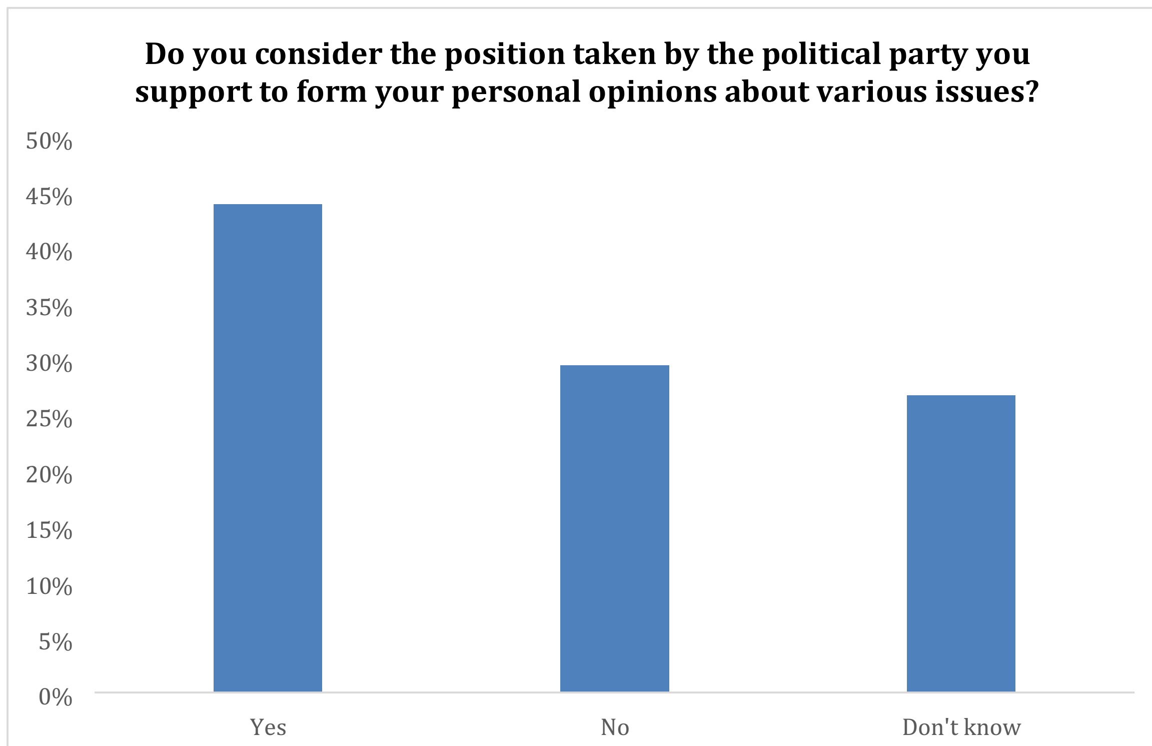


Figure 4. Consideration of party position

Data analysis also confirmed the persistent existence of core voters in the Maltese Islands. Not only because of those participating in the 2021 data collection 83% reported having always voted for the same party (Figure 5), but also because 56% reported that they were not considering voting for a different party in the future (Figure 8).

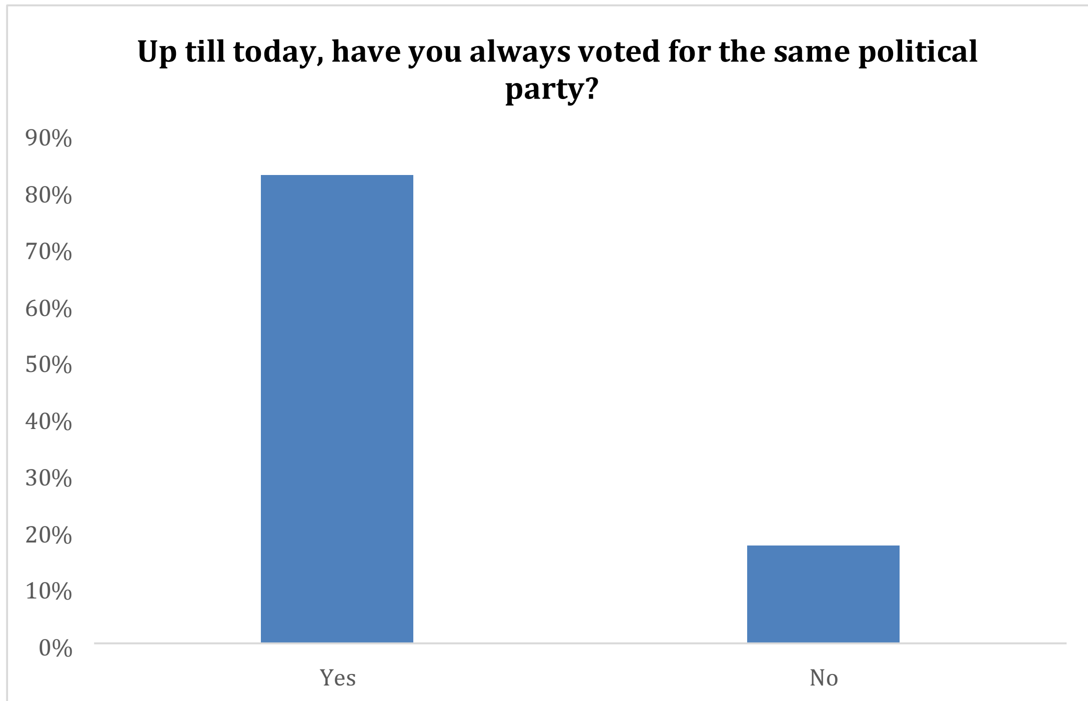


Figure 5. Past voting trends

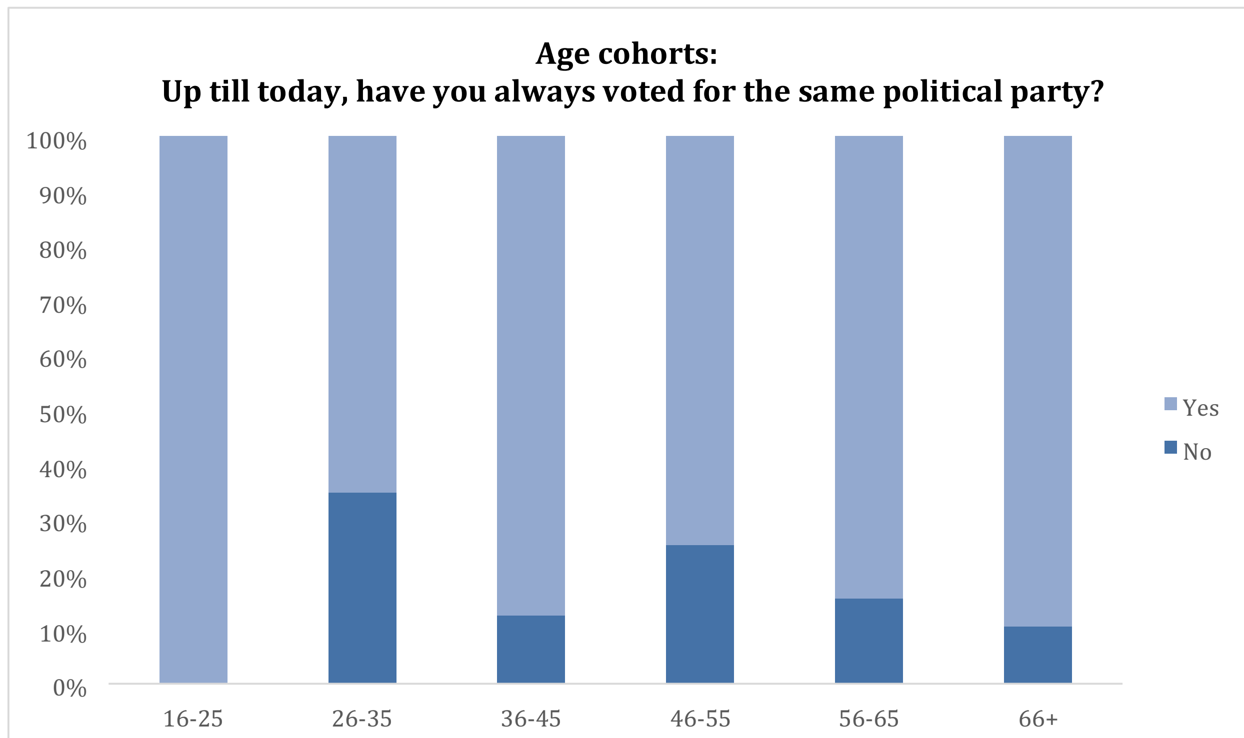


Figure 6. Age cohorts: Past voting trends
Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 211.10$, $p < 0.001$

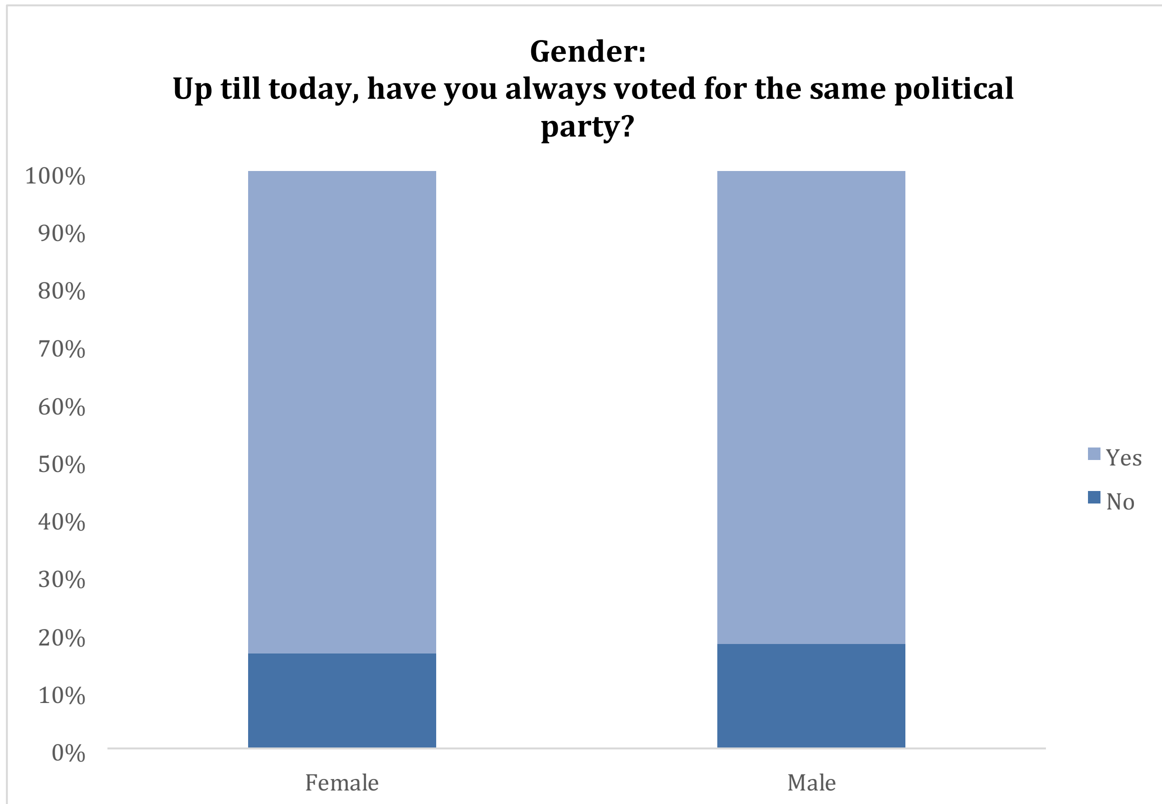


Figure 7. Gender: Past voting trends
Chi Square Test: x2(1) = 4.55, p = 0.103

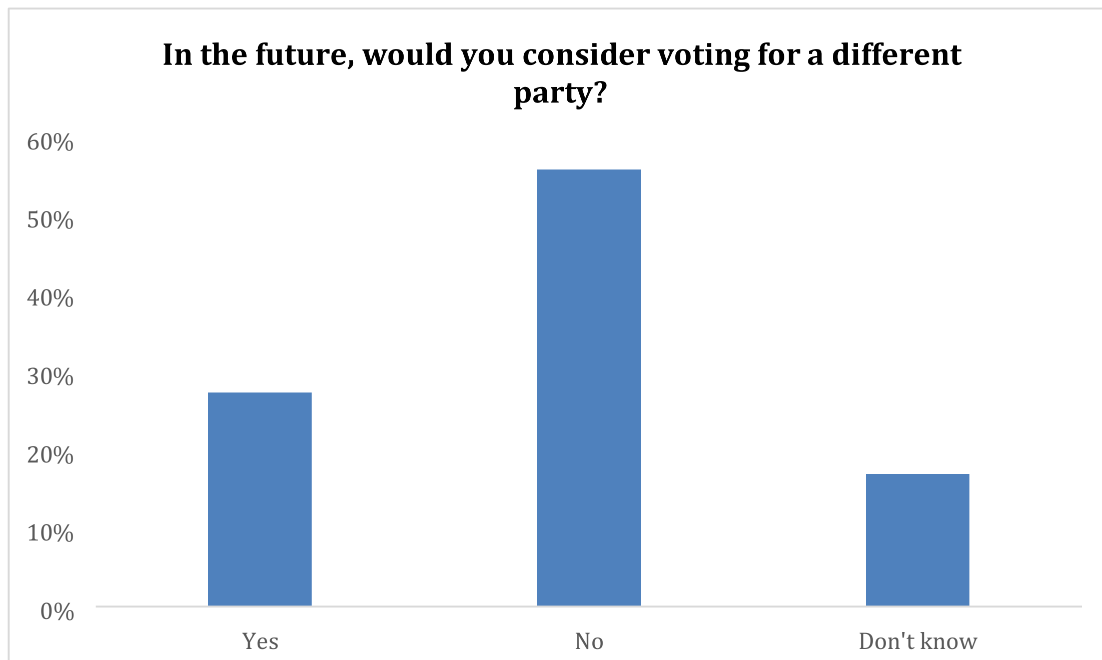


Figure 8. Prospective voting trends

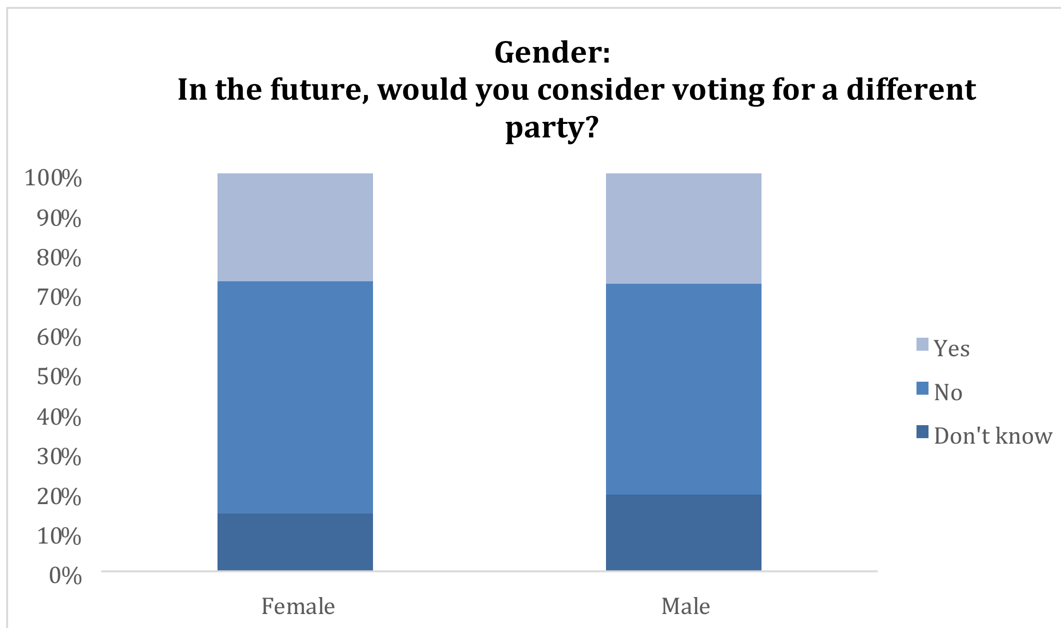


Figure 9. Gender: Prospective voting trends
Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 9.86$, $p < 0.05$

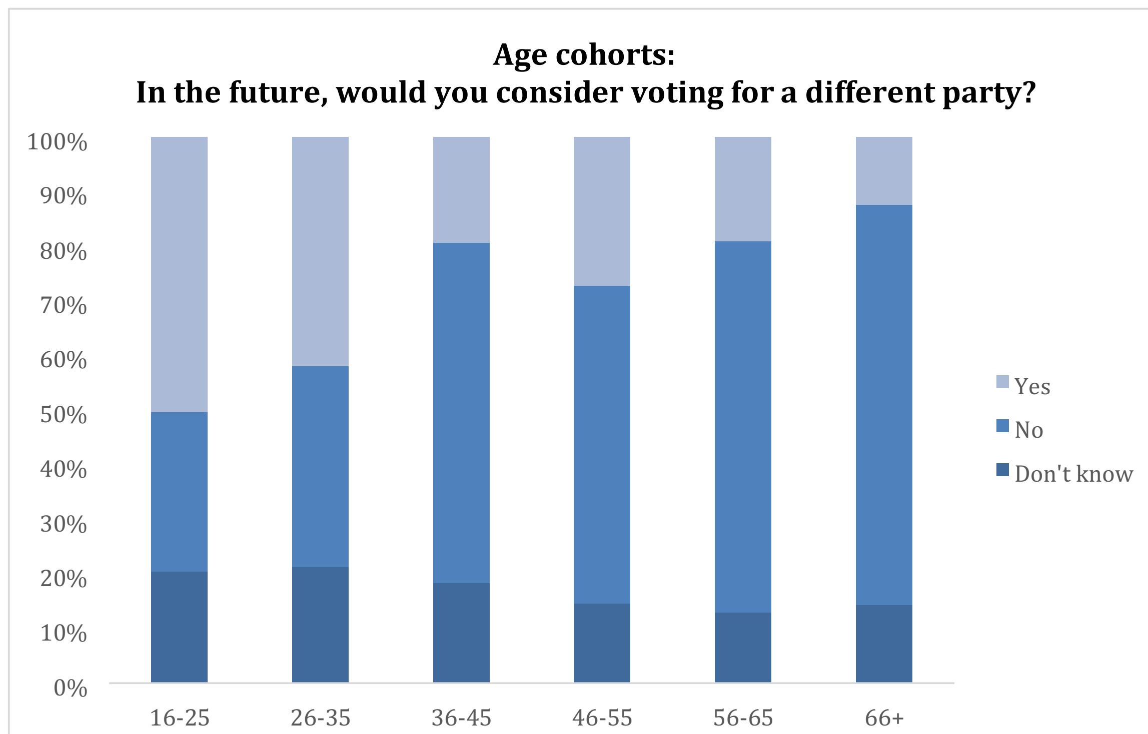


Figure 10. Age cohorts: Prospective voting trends
Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 129.27$, $p < 0.001$

The size of the majority (56%) who stated that they were not considering voting for a different party in the future (Figure 8) is likely to increase closer to the general election and/or when the general election date is announced because a number of those reporting 'I do not know' (16.9%, Figure 8) at the time of the study, are likely to cease sitting on the fence. These results did not vary with gender (Figure 9), but respondents in the youngest age cohorts were prominent among those stating they would consider voting for a different party in the future (Chi Square Test: $x2(1) = 129.27$, $p < 0.001$; Figure 10).

Since, as explained earlier, the youngest age groups predominated among those using Facebook and online newspapers to source news during electoral campaigns, the results of this study suggest that those following Facebook and online newspapers may be among those likely to vote for a different party in upcoming elections. Nonetheless, further target research is required to validate this projection.

Consistency within partisan cohorts also emerged when scrutinising which media platforms were followed during the 2017 and the 2019 electoral campaigns (Table 5). It is noteworthy that, in the campaigns, before the 2017 general election and before the 2019 MEP/LC elections, negligible differences emerged in voters' following of specific media platforms (notably PL and PN adherents). This was particularly the case regarding the use of Facebook.

Table 5. Voting and use of media platforms

| Local TV | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 81.7% | 83.8% | 75.0% | 52.2% | 77.4% |
| **2019** | 67.4% | 62.2% | 30.0% | 55.3% | 57.9% |

| Printed Newspapers | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 8.3% | 8.3% | 0.0% | 2.3% | 5.5% |
| **2019** | 6.2% | 7.6% | 0.0% | 7.6% | 4.3% |

| Online Newspapers | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 44.3% | 45.5% | 36.4% | 67.3% | 45.5% |
| **2019** | 30.0% | 34.9% | 30.0% | 32.0% | 36.6% |

| Radio | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 30.4% | 33.9% | 0.0% | 8.9% | 23.0% |
| **2019** | 15.0% | 14.2% | 10.0% | 6.6% | 9.1% |

| Facebook | PL | PN | Others | Non-voters | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2017** | 30.8% | 32.3% | 33.0% | 40.3% | 35.9% |
| **2019** | 28.9% | 24.7% | 30.0% | 36.0% | 34.9% |

## Discussion

The study found that the following of news during the 30-day period leading up to the 2017 general election was higher, across all media platforms, than in the run-up to the 2019 European and local council elections. This confirms differences in interest and mobilisation with respect to different types of elections in Malta (Vella, 2018). This study has also shown that although television consumption remains strong - particularly among the older cohorts, women and those with lower levels of education - Malta's younger and more educated voters are gradually shifting to online platforms in sourcing media content. Use of Facebook is also on the rise, irrespective of the type of election (general, MEP/local) and party allegiance (as inferred from voting in the last election). These findings confirm the globalised pervasiveness of the digital revolution and of virtual platforms of citizenship education, in this case media (or their potential for this). These findings also corroborate studies in other, larger countries. For example, 74% of United States' millennials (18-34-year-olds) source their news from the Internet; and 88% from Facebook alone (American Press Institute, 2015). However, besides corroborating the latter, this study empirically documents the digital penetration in news sourcing during election campaigns in a small island state and postcolonial context, where research on related matters is lacking.

This is a first step, which, however, also indicates the need to investigate the short, medium, and long-term impacts and developments that such trends may yield in an island state context with bi-party politics and tribal cultural trends – all the more so because this study found negligible discrepancies between adherents of the two main political parties in sourcing news during electoral

campaigns, irrespective of the type of election. This finding was particularly pronounced in the use of Facebook. Such results raise concerns informed by alarming studies on the echo chamber effect of Facebook and other online platforms (Jääskeläinen & Huhtinen, 2020; Dahmen, interviewed by Brichacek, 2016, para. 20-22), popularised by the Netflix (2020) docudrama *The Social Dilemma.* Research examining the impacts on tribalized bi-party contexts like Malta is likewise lacking. Yet the findings of broader research ring radicalisation alarm bells – triggered by how PL and PN voters were found to be increasingly using Facebook to source news during electoral campaigns – because there

> is no single, universal Internet, but rather a multitude of Internets. Social automation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence mean that propaganda is becoming more sophisticated and harder to track. ... democracies are using individuals to design and operate fake and highly automated social media accounts. The public conversations on social media have become more polluted and polarized. ... language, jokes, memes, tweets and interaction on these platforms help users to slide into more radical theories and thoughts through the game-like nature of the interaction. (Jääskeläinen & Huhtinen, 2020, p 151)

In brief,

> What we see on Facebook is dictated by algorithms that decide what you see based on what you like and dislike, what you comment on and click on… Rather than getting a diversity of perspectives that contribute to political discourse, we see an echo

> chamber. (Dahmen, interviewed by Brichacek, 2016, para. 2022)

The tribalized partisan context explained earlier in this paper may be fertile soil in which technologically supported radicalisation can thrive more easily. This substantiates the relevance of the postcolonial media and communication theoretical framework informing this study to interpret findings and design media literacy programmes because of the potential to decode discourses (Kumar & Parameswaran, 2018) associated with postcolonial media and communication perspectives. Additionally, the literature on radicalisation articulates mass self-indoctrination as involving a large group that formulates an ideology for itself. This ideology would be selectively informed by media outlets and politicians that resonate with the group's preferences and pre-existing beliefs. Contrary to traditional top-down indoctrination and propaganda, mass self-indoctrination is more bottom-up; yet still supported by media and politicians when these do not stray far from their patrons' tastes to avoid losing them to competitors (Kydd, 2021).

Nonetheless, recent research in Malta (Vella, 2018) identified increased numbers of floating voters, cross-party voting and non-electoral forms of political participation among the indicators of distrust in political parties and representative democracy. The same research found differences in the socio-demographics and of motivation among non-voters; yet still these tended to be

> younger, better-educated, and cognitively mobilized, as well as more liberal and oriented towards the left of the political spectrum. Non-voters are also more likely to uphold progressive rather than conservative or moderate views and values, and are more likely to adhere to extremist

> rather than centralist ideologies. Non-voters also have a higher predisposition to come from mixed, floating, or politically antagonist family backgrounds. (Vella, 2018, p 411)

These recent findings suggest improved media literacy over the past decade because earlier analysis associated high electoral turnout with the Maltese electorate's reluctance and lack of ability to manifest "critical thought about politics" (Falzon, interviewed by Grech, 2009); albeit it needs to be underlined that non-voters comprise a small minority of the electorate (less than 10%). Nonetheless, Vella's (2018) observations show how, in Malta, a higher potential for critical political and media literacy among younger non-voting generations co-exists with extremist and antagonist traits. Consequently, radicalising self-indoctrination (Kydd, 2021), critical dealignment and, possibly, realignment (Vella, 2018) are not mutually exclusive scenarios.

Ambivalent co-existence, particularly in Malta, can be further understood with reference to how (as mentioned earlier) stability and change, seclusion and exposure, conservatism and modernity, tradition and innovation (Vassallo, 2012) are often two sides of the same coin. Postcolonial media and communication perspectives inform on how such ambivalence and co-existence are the Maltese electorate's articulations of "logics", and "mediations" (Shome, 2016, p 261) and thus can support the design, delivery, and evaluation of targeted media literacy programmes.

These insights confirm the existing literature on radicalisation, where "its meaning is ambiguous and the major controversies and debates that have sprung from it are linked to the same inherent ambiguity" (Neumann, 2013, p 873). While corroborating an understanding of radicalisation as involving "processes of cognitive and

ideological transformation, mainly at the individual level" (Malthaner, 2017, p 369), these insights shed light on the social (rather than the individual) contributors of such cognitive and ideological transformations that should be factored into the design, delivery, and evaluation of targeted media literacy programmes. Consequently, this prospect of ambivalent, nuanced engagement demonstrates the relevance of postcolonial media and communication studies in discerning trends identified in other research on citizen, adult and community-based education in Malta which, drawing on the works of Gert Biesta (2006), pointed out "the educational value of such nuances because they provide spaces to come into presence in an unscripted manner" (p 16). In this regard, Malta's island 'insularity' and small size potentially increase the likelihood of physical encounter with 'Otherness' with the potential to breach echo chamber silos.

Most participants of this study reported considering their personal position when forming an opinion, rather than uncritically adopting the position of the party. However, this finding is significantly challenged by the 83% core vote identified in this study. The two concurrent findings suggest that voters can perhaps barely discern boundaries between personal opinion and political party influence. The tribalized context discussed earlier in this paper and the echo chamber/radicalisation impacts of online sources discussed earlier in this section would complement this inference. Lack of disparity in the increased use of online sources (and Facebook in particular) by PL and PN voters corroborates this.

On the other hand, the prevalence of younger voters within the cohort willing to consider voting for a different party in the future suggests possibilities of resistance to the radicalising impacts of online influences, notwithstanding that younger cohorts were found by this study to be prevalent among those following the news

using online sources - and Facebook in particular – during the electoral campaign. On the other hand, the prevalence of television viewing during the electoral campaigns researched for this study, particularly among older cohorts and less educated cohorts, gives relevance to the crowdfunded legal bid mentioned earlier in this paper - incidentally initiated by a media company that operates solely online - against party-owned television stations. All the more so, since this study also revealed that older voters were also more prevalent among those who always voted for the same party and less prevalent among those considering voting for another party in the future. In this regard, the postcolonial media and communications perspective adds value to the findings of this study in that they shed light on the implications of the mentioned legal bid for a politics of representation and dislocation in the postcolonial context under study. Pertinent questions for future research and debate include: to what extent is this legal case an unscripted response of resistance to the tribalized Maltese context described earlier in this paper? To what extent is it nuanced itself, given that the media entity instantiating it has a vested interest of sorts in stating that party owned competitors are unconstitutional?

## Conclusions

This quantitative study used data on media platforms used by voters in Malta to source news in the 30-day run-up to the 2017 general election and the 2019 MEP/local council elections as well as data on voters' engagement with national politics a few months before a yet-to-be announced general election. The main findings of this study are that use of television was prevalent - particularly among older, female and less educated cohorts while the use of online sources and of Facebook in particular was on

the rise particularly among younger cohorts and more educated cohorts. Younger cohorts dominated among those who reported considering voting for a different political party from the party for which they had most recently voted while there was a preponderance of older cohorts among the 83% reporting they had always voted for the same party.

The data from collection rounds in 2017, 2019 and 2021 implied that respondents differed between data collection rounds. This somewhat inhibited the statistical analyses. For example, it was not possible to test the likelihood of following a specific media platform among those reporting that they would consider voting for a different party in the future, or among those reporting they had always voted for the same party. Another limitation is that the study did not include forms of media which may also act as significant sources of political information and propaganda: billboards, leaflets and door-to-door canvassing. This could inform future research.

Similarly, since the quantitative study focused on trends in news sourcing during electoral campaigns and perceptions of selected aspects of national and party politics a few months before the announcement of the next general election, it was beyond the scope of the study to scrutinise whether the electorate differentiated the quality and type of media content consumed (or prosumed). Given that media may simultaneously act as an informative and empowering or emancipating tool for critical political analysis while prone to the dissemination of political information of poor quality, including biased information and fake news, the researchers also recommend further research on this aspect.

A further limitation is that in interpreting findings, party allegiance can only be inferred from data provided by participants on how they voted in the previous general election. This may not always indicate party allegiance in a valid manner as voting during a specific election may be

motivated by several (possibly intersecting) reasons. However, the findings of this study revealed the need for further research on these aspects. The methodology adopted also made it possible to elicit voter perceptions before the start and towards the end of the current governmental term.

This study affirms the relevance of postcolonial theory to communication and media studies and to the "still emerging area of inquiry…postcolonial communication" (Kumar & Parameswaran, 2018, p 347). Postcolonial communication and media perspectives confirm the relevance of Malta's postcolonial nuanced context in fostering opportunities for 'unscripted' responses that may catalyse resistance. However, discussion also identified a risk of radicalisation - particularly given the increased use of online news sourcing noted in this study. It also noted the risk that radicalisation can thrive in Malta's tribalized socio-cultural milieu. However, while younger voters are at greater risk of the arguable radicalisation impact of online news sourcing because of their popularity among online users, they have more access to pluralised platforms than do older cohorts, who primarily get their news from television.

Thus, in this study, postcolonial communications and media studies were useful to understand the ambivalence emerging from trends associated with increasing critical engagement with partisan politics coexisting and with trends suggesting extremist partisan engagement associated with (potential) radicalisation. In a context where media bear the onus of the 'fourth estate' yet are challenged by the risk of systemic and institutionalised fake news, policies and practices need to ensure the quality and validity of news and to minimise the risk of platforms becoming corrupted by fake and sensationalised and radicalising agendas. A particular risk may be those losing popularity, which this study identified to be radio and printed newspapers. The findings support continued

investment in media literacy, in lifelong learning and citizenship education and with a differentiated approach since the findings of the study revealed demographically differentiated use of media platforms during electoral campaigns.

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# THE DEBATE OVER CIVIC EDUCATION: ITS PLACE IN POPULIST RHETORIC

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**Abstract** The paper aims to elucidate the relationship between populist rhetoric and civic education, examining the political value the latter holds for the former. The paper addresses some of the major issues raised in the discussion around civic education emerging in the second half of the twentieth century and, again in the 2010s. The research thus centres on the different general interpretative frameworks approaching the core concepts of the civic education curricula. This leads the study to analyse populist rhetoric by contemplating what 'populism' might mean, yielding thereby a functional characterization of populist rhetoric and illustrating its link to civic education. Finally, the paper addresses the case studies of *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos*, Spain's respectively right-wing and left-wing main populist parties.

**Keywords:** Civic education, political rhetoric, populism, Spanish politics, party politics

**Resumen** El objetivo de este artículo es discernir cuál es la relación entre la retórica populista y la educación para la ciudadanía, examinando el valor político que tiene esta última para la primera. Para ello, el trabajo discute algunas de las cuestiones principales en el debate que rodea la educación para la ciudadanía durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX y, con argumentos renovados, durante la última década. En ese

sentido, la investigación se centra en los diferentes marcos interpretativos para estudiar los conceptos clave que se tratan en el currículum. Este hilo conduce a analizar la retórica populista desglosando qué podría significar 'populismo', lo que permite desarrollar una caracterización funcional de la retórica populista y su vínculo con la educación para la ciudadanía. Finalmente, el artículo trata los estudios de caso de *Vox* y *Unidas Podemos*, de derecha e izquierda populistas respectivamente.

**Palabras clave:** Educación cívica, retórica política, populismo, política española, política de partidos

## Introduction

Education is ubiquitous in the public arena, and rightly so; it concerns the future of a given society in general and that of its individuals in particular. Indeed, individuals' preferences and curricular design rarely entirely match. Civic education is consequently a source of constant controversy among political parties and plays a major role in the populist discourse addressed here.

Civic education figures in the political agenda and rhetoric not only of mainstream parties but also of populist parties whose underlying narratives have in large part pervaded the entire ideological spectrum over the past decade. This is no coincidence; capturing votes is a means of attaining power in the immediate future, with education and citizenship education often reduced to political currency, occasionally tied to partisan interests or serving as a passport to ideological victory.

This piece argues that several of the core concepts in so-called citizenship education are polysemous (with

multiple meanings) and sufficiently flexible to produce a framework where they are contested. This conceptual flexibility is key to understanding how education and citizenship education are then enshrined in populist rhetoric. Thus, the research question is: What political value does citizenship education hold for populist rhetoric? In response, the working hypothesis states that the political value of civic education lies in its status as a means of identity creation for 'the people'.

This paper starts from the assumption that the political relevance and the conceptual flexibility of citizenship education make it attractive to populist rhetoric, relying primarily on empty signifiers. These are themselves terms without a closed reference. In other words, they are signifiers that are not anchored to a particular signified. Ernesto Laclau (1996) defines empty signifiers applied to the social world as 'signifiers without a signified'. It means that empty signifiers do not reference reality univocally and lack any solid or consistent meaning; that is, their content is constantly flowing in a process of emptying and re-filling or re-conceptualising. The content is dependent on the result of ongoing competition between alternative representations that seek to gain hegemony and thus provide meaning for the signifier.

The paper will, first, describe civic education in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century and the concepts addressed in the curricula formalized in the first decade of the twenty-first century, illustrating their usability in populist rhetoric. This analysis will elucidate its problematic nature. Indeed, there is a substantive change of disposition from subjects such as physics or mathematics to more 'subjective areas' – as some say – like citizenship education, where claims of brainwashing or ideologization are not uncommon.

Second, the paper will outline the approach to populism and its understanding of populist rhetoric,

namely, a pathway to a set of argumentative tools depending upon the conflict between 'people' and 'power' or between oppressed and oppressor, linked with identity-based cultural and political narratives. Several concepts appearing in populist rhetoric, both right-wing and left-wing, are emphasized in civic education curricula: 'Citizenship', 'ethnicity', 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', 'identity' or 'social justice' are among the contested concepts used in populist rhetoric as empty signifiers, as they are consistently re-conceptualised and their meaning is disputed.

Finally, Spain's main populist parties, *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos* (United We Can), right wing and left wing respectively, serve as case studies to illustrate the argument of the paper: the former aiming to heavily modify the traditional curricula, and the latter reinforcing parental control over education, in both cases, albeit for different reasons, to challenge the liberal understanding of civic education.

## Summarizing the civic education debate

Educating good citizens has been a political priority at least since the idea of *paideia* (education), for the ideal *polis* was discussed in the Greco-Roman world, albeit what makes a good citizen is an ongoing debate. Indeed, a crucial issue here is whether education should be about making good citizens or rather about making citizens that are fundamentally good and hence also good citizens.

Yet, despite the expanding range of citizenship over the course of history – women, slaves, immigrants or racial minorities – and the change over time in civic expectations, e.g., expected duties, obligations and responsibilities to a particular political community, civic education remains one of the greatest tools not

only for affirming but also for changing the political *status quo*.

Throughout the twentieth century and both World Wars, civic education broadened its purposes regarding democracy, inclusion, and tolerance (Kennedy, 2019, p 2). In that sense, the school curriculum became a means to imbue youth with liberal democratic values in those countries across the world with at least some commitment to liberal democracy.

Thus, Civic Education (or Citizenship Education) was created as an independent subject in some education systems and in others was merged with other subjects such as history, philosophy or taught following a cross-curricular methodology (Eurydice, 2012, p 13). Extracurricular activities were also encouraged, including 'flag-raising ceremonies, visits to parliamentary institutions and giving a voice to guest speakers who have some political experiences to share' (Kennedy, 2019, p 2).

As of 2002, following *The Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States*,[1] civic education features in national curricula across Europe, although without consensus on a unitary approach. In the UK, for instance, it entered the curriculum in 2002, after the 1998 report by the Advisory Group on Citizenship which raised concerns over the democratic involvement of citizenship and perceived 'social decline' (Tonge et al., 2012).

The objectives outlined in these recommendations, although potentially aspirational, seem to assign the main responsibility to schools, and, as Elena Arbués argues, this seems a disproportionate task (Arbués, 2014, p 227). Schools have nevertheless

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[1] Available at: https://rm.coe.int/16804f7b87.

become the epicentres of civic education and the focus of political agendas on education.

## ***General aim of citizenship education***

What is the purpose of civic education? The Eurydice 2012 document, 'Citizen Education in Europe', listed four main objectives applied at least to some extent in every Eurydice country: a) developing political literacy, b) acquiring critical thinking and analytical skills, c) developing certain values, attitudes and behaviours, and d) encouraging active participation and engagement at school and community levels (Eurydice, 2012, p 27).

Of these four objectives, developing political literacy is the most relevant for the argument of the paper. It includes the understanding of issues such as 'social, political and civic institutions; human rights; national constitutions; citizens' rights and responsibilities; social issues; recognition of the cultural and historical heritage as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of society' (Eurydice, 2012, p 27). It is a formal objective containing both what this paper deems the main goal of civic education and the key to understanding the subject's role in populist rhetoric.

It serves to protect or modify the political *status quo*. It is no coincidence that political forces claiming to seek a structural societal change target education in general and civic education in particular. In liberal democracies, mainly in the Anglosphere, proponents of 'active citizenship' abound, that is, citizens who engage politically and are active in promoting democratic values and human rights.

Yet these 'democratic values' are not necessarily shared by all citizens in a given country, and active citizenship could work as a Foucauldian 'disciplining

technology' (Luke, 1990) to promote and ensure commitment to liberal democracy. For Kennedy, civic education 'is best seen as a political construction designed to serve the purposes of the nation-state reflecting its values, its purposes and its priorities' (Kennedy, 2019, p 18). These purposes and priorities may indeed be liberal, illiberal, or authoritarian.

This general aim of citizenship education can be further illustrated by contemplating the widespread claim that democracy is under attack, and therefore needs protecting. It highlights the perceived role of civic education in the process of promoting liberal democracy and democratic values. After all, the argument for civic education seems to gain weight when imbued with the 'crisis of democracy' narrative.

Chantal Mouffe has been adamant about the 'populist moment' she diagnoses in Europe in recent times and how it represents a turning point of democracy, which, she claims, is in grave crisis. Populism's success is, in that sense, 'the expression of a crisis of liberal-democratic politics' (Mouffe, 2016). She argues that these movements successfully shape the people's demands, namely 'legitimate democratic aspirations' to take back the power from alleged elites. To face this challenge, she proposes, given that 'the people' can be conceptualized in various ways, constructing another people 'promoting a progressive populist movement that is receptive to those democratic aspirations and orientates them towards a defence of equality and social justice' (Mouffe, 2016). Thus, for Mouffe, the left ought to offer an alternative progressive vocabulary to articulate these demands. Education and civic education are a feasible path for fabricating such a narrative. It should be no surprise that populist parties with serious pretensions on the school curricula, such as *Podemos* in Spain, have

actively shared and promoted Mouffe's (and Laclau's) theses in the past (Mouffe & Errejón, 2015).

As shown in the following sections, populism, whether understood as the creation of political identities through discourse, as a *thin* ideology feeding upon thicker, established ideologies to give meaning to its conceptual core or simply as a political practice, has transversal elements cutting across other ideas. These elements include the conceptualization of 'the people' and 'the elite' or 'the other' as opposing poles in a in a quasi-dialectical conflict, the claim by a party or leader to be the sole representative of the people and the axiological divide of citizenship.

## Populist rhetoric and civic education

With this analysis of civic education in mind, this section addresses its relationship with and role in populist rhetoric. Hence, the paper will tackle how Euridyce's objective, namely, 'developing political literacy', is key to understanding the role of civic education in populist rhetoric. The objective emphasizes the conceptual flexibility of the subject, dealing mainly with civic and political-institutional legitimacy, human rights, citizen's duties, historical heritage and linguistic diversity.

These concerns encompass several concepts including the nature of citizenship (e.g., whether it is preferable to be an active or passive citizen), if liberal democracy is the best alternative, different interpretations of human rights and subsumes history ranging from the revision of colonial history to the reinforcement of 'western values' in history teaching. In that sense, the conceptual horizon widens considerably to include among others, discussions on matters of ethnicity, gender, or questions of social justice.

These concepts have received a discretionary interpretation dependent on political agents, or rather on their political positions and rhetoric. Indeed, as the following sections show, populist rhetoric employs these signifiers to conceptualize 'the people' and 'the other'. Thus, this section will first address the political interpretative frameworks from which civic education is approached then characterize populist rhetoric and its capacity to adapt to right-wing and left-wing narratives. Finally, the value of civic education for populist rhetoric will emerge from that analysis.

### *Competing interpretative frameworks*

There are three relevant standpoints to approach the aforementioned conceptual debate on the focus and reach of civic education as understood by some theorists of education such as Schugurensky and Myers (2003), Kerr (2002) and Kennedy (2019): a) progressive, b) conservative and c) post-structuralist or critical. Although quite broad in scope and, as such, vague, they facilitate the subsequent understanding of the connection between populist rhetoric and civic education.

The so-called 'progressive' framework highlights public participation and active citizenship, with schools at the forefront. In the 'conservative' case, there may be a production-based concern, that is, to prepare future citizens for the job market or an emphasis on history and traditional values to maintain present conditions. Conversely, a 'critical framework' understands civic education as a tool for validating the power structure, embodied in 'capitalist democracies', where the political regime serves the economic system and financial markets. This approach criticizes the former two (Kennedy, 2019, p 6).

There are several differences between the so-called progressive and conservative approaches. According to some, the progressive approach is akin to traditional republicanism (Pettit, 1997) or liberalism, where participation and involvement in public life are encouraged and taken as key for civic education at schools. The conservative approach is understood as focusing on passive citizenship, passing on traditions and stressing that the teaching of history should highlight gradual progress and development.

They also have disparate views on the future of society, one of the main concerns of education. Conservatism underscores the presence of shared values, the need for gratitude to past generations by preserving their achievements and a certain hopefulness for a future built on the foundations of the past. The progressive framework understands the future as being actively constructed by participating citizens.

These two frameworks and their differences have been widely represented in the public arena. But these views can converge in that they both seek social cohesion, albeit offering different answers to the question of what makes diverse individuals come together and what makes them break apart. This is the central question posed by Charles Merriam in *The Making of Citizens* (1931, pp 33-35). It is a matter of how to cooperate peacefully and successfully in plural societies with citizens who only have their citizenship in common.

The paper mentioned Luke's view of civic education as Foucauldian 'disciplinary technology', and the third standpoint stems from that same position. Indeed, critical theorists – gradually infiltrating the political mainstream – and post-structuralists, claim that aiming at 'cohesion' renders education a factory of citizens, submissive to the *status*

*quo* represented by liberal democracy and capitalism. Therefore, for the proponents of this approach, both progressive and conservative views of civic education may exclude the possibility of radical renewal and revolutionary change (Luke, 1990).

These three interpretative frameworks, which are general outlines given the scope of this paper, propose quite disparate approaches to the concepts encompassed by civic education as a subject. Their relevance is due to populist rhetoric being practicable for each of them. Nevertheless, it is to the third, critical theory standpoint that populist rhetoric is akin to despite its conservative or progressive core: populist rhetoric aims to fuel conflict, not cohesion or harmony between diverse citizens.

Through conflict between two warring camps, 'the people' and 'the power', this type of oratory is harnessed to advance political change. However, to understand how populist rhetoric and civic education are linked, it is necessary first to characterize what the former might be.

## *Characterizing populist rhetoric*

Achieving a fairly functional characterization of populist rhetoric involves initially trying to shed some light on what 'populist' entails. In that regard, there have been several approaches to populism, among which two stand out: a formal approach argued more representatively by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and an ideational approach defended by scholars such as Cas Mudde, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart and Jan-Werner Müller.

The formal approach understands populism as a type of discourse which, largely by virtue of its argumentative character, appears as a condition of the possibility for political action. It manifests as a

redemptive force for democracy, a way to combat right-wing populism. The ideational approach focuses on populism as a set of ideas that can be combined with other ideological features at the core of populist speech (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p 514). For argumentative clarity, to accurately point out some features of populist rhetoric, consider first this second approach.

Take as a starting point the operational definition proposed by Cas Mudde: A "thin-centred" ideology that "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. Populism, so defined, has two opposites: elitism and pluralism" (Mudde, 2004, p 543).

For Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, populism's three core concepts, namely, the people, the elite and the general will, come into play with this definition. That is, politics – say the populist politician – expresses the general will in the face of 'the elite'. 'The people', on the other hand, has three senses: as the holder of sovereignty, as the 'common people' or the nation, civically or ethnically understood, and the downtrodden, based on socio-economic class (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp 38-51).

Perhaps more interestingly, this is a definition that highlights the concept of citizenship in populist discourse. That is to say, a person may be a citizen, but not part of 'the people', which may indeed lead to their exclusion from the political arena or to a reduction in the range of their citizenship, amplifying the historical exclusionary dimension of the concept (Kiwan, 2016, p 3). As a direct result, there is polarization, exclusion and possibly discrimination

because of political leanings, social status, sexual orientation or race.

In this logic, using here Claude Lefort's argument, legitimate political power is only held by a subset of the whole population (Lefort, 1988, p 79) embodied by the populist leader or party. This is a rhetorical distinction seeking to set one part of the populace against the other for political gain, often pursuing radical institutional change. The nuances and argumentative contests of politics are thereby reduced to a struggle between two factions.

Following this rhetoric, populist politicians are conceptualized as the only valid voice of the *true* people. As Arato and Cohen (2017) claim, it is based on a *pars pro toto* dynamic, where some of the population "pretends to rule in the name of all". It factually excludes all those left outside of 'the people's' subset, as well as all those not committed enough to the cause the leader represents, which would advance the true demands of imagined "virtuous' citizens" (de la Torre, 2019, p 68).

As seen, from this minimal definition of populism it is possible to identify two salient features of populist rhetoric: on the one hand, it exacerbates political polarization as it is at its most effective in conflictive environments. On the other hand, it relies on *thin* or vacuous concepts, with no agreed reference to create a coherent discourse through which those concepts gain meaning depending on their context of use.

Exploring the approaches of Laclau and Mouffe to populism will help to further elaborate, albeit briefly, how populist discourse fuels political conflict through the creation of identities. This analysis will give the remaining keys to characterize populist rhetoric, making its relationship with citizenship education even more apparent.

To Laclau, populism is a practice that creates political identities dichotomizing society into two opposing sides, the people and the power (Laclau, 1977). He argues in his book, *On Populist Reason* (2005), for a contrast between stable and conventional administrative politics and exceptional moments of populist rupture, when the general population breaks into these two antagonistic groups.

This event follows what Laclau calls a 'logic of difference' and a 'logic of equivalence'. The former assumes that legitimate demands are attended to by the state administration, and the latter that these demands cannot be individually addressed, and in turn aggregate in what he calls a chain of equivalence that eventually leads to social rupture. This rupture is, in essence, the consequence of a moment or moments of profound disaffection with traditional politics and institutions that accumulate until it reaches a tipping point.

Thus, it operates following an anti-institutional logic that disassociates 'the people' from the institutions that become the alleged oligarchy's site of power. Those demands, ignored by politicians and mainstream parties, are personified by the figure of the leader, which unifies them in one voice (Mouffe, 2018, pp 69-71).

The conflict described, claims Mouffe (2018), is not one of antagonism *à la* Carl Schmitt (in her particular interpretation of his work) but of what she names 'agonism': a struggle between political adversaries (Mouffe, 2018, p 91). Yet this distinction is still quite ambiguous at best, as it fails, for example, to account for charismatic leaders and parties using populist rhetoric without attempting to undermine the state institutions or to produce radical political change through this conflict.

The figure of the charismatic leader, for Laclau, is a result of the singularity following the aforementioned logic of equivalence. However, the leader's identity would be irrelevant for Laclau and Mouffe. It is an "empty signifier", a signifier without a signified of the collusion of the hopes and passions of "the people" (Laclau, 2005, p 16). This figure acts then as a central agent in the conceptualization of 'the people' through discourse. It is an idea of representation as embodiment: the leader *embodies* the people (Borriello & Jäger, 2020, p 4).

Conflict is at the core of populist rhetoric, moving within a friend and enemy dynamic. It is a fictional conflict – a conflict existing initially only in the discourse – between two antagonistic (or agonistic, polemical) poles, namely, 'the true people' and 'the elite', 'the oligarchy'. These are formal, rhetorically constructed categories serving the populist narrative and applying equally to right and left. Furthermore, they may share certain political pretensions permeating populist rhetoric on civic education.

The flexibility of categories like 'the people' and 'the elite' leaves room for mutability and adaptation along with social and cultural trends. It allows a free margin of interpretation for these signifiers. It liberates populists from ideological ties and allows them to resourcefully navigate the political arena. This highlights the idea of populism as a political practice, a recourse to a plethora of argumentative tools available to a populist politician – or any politician – to achieve political goals.

This is the other key to populist rhetoric: belonging to a 'political repertoire'. It opens up a performative dimension that understands it as a resource to be employed, a suit for the politician to 'slip in and out' of (Kranert, 2020, p 9). Populist rhetoric bridges political agents with their social basis (Ostiguy,

2017, pp 73-74), but rather than 'contesting world views' it is a relationship of identity creation.

As implied throughout the paper, civic education grants access to that social basis in an identity creation process. Through civic education, populist politicians and politicians employing populist rhetoric can fuel political conflict and exacerbate social polarization. It focuses on conceptualizing citizenship in a friend and enemy dynamic, through discourse it imbues the conceptual core of civic education with meaning.

These are discussed in works such as *The Palgrave International Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Social Justice* (2016): citizenship, race, gender, sexuality, native peoples and history. It includes those items outlined by Eurydice, especially the first objective, mentioned several times during the study and, as said, holding the key to better understanding the value of civic education for populist rhetoric.

## Case studies from Spain: the political relevance of civic education

The Spanish example serves here as a case study to present in a clearer light the complex relationship between politics, populist rhetoric and citizenship education in practice, as education policy and the role of citizenship education has long been a heavily contested matter in Spain.

As outlined in the second section, citizenship education has assumed a central position in the global curricula from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, especially democratic citizenship. However, there is no consensus on approach or method, and its relationship with national politics varies significantly

across borders. Briefly, there is accord on the subject matter, but not so on its content.

What, then, is the goal of civic education? By the end of the last century, a general commitment to liberal democracy produced the notion that it could be safeguarded through education. Indeed, the words of Woodrow Wilson when entering the First World War aptly characterize the overall goal of citizenship education, namely, 'making the world safe for democracy' (see Wilson's speech, 2 April, 1917). Such, in short, is the spirit of Eurydice, thoroughly explored in this study.

The legitimacy of such an aspiration is not considered here, although it poses a relevant question: when is it fulfilled? As a goal, it is vague enough to provide politicians, especially those favouring populist rhetoric, with a basis for modifying laws and reforming education policy. After all, it is left for them to draw the line, for instance, between what is real democratic citizenship and what is not.

In this view, citizenship education is instrumentalized to protect liberal democracy, and with that alleged goal, populist politicians can use it to pursue their aims, which paradoxically may conflict with the general aspiration of citizenship education. Indeed, the issue has commonly been shrouded in controversy, more so since the 2010s.

Agreement between political agents has proven so far impossible in that regard, and civic education is largely reduced to 'symbolic citizenship courses devoid of any critical thinking element' (Buxarrais & Ortega, 2019, p 332). Likewise, a compulsory course introduced in 2006 aimed at A level students in Education for Citizenship and Human Rights was excluded from the curricula by the Spanish government in 2012, the year of Eurydice's publication. The Spanish Minister of Education at the

time opted rather for an optional course 'whose syllabus would be free from controversy and not susceptible to ideological indoctrination issues' (Barcala, 2012).

Spain has certainly encountered difficulties in establishing a continuous and cohesive education policy since the promulgation of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, and each political party in power has approved a new education law following their respective ideological agendas. In short, education has been used, and continues to be used, as political currency to purchase an ideological victory. It is no coincidence, then, that populist rhetoric has pervaded the debate over civic education.

Taking the Constitution of 1978 as a pivotal milestone, it is interesting to see a timeline of education laws to put the palpable lack of cohesion into perspective. Prior to the Constitution, as Naval and Arbués note (Naval & Arbués, 2016, p 597): a) The 1945 *Ley de Enseñanza Primaria* (Law of Primary Teaching), in force for approximately twenty years; b) The so-called 'technocratic' period, beginning in the 1960s, which achieved universal access to teaching; and c) The 1970 *Ley General de Educación* (General Law of Education), in which the state assumed responsibility for education. These were all approved during the Francoist regime.

After the promulgation of the Constitution, as listed by Buxarrais and Ortega (Buxarrais & Ortega, 2019 p 332): in 1990, the LOGSE (Organic Law of the Education System) 'approved while the Socialist Party was in power'; in 2002, the LOCE (Organic Law on the Quality of Education) 'passed while the [conservative] Popular Party was in government', although it was never officially implemented; in 2006, the LOE (Organic Law of Education) 'was adopted with the Socialist Party once again in government'; and in 2013,

the LOMCE (Organic Law on the Improvement of Educational Quality), 'passed when the Popular Party returned to power'.

As of 2020, following the results of the general election of 10 November 2019, the Socialist Party returned to power by forming a coalition government with *Unidas Podemos*, a coalition of forces mainly represented by *Podemos* and United Left. As tradition dictates, this government passed yet another education law in 2020: the LOMLOE (Organic Law of Modification of the LOE).

Table 1 below summarizes the evolutionary process of education laws in Spain and key milestones for citizenship education worldwide.

| **Year** | **Key hallmarks in the global context for Citizenship Education** | **Spanish education laws** | **Spanish political context** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1945-1960 | End of World War II and post-war period | *Ley de Enseñanza Primaria* (Law of Primary Teaching) | Francoist regime: Enforced for twenty years until the technocratic period beginning in 1960. Universal access to education |
| 1970 | | *Ley General de Educación* (General Law of Education) | Francoist regime: The state assumes |

| | | | responsibility for education |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | First international attempt by researchers Torney, Oppenheim and Farnen (1975) to ascertain young people's notions of citizenship | | Death of Francisco Franco on 20 November and beginning of the Spanish Transition (1975-1982) |
| 1990 | | Passing of the LOGSE (Organic Law of the Education System) | Government of the Socialist Party |
| 1978 | | | Promulgation of the Spanish democratic Constitution |
| 2002 | Civic Education features in the national curricula across Europe following *The Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States.* For example, it | Passing of the LOCE (Organic Law on the Quality of Education) | Government of the conservative Popular Party |

| | was introduced in Britain for the first time | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | | Passing of the LOE (Organic Law of Education) | Government of the Socialist Party |
| 2012 | Eurydice document: Civic Education in Europe | | |
| 2013 | | Passing of the LOMCE (Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality) | Government of the Popular Party |
| 2020 | | Passing of the LOMLOE (Organic Law of Modification of the LOE) | Coalition government of the Socialist Party and *Unidas Podemos* |

*Table 1. Evolution of civic education and the political context in Spain (1945-2020).*

In the context of the passing of the LOMLOE in 2020, the arguments raised respectively by the right and left-wing populist parties, *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos* will be discussed next. This will show how in practice,

following the theoretical framework developed in the preceding sections, education in general and civic education in particular are targeted by populist rhetoric and integrated into these politicians' overarching discourse, then instrumentalized to achieve their goals.

### *The position of Vox*

In *Vox*, the conflict between 'the people' and the "others", morally inferior in their view, stems from an ethnonationalist conception of the people, and an historical narrative arguably having little to do with actual historical events. In the April 2019 general election campaign, they chose Covadonga, Asturias for its launching. In 722, the legendary King Pelagius of Asturias allegedly won a major victory against a vastly superior Muslim army, setting the stage for the *Reconquista*. In this election, one of the main issues was Catalonia's claim to independence and Spanish national unity, making referencing the *Reconquista* all the more attractive for *Vox*.

In Covadonga, party leader Santiago Abascal said that Spaniards must 'ride on the steed of patriotism to the general election against the enemies of Spain': those enemies were listed as Catalan secessionists, progressives, gender politics advocates, communists, Islamists and what he labelled the "cowardly right", namely, centre-right parties and moderate conservatives. All were presented as threats to the unity of Spain (Carvajal, 2019).

These groups constitute the "others" that follow, in his view, a hidden agenda created by the left-wing and 'globalist elites'. Against these enemies, superior in force as the Moors were to Pelagius' army, the *true* people would have to defend Spain's territorial integrity to the end.

This historical narrative with the *Reconquista* as its symbol was used to justify certain political measures urged by *Vox*, more symbolic and rhetorical than factual, such as the proposal in Andalusia to change the day commemorating the Autonomous Community from 28 February to 2 January. This was thought to celebrate the day the *Reconquista* ended with the conquest of Granada in 1492 (Pérez, 2019).

To study the party's view of education and civic education, this section focuses on the parental veto proposed by *Vox* (and exercised in communities like Murcia) and their opposition to the last education law. As will be seen, *Vox*'s position is primarily reactive, although their arguments reveal their approaches to matters of civic education. This is due to their parliamentary position, having so far remained in the opposition.

Since 2019, *Vox* has proposed what they call a 'parental pin' or veto (*pin parental*). In Andalusia, under the label 'freedom of education', *Vox* argued for a parental veto. It consists of making compulsory for schools consulting parents on their children's assistance in workshops, seminars or activities with an ideological or moral attitude contrary to their convictions (Pérez, 2019). This is a direct reaction to the Socialist Party's and (mainly) *Unidas Podemos*' rhetoric on gender issues, which, much like *Vox*'s, is born of an identity-based narrative with a different conceptual backdrop.

It was met with a vigorous backlash from the government, a response to be addressed below, and by members of the LGBTQ+ community. They asked for the affective-sexual education of children to be respected as it was protected by the education law. Abascal responded that 'equality between men and women as well as respect for homosexuals are already accepted in Spain'. The parental veto targets, according

to him, the protection of minors against 'indoctrination in erotic games and gender ideology' (Grande, 2020).

Against the new education law, popularly dubbed by the Socialist Party the 'Celáa Law' after the Minister of Education, Isabel Celáa, *Vox* said that they 'would not consent to its sectarian, totalitarian and relativistic indoctrination'. *Vox*'s congresswoman, Georgina Trías, duly presented an amendment to the totality of the new education law, saying: 'they want to impose on our children at their earliest age that supposed sexual, ideological and sectarian education. And they want to do it in an organized, curricular way, as it pertains to a good old fashioned totalitarian regime [...]' (*Vox*, 2020).

*Vox*, moreover, lists up to ten reasons for rejecting the Celáa Law. Here those are considered highlighting *Vox*'s views on civic education, namely: first, the alleged imposition of sexual, ideological and sectarian education, contrary to the principles and basic rights enshrined in the Constitution; second, it accentuates the absence of Spanish language from schools across Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands. In that regard, it fails to guarantee the established minimal hours of teaching in Spanish and disregards parental demands for their children to receive classes in their mother tongue.

Third, it wastes the opportunity to reform vocational training given its current status in comparison to Europe. Finally, it strips religion of any academic value thus contravening the International Accord with the Holy See that mandates religion be taught on the same grounds as any other discipline (*Vox*, 2020).

As previously stated, *Vox*'s approach to education policy is mainly reactive. Yet it is possible to provide a good picture of their view on civic education, following

their conceptualization of ‘the people’, ‘the elite’, and the core of their argument for the parental veto and against the Celáa Law. Arguably, the proposal of the parental pin fuels political conflict and polarization and portrays them – as intended – as those who protect children against leftist gender ideology.

Thus, a neutral, possibly reasonable proposal becomes a vehicle for promoting the demands of a subset of the population. Their reasons for opposing the new education law underscore their vindication of the Spanish language, their defence of traditional family values and their support for Catholic education. Indeed, their rhetoric conceptualizes identity from those coordinates.

*Vox'*s arguments seem to follow trends commonly associated in the literature with populist rhetoric. As discussed in the theoretical debate on populism above, on the one hand, they build up an axiological conflict between ‘the people’ and ‘the others’. Following an ethnonationalist logic, the former presents the latter, depending on the context, as traitors, brainwashers and relativists. On the other hand, this Manichean view produces an exclusionary narrative –as Kiwan (2016) argues, where not belonging to the *true people* risks being branded as enemies.

Furthermore, other cues are visible, such as the claim to sole representation reflected on the view of *Vox* as the one and true defender of youth against those ‘liberal elites’ attempting to seize their minds. However, populist rhetoric serves preeminently an instrumental purpose and fuels their arguments concerning civic education. In that sense, populism affords access to different argumentative antics to achieve the party's goals.

## *The position of Unidas Podemos*

Born of the 15-M movement of 2011, the *Podemos* party as of 2014 frequently defined the elite in socio-economic terms, using "caste" to refer to the establishment. On the one hand, the political establishment, representatives of what they derogatorily call the "Regime of 78" (*Régimen del 78*), the political *status quo* emerging after the Constitution of 1978. They argued that the transition from the Francoist regime to democracy was never really achieved. It was only covered by a different layer of paint. Hence, they "left the plazas and ran for office", exporting the assembly model of 15-M and exploiting appearances in public acts as manifestations of the "popular will" (Valdivielso, 2017, p 5).

On the other hand, there was the political establishment: the Troika (jargon for the triumvirate formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). The German government was also presented as an abusive European neighbour (Ramiro & Gómez, 2016, p 112). *Podemos* explicitly argued for "the people vs. the elite" divide to cultivate resentment and maximize their election prospects. This achieved tangible results in the European Parliament elections of 25 May 2014, where *Podemos* voters were those "particularly dissatisfied with the workings of democracy [...] and an intense lack of confidence in politicians" (Cordero & Montero, 2015, p 374).

For the general election of 29 April 2019, *Unidos Podemos*, a left-wing coalition where *Podemos* and United Left are the main members, opted for changing its name to *Unidas Podemos* feminizing *Unidos* to *Unidas* to underscore their commitment to feminism in response to the alleged threat of the far right to women's rights. It was presented as a reaction to the

alleged sexism of *Vox*. Thereafter, *Vox* became the opposite pole of the dichotomy for the left in Spain.

*Unidas Podemos* has adopted feminism and several other social causes, such as LGBTQ+ rights. In that sense, their discursive conceptualization of 'the people' and 'the elite' have shifted from socio-economic conditions to a dichotomy between, in their view, historically oppressed minorities and their oppressors. This shift follows the rise in the influence of critical theories of society in the United States and elsewhere related to post-structuralism and the Frankfurt School (Lindsay & Pluckrose, 2020).

This emphasis on minorities, who in this rhetoric are presented as the *true* people, inherently virtuous, enables populist politicians to question the motivations and moral standing of those challenging their arguments, law proposals or any other political initiative. It is a win-them-all argument in the sense that questioning labelled feminist or supposedly equality-seeking policies can be branded as sexist and those who question them are instantly dubbed conservatives, fascists or homophobes. This is, fundamentally, a way to construct 'the other' as the enemy: those seen as opposed to 'the people' or not sufficiently convinced by the 'cause' of the populist party or politician.

Further, it is crucial to insist on the axiological content of the claims raised against these so-called 'conservatives, fascists and homophobes'. The *others*, in this view, must be evil and rebutted using political power only legitimately held by a subset of the population, following Claude Lefort's (1988) standpoint, represented in this case by *Unidas Podemos*.

A similar exclusionary element is present, although in a different vein from *Vox*'s, where citizenship is not necessarily tantamount to being part

of 'the people', allegedly represented solely by the party (thus affecting their civic education policy). In *Podemos* there is a solid Laclauian-Mouffian influx, seen in their attempt to redirect the demands of the population, seemingly – in their view – unmet by so-called elites or establishments.

Crisis also seems to be the driving political force in several key arguments. Two moments stand out: In their political youth, the context of the 2008 economic crisis was an ideal, concrete backdrop for their plunge into mainstream politics. On the other hand, their continued performance of crisis is usually framed in a 'crisis of democracy' narrative described above. Other 'performances' arguably include the outcry about an alleged influx of gender violence, persecution of LGBTQ+ people by far-righters or claims of a judicialization of politics or lawfare instigated by the old elites against *Podemos*.

To show *Unidas Podemos*' conception of civic education, mirroring the analysis of *Vox*, also consider their reaction to the parental veto and their defence of the Celáa Law. In the case of the former, Irene Montero, Minister of Equality and member of *Unidas Podemos*, accused those promoting the parental pin of contravening the State Pact Against Gender Violence (*Pacto de Estado contra la Violencia de Género*), which established an education in values that promotes 'effective equality' between men and women (Grande, 2020). She also said that the children of homophobe and sexist parents have the right to be educated in the promotion of human rights, equality and feminism. In other words, parents favouring the parental veto on these workshops are *de facto* labelled as sexists and homophobes (María, 2020).

Pablo Iglesias, who at the time was second vice-president of the Spanish government and Alberto Garzón, Minister of Consumer Affairs also expressed

their opposition to this proposal on Twitter and on TV respectively (*20 Minutos*, 2020). Iglesias, for his part, claimed that the parental veto wanted to normalize the right's legal disobedience. Garzón, like Montero, stated that children of homophobic parents should be taught to love whomever they chose, and that *Vox* was targeting public education with this measure.

In response to criticism of the new education law by opposition parties, namely, the Popular Party, the Citizens' party and *Vox*, Joan Mena, spokesman for education and vocational training of the *Unidas Podemos-En Comú Podem-Galicia en Común* (Galicia in Common) confederal group, said that although they claimed to champion liberty, they actually stood for privilege and class distinction (Sanmartín, 2020).

*Unidas Podemos*' rhetoric identifies mainly the Popular Party and *Vox* as 'the other', or rather as the oppressors. The identity of 'the people' is created upon a shared identity feature, be it race, gender, ethnicity or sexuality, which marks a given person as part of the oppressed. In that logic, the party alone can accurately grasp the demands of these groups.

Thus, civic education also serves as a bridge for creating said identity, and fuelling a social conflict that works as an electoral platform against those who would deprive these minorities of their rights. As argued above, far from seeking social cohesion and harmony between diverse citizens, populist rhetoric on civic education thrives on their clash.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to answer the question on the value of citizenship education in populist rhetoric. Hence, the working hypothesis was that the political value of civic education lies in its status as conduit for the process of identity creation of 'the people' in its

conceptualization. Scrutinizing this hypothesis began by tracing the subject's history starting after WWII. To achieve its purpose, the paper studied the objectives detailed in the Eurydice document, redacted in 2012, highlighting the first as pivotal: developing political literacy. This objective was critical to understanding the political value of civic education in populist rhetoric, as it is prone to a discretionary interpretation dependent on political agents. With that in mind, the paper explained the various interpretative frameworks through which Eurydice's objectives could be addressed.

Mindful of the previous steps centred on civic education, the paper characterized populist rhetoric, analysing the Laclauian formal approach and Cas Mudde's ideational approach to populism. This enabled an adequate framing of the role of empty signifiers in populist discourse and opened a performative dimension of populist rhetoric. With these findings, the political value of civic education for populist rhetoric emerged: using civic education as a rhetorical instrument, populist politicians can fuel political conflict. The focus of populist rhetoric is on the fabrication of citizenship through discourse which gives meaning to the conceptual core of civic education.

Finally, after exploring the state of the education laws in Spain, the paper examined the cases of *Vox* and *Unidas Podemos* to ascertain how populist rhetoric on civic education operates in practice. These results will hopefully encourage further debate, as the findings presented here are by no means definitive. An extensive field opens up from these results to discuss how national legislation could promote civic education, maybe via multi-party parliamentary agreement among non-populist parties and moderates. The matter of populist ambitions or conflict fuelled by these

politicians instrumentalizing citizenship education also comes to the fore: how to curb them? Perhaps constitutional precautionary measures can be taken or enhanced, or perhaps the exit from this conundrum is to be found through citizenship education itself.

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# POSSIBILITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A PRODUCTIVE CIVIL AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF ALBANIA

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**Abstract** This paper analyses the prospects of civil and social engagement in Albanian higher education by contemplating the impacts of recent historical developments, namely the period 2010-2020. The main goal of the study was to identify the (potential) role of higher education in civil and social engagement (CSE). The study draws on two Albanian case studies: activism in the civil society organisation 'Alliance for the protection of the theatre' and the 2018 student protest against state reforms in higher education. The study asked how education can be involved in building a productive civil engagement that contributes to a (more) sustainable democratisation process. Previous experiences of CSE in Albania, reshaped during the democratisation process, were politicised and hampered democracy. Only after 2000 was Albanian society able to rehabilitate CSE engagement. Due to many factors, such as education, technology and opportunities to travel abroad, the role of the young generation (especially students) and well-educated citizens was of great significance.

**Keywords**: Albania, democracy, education, civil and social engagement (CSE), social reform.

**Abstrakt** Punim ka në fokus analizën dhe perspektivat e angazhimit civil dhe social në raport me edukimin në Shqipëri, referuar zhvillimeve të viteve të fundit, përkatësisht për periudhën kohore mes viteve 2010-2020. Qëllimi kryesor i studimit është identifikimi i rolit (potencial) të edukimit në angazhimin civil dhe social (ACS). Studimi bazohet në dy raste studimore: mobilizimi

nëpërmjet organizatave të shoqërisë civile si "Aleanca për mbrojtjen e teatrit" dhe mobilizimit nga poshtë si protesta e studentëve në 2018 kundër reformave në arsimin e lartë. Punimi tenton të argumentojë se si edukimi mund të përfshihet në konsolidimin produktiv të ASC. Eksperiencat e mëparshme të ACS në Shqipëri, të riformësuara gjatë procesit të demokratizimit, duket të jenë të politizuara, duke mos lejuar mobilizmin apo duke sjell dështim në qëllimin e tyre. Vetëm pas vitit 2000 shoqëria shqiptare ishte në gjendje të rehabilitonte konceptet e angazhimit në ACS. Faktorët si arsimi, teknologjia dhe mundësitë për të udhëtuar jashtë vendit, roli i brezit të ri (studentëve) dhe qytetarëve të mirëarsimuar duket se janë elementë të rëndësishëm në ASC.

**Fjalë Kyçe:** Shqipëri, demokraci, edukim, angazhimi civil dhe social (ACS), reforma sociale

## Introduction

The paper analyses the relationship between higher education and civil and social engagement (CSE) in Albania as informed by case studies of a civil society organisation, 'Alliance for the protection of the theatre' and the 2018 student protest against reforms in higher education. An important goal of this paper is to assess the prospects of higher education in CSE for helping to build a sustainable democracy.

Albania, located in Southeast Europe, has a coastline of about 476 km shared between the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Based on the official statistical data Albania has around 3 million inhabitants and is characterised by a youthful population. Economic growth is 5.52%, inflation is 6.2% and the unemployment rate is 11.4%. Lately, Albania is facing a massive emigration especially from the youth (INSTAT, 2022).

Albania has experienced a diverse socio-political history since its independence in 1912. Right after independence from the Ottoman Empire, Albania faced

occupation from neighbouring countries, with Serbian and Montenegro troops in Northern Albania, and Greek troops in the South. Albania was part of the League of Nations by 1913. The International Control Commission imposed one representative from each of the six European powers, to oversee the government of Albania. Between 1925-1928 Albania was initially constituted as a democratic monarchy. During the Second World War, Albania was occupied by Italian and German troops. By the end of the war Enver Hoxha was elected as the new ruler of Albania. Between 1944-1992, Albania was under Hoxha's totalitarian regime and from 1978 Albania was isolated. Starting from 1992 Albania has been living under a democratic constitution.

Civil and social engagement (CSE) is important for young democracies as it plays an important role in the consolidation of state institutions, and contributes to a sustainable path towards democracy. In the last 30 years increasing democratisation has been necessary given the tendency of the Albanian political elite to be heavy-handed or oppressive with regard to the wishes of social groups, such as in the case of the decision for the demolition of the National Theatre building in 2020.

Albanian CSE can be divided into three phases (Krasniqi, 2004, p 34). The first of these started in 1912, with various associations and non-governmental organisations focusing on promoting cultural and political activities, such as language courses and schools, newspaper publications etc. These associations were helped financially by the Albanian diaspora in order to enable their fellow Albanians to survive the socio-political crises immediately after the declaration of independence in 1912.

The second phase spans the period 1944-1992. Under the totalitarian regime Albanian CSE existed in theory although at the same time there was practically no free CSE, everything was under the strict political control

of the state party, PPSH[1] (Krasniqi, 2004, p 44). In such a centralised system, the collective values of *Fis* (kinship) were adapted as (new) communist priorities, where the party became the sole focus of loyalty in society. Civil society was 'protected' by the state (Prato, 2011, pp 33-151). All independent and intellectual organisations were banned, those expressing liberal or opposing ideas were imprisoned or exiled. In 1967 control over society reached its most repressive, closing every religious institution by law.

The third phase spans the period 1991-1992 with the Albanian democratic transition as a result of student movements protesting against the hard living conditions in their dormitories and later on demanding democracy. During 1990 and 1991 Albania was hit by severe economic and social conditions under the authoritarian regime, while other formerly communist countries in Europe had already started to change their regimes two years earlier. The difficult economic conditions contradicted the propaganda of a new economic mechanism. This prompted student protests as a reaction. The Albanian student protests of the 1990s emphasised not only the bad conditions in their dormitories (which was the first reason for the protests), but also reflected social constraints such as lack of income, inequalities, no freedom of speech etc. Social strain theory is used by scholars to explain the idea that delinquency results when individuals are unable to achieve their goals through legitimate channels. In such cases individuals may turn to illegitimate channels to achieve their goals or strike out at the source of their frustration (Agnew, 1985, pp 151-167).

Other theoretical approaches (Campbell, 2006; Della Porta & Diani, 2000; Vebra & Nie, 1972), point out that

[1] The Labour Party of Albania (Partia e Punës së Shqipërisë-PPSH) was established in 1941 as the Communist Party of Albania; members of the National Liberation Movement (1942-1945) against Nazism and Fascism during the Second World War. The LPA was led by Enver Hoxha between 1941 and 1985 and partisans as members of the party ruled in Albania from 1944 until 1992 as the only legal political party. The party ideology was based on Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism and Hoxhaism.

social divisions are closely linked to CSE, especially for young democracies such as Albania. Scholars identify CSE in terms of two main approaches; a) a system of political opportunity and b) an approach through culture. The latter argues that social change imposes strains on the functioning of society and collective actions are seen not just as manifestations of those strains, but also as a viable means of arriving at a solution to relieve such social pressure.

Nonetheless, it can be said that Albania has historically met with difficulties in the construction of a democratic society and in the consolidation of democratic institutions (Dhembo et al., 2010). This means that the political culture is still based on the "moral code", creating a strong network of beliefs and loyalty in individual and family relationships or those of the tribe/clan, minimising the force of public institutions and even the role of an active civil society. In Albania many institutions have been found untrustworthy. The absence of financial transparency or even democracy within the decision-making structures remains the fundamental problem in the process of democratisation (Picari, 2007, pp 79-90).

The political opportunity theory was developed by scholars like Peter Eisinger and David Mayer (Mayer & Minkoff, 2004, pp 1457-1492) whose main argument was that the chances for success and mobilisation are heavily dependent on the opportunities created and offered by the political system. These opportunities may be institutionalised and formal, but they may also be informal. The political elite may try to facilitate or to repress collective action, which affects the chances of such actions succeeding.

The system of political opportunity in Albania is closely connected to the legal framework. Since 1991, when the old Constitution (party-state Constitution) was replaced, few changes have been made in status and legal arrangements, CSE status or other volunteer activities.

Parliament initially approved a constitutional package which recognized and guaranteed the right of citizens to freely organise (Anastasi, 2004, p 87). The most important strategic change in the law is in the regulation of relations between the state and CSE and the non-conventional forms of participation are shrouded in unclarity.

The key recognition in the opportunity perspective is that activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilising supporters and exerting influence are dependent on context. Analysts therefore appropriately direct much of their attention to the world outside a collective behaviour on the premise that exogenous factors enhance collective prospects of a behaviour for mobilisation, for advancing particular claims over others, for cultivating certain alliances over others, for employing particular political strategies and tactics over others and for affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy.

Given the Albanian socio-political background in recent decades, it could be said that although Albania has a stable system of political parties, a political representation and/or decision-making process, its society is embroiled in a chaotic development towards democratisation, education being also affected by chaotic trends such as the frequent changing of rules (Murati, 2013, pp 651-691). CSE concepts and collective behaviour are key to raising awareness in citizens about public policies, decision-making and governance. While policy-makers widely recognise the fact that education serves as an engine for economic growth through the accumulation of *human* capital, education is also strongly associated with boosting levels of *social* capital. Indeed, an important justification for the large expenditures on education in many democratic nations is its social and not just its economic impact on the benefits an educated electorate brings to civil society (Campbell, 2006, pp 25-38). This paper aims to analyse the prospects of higher education in CSE in fostering a sustainable democracy in the

broader context of socio-political and economic factors characterising Albania.

## Methodology

As is observed in Donatella Della Porta's book *Methodological Practices in Social Movements Research,* researchers may combine different methods, such as linking qualitative and qualitative approaches (Della Porta, 2014, p 2). Following Della Porta's conclusion, studies on civil engagement, including social engagement and/or movements, extend from sociology and political science to other research fields, such as economy, law, anthropology, etc. Thus, researchers tend to focus on the 'how to do it', rather than on reviewing the existing research using specific methods (Della Porta, 2014, p 3). Methodological pluralism seems indeed to be the method of choice in CSE.

Della Porta (2014) presents a few reasons for why pluralist methodology is prevalent among researchers. Firstly, given the lack of reliable databases, researchers need to invest in data collection using various techniques. Second, it has often been observed that CSE researchers have tended to focus on CSE towards which they themselves are sympathetic. Thirdly, problem-oriented rather than method-oriented CSE studies have been open to different research techniques. Fourth, CSE studies have been eclectic in theoretical terms. As they emerged through the bridging of different disciplinary approaches, from symbolic interactionalism to organisational sociology, from sociological theory to political science, they have constructed their toolkit of concepts and hypotheses by combination and cross-fertilisation. Fifth, given the emphasis on middle-range theory, rather than the search for grand theory or mere empiricism, interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation has contributed to these methodological innovations.

Following Della Porta's arguments on pluralism in methodology, this paper aims to combine education and CSE as two interrelated research fields. The main goal in this paper is to understand how education and education models can affect the mobilisation of CSE, thereby arriving at new forms of participation in decision-making to help towards a sustainable democracy.

This paper aims to answer the research question: What is the role of education in the mobilisation of CSE using new forms of participation and aiming at a sustainable democratic development in Albania? The research design is focused on combinations of the theoretical framework of the main concepts and primary data collected by means of an online survey (see Annex 1) sent to a population including academics, students, activists, etc.

## Overview of results

Survey responses suggested education on the individual level plays an important role in CSE mobilisation and new forms of participation in decision-making. According to the results of the survey, education models and education instructions should play a better role related to the after-effects of CSE towards a sustainable democratic process. This collaboration could assume different forms, possibly including study modules in faculty curricula and/or other academic activities involving concepts related to CSE, such as public spaces, collective actions etc.

Of the respondents, 76% totally agreed that citizens with higher levels of education share concerns about public issues and 68% of the respondents totally agreed that higher education institutions should collaborate more with CSE for a sustainable democratic process.

In the future, the relationship between CSE, new forms of participation and legal frameworks will need further development as only 35% partly agreed with the

statement that the legal framework should be supportive towards non-conventional forms of participation for a sustainable democratic process.

## Modes of Civil and Social Engagement in Albania

More education and knowledge about politics can improve the quality and quantity of participation in a democratic system (Campbell, 2006, pp 25-38).[2] Authors and scholars classify CSE into different types, including political engagement, civic engagement, voter turnout, interpersonal trust, institutional trust, tolerance and political knowledge. Within this classification political engagement translates into effort to be involved, influence public policy, implement decision-making, governance and other components. In most of the cases these forms of engagement tend to transform into political parties.

As regards Albanian socio-economic conditions from the early 1990s until 1996, it can be argued that for many reasons the occurrence of such social divisions and the mobilisation of CSEs are few, due to many factors. Firstly, lack of knowledge of adaptation to the collective behaviour; secondly, lack of legitimacy of unconventional and/or non-official forms of participation in the decision-making, as new meaning in the system of the newly adopted liberal democracy; thirdly, lack of CSE and unconventional and/or non-official forms of participation in decision-making may also be considered a reflection of the past in culture politics. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that during the totalitarian system the solution for the representation of social interests was dependent solely on state and party-state structures. The argumentative theories on transition processes legitimise the overlapping of the political elite (i.e., political parties)

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[2] For analytic purposes other levels of CSE such as voter turnout in elections, interpersonal trust (i.e., trust in other people), institutional trust (i.e., trust in public institutions) and tolerance will not be elaborated further as they are counted as forms of participation and are not the focus of this paper.

in decision-making, policy-making and the well-being of citizens and/or citizens' representation.

While Herbert Blumer (1957) defines civil engagement as "a collective enterprise seeking to establish a new order of life because their inception is a condition of development towards their power of motive from dissatisfaction with the current form of life or from their wishes and hopes for a new system of living" (p 99), Della Porta and Diani (2000) also agree that civil engagement can include informal networks based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise around conflictual issues, through informal networks and the frequent use of various forms of protest (pp 279-281). Collective action can be divided into conventional and non-conventional related to activities such as electoral-political campaigns and those based on voluntary relationships (Vebra & Nie, 1972, p 54).

According to Vebra & Nie (1972), "political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (p 56). Civil engagement involves public activity that is not primarily motivated by a desire to influence public policy (Campbell, 2006, pp 25-38). It can be considered a continuous and significant challenge to the political apparatus aiming at some form of social change. It could be argued that freedom of expression, education and comparative commercial autonomy prevalent mostly in Western political experiences explain the unprecedented amount of civil engagement at present.

Social movements have occasionally occurred in the democratisation of states, but mostly they have flourished after that process. Current civil engagement frequently uses knowledge and the internet to mobilise people globally. Civil engagement is a particular form of collective behaviour whose aim is to act together in large groups for some overarching attitude and target, typically acting

within a free organisational framework (Crossley, 2002, p 4). This requirement for commitment may explain why engagement can encourage democracy if citizens need some kind of social change and their commitment is one of the most important contributory forces pushing for change. It is then likely that they will support the movement until it is implemented.

Political scientists became aware that the specific features of an individual political system impinged decisively on the action repertoires, forms of organisation and on the successes of these movements and that non-conventional or even radical action which could be effective in one political context might be counterproductive in another (Tilly, 2004, p 36). This suggests that the state citizens are trying to change or possibly devolve away from may affect the methods and strategies that can be used by social movement groups. From this point of view, civil engagement can be seen as a non-conventional form of participatory democracy and as a part of decision-making.

Trying to distinguish the collective behaviour of Albanian society in specific terms such as civil society, social or political movements is challenging due to its complex democratic transition process, notably the period 1996-1996, when Albania faced an economic crisis (financial pyramids) which led to a chaotic situation and demonstrations. The protests and demonstrations were not simple reactions to financial loss, but a consequence of ignoring democratic principles and the level of corruption of accumulating during the first years. (Kajsiu, 2008, pp 5-25).

The following decade for Albanian society's collective behaviour in civic engagement has new patterns due to youth organizations such as MJAFT[3]. Initially MJAFT was

[3] MJAFT in English means 'enough'. Initially MJAFT was envisioned to be precisely that one-word colloquial response as the center of a four-month (mid March - mid July 2003) public campaign reaching out to over 2,5 –

envisioned to be precisely a one-word colloquial response as the centre of a four-month (March - July 2003) public campaign reaching out to over 2.5–3 million Albanians in the country and abroad. The MJAFT campaign turned out to be the largest and most successful awareness-raising and advocacy campaign ever held in Albania (Mjaft, 2003). The following year other successful specific cases of civic engagement were active in Albanian society, among them the protest on the 'Demolition of Syrian chemical weapons proposal' in 2013. Other types of organisation, such as NGOs, especially those related to women's rights, have been working in 'traditional' ways, following the legal regulations and donors' instructions.

Albanian society has recently been facing public reaction related to women's rights and feminism. For this paper, collective behaviour in civil engagement/social movements and/or NGO-s is being identified as Civil and Social Engagement. This paper examines the extent to which the two specific CSE cases contextualised in education spheres, namely the civil society organisation 'Alliance for the protection of the theatre' and the 2018 student protest against reforms in higher education, impacted Albanian society and provided opportunities for sustainable democratisation.

## CSE through Education: The Albanian experience

Following the collective action perspective, scholars try to identify education as public in nature, necessarily collective and requiring collaborative contributions. Most efforts at social transformation are not initiated by the government or within social institutions, but emerge in the form of community self-help (Roumell, 2018, pp 47-56).

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3 million Albanians in the country and abroad. The MJAFT Campaign turned out to be the largest and most successful awareness-raising and advocacy campaign ever held in Albania.
For further information: https://www.mjaft.org/en/who-we-are

Scholars identify the education community as transformative, since it provides education, recreation, cultural and other related community and human services (White, 2014, pp 15-20).

Studies and researchers identify three models of education that can impact CSE: the absolute education model, the sorting model and the cumulative model (Campbell, 2006, pp 25-38). Firstly, the absolute education model, from which we can perceive that an individual's own level of education is the driving mechanism for collective action, and consequently part of CSE. Second, the sorting model is premised on the assumption that education serves as a marker of social status. Thirdly, in the cumulative model engagement rises in accordance with the average education level of one's compatriots. In this paper, the first two models will be analysed with reference to Albanian CSE as they can be linked to the cases of the Alliance for the protection of the theatre and related student protests of December 2018.

The National Theatre building was the only modern building of the architectural project by Giulio Berté (Italian architect) begun in January 1938 and completed on 17 May 1939. The project included the buildings which nowadays are the centre of the government, the main boulevard and the main central square in Tirana. Based on this architectural project, Tirana became the capital city. The National Theatre building with a floorspace of 13,000m$^2$ was intended as a social-cultural centre known in Italian-Albanian society as 'Scanderbag', including a bar, a library, theatre stage, a swimming pool, a big garden, among other features. Experts on architecture and historians stated that this then new building was the most modern in the region. Albania had been under the Ottoman Empire for 500 years and now with this modern building could take a step into modern life. For instance, for the first time Albanian women could swim in swimsuits.

By 17 May 1945, the building was inaugurated as the National Theatre. For more than 50 years the National Theatre building hosted and developed Albanian theatre and the most important Albanian artists dedicated their professional lives to the National Theatre. In 2003, this area was included in the national cultural heritage, having a legal status as a cultural monument. The status of the building changed a few times depending on the political parties' interest, but in 2015 the National Theatre building was given the status of the second cultural monument in Albania.

Since early 2000 there have been debates about establishing a new theatre building. The discussion has not so much been centred around if a new building is necessary but primarily if the old National Theatre can be replaced or must be preserved. In recent decades Albania has gone through hard times, especially financially, with few investments in the arts scene in general. In 2017 the government planned to build a smaller theatre on the same site through a public-private partnership, giving the rest of the land to the private partner in the same area. The suggestion met with disapproval and protests from the artistic community, Tirana's citizens, as well as from civil society. The protests gained support from the wider public. It is expected that the cost for the new building will reach 30 million euros (Panorama, 2020) and it is argued that the reconstruction of the old building (which survived the earthquakes in 1979 and 2019) would cost less and that this money could be used to rebuild people's homes lost in the earthquake, and to build a less modern theatre somewhere else in Tirana.

For the 'Alliance for the protection of the theatre', the failure of the public-private partnership plan was a victory, and the resistance captured the attention of the international community. Earlier, in 2020, Europa Nostra, a Europewide organisation, classified the building as a European cultural heritage site and undertook its

protection. The artists in the 'Alliance for the protection of the theatre' kept protecting the building by watching it 24/7 by turns and were determined to continue doing so. This was also done even during the pandemic restrictions and curfew. However, on 8 May 2020, the Council of Ministers' decision No.377 proclaimed that the National Theatre building was the property of the Municipality of Tirana (VKM Nr. 83, 2020). The President rejected this (this is a repeated pattern) and referred it to the Constitutional Court.[4] On the same day, 8 May, the artists protecting the National Theatre building asked for the immediate mobilisation of any citizens to come and occupy the building to safeguard it against the threat of imminent demolition. The artists' call was heard. They were supported by the architects' community, citizens and other representatives of civil society. Although Tirana was in the red zone of the pandemic, people came, and some occupied the building; whilst respecting pandemic-related measures (e.g., scheduling two persons inside the building at a time) and the curfew.

A few days later, the municipal council at one online meeting decided unanimously to demolish the building. For almost one week, meetings and discussions between the artists and the rest of the theatre supporters were held in the theatre yard, all respecting the pandemic protocols, such as social distancing and face masks. As the tension was rising due to the governmental statements for the immediate demolition of the building, actors, activist, citizens and media were settled inside the building and in the yard.

On 17 May 2020, the 75th anniversary of the building, without any announcement, disregarding the pandemic protocol and the rules, not respecting or upholding legal procedures, the state police entered the building at 4.20

[4] The Constitutional Court has currently only one member instead of three as the member judges did not pass the anti-corruption reform. They have therefore not worked for at least four years and no replacements have been made.

a.m. and arrested the citizens inside [5] (Hoxhaj, 2020). Half an hour later the demolition of the National Theatre building was a reality. This happened when people were still inside. Some of the artists climbed up on the rooftop, and many others tried to save whatever they could from the theatre legacy, such as furniture, pictures, books and recording equipment.

According to the protesters (Kryeziu, 2020), this episode and the behaviour were brutal, disrespectful and unacceptable in a democratic country. Some of them even felt the situation to be life-threatening. Later that day, on the streets of Tirana there were protests by the artists, the engaged community, representatives of civil society and social organisations and citizens at large. The protests occurred in spite of the curfew and the lockdown, and therefore 68 citizens were arrested. In a public announcement related to the events around the National Theatre building, the mayor of Tirana declared: 'We have taken into consideration all options, the building was old and decayed. It was no longer of any value and people will soon forget about it' (Dervishi, 2020).

Although the National Theatre building was demolished, during the days of protest and among the activists the level of education of interested individuals helped the public discourse to present arguments (Redaksia, 2018)[6] for the preservation of the building. This argument can also be supported by the decision of the Constitutional Court to repeal VKM. No. 377 of

[5] For more information and visual testimonies from the activist, actors and citizens, please refer to Albanian media, such as:
https://www.dw.com/sq/17-maji-n%C3%AB-tiran%C3%AB-shembja-e-teatrit-komb%C3%ABtar/av-53473146
https://www.dw.com/sq/tiran%C3%AB-n%C3%AB-lup%C3%ABn-e-protest%C3%ABs-p%C3%ABr-shembjen-e-teatrit-komb%C3%ABtar/a-53525752
https://exit.al/shembja-e-teatrit-kombetar-ne-foto/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDkKv34Fh9Q
https://citizens-channel.com/

[6] Most well-known and popular actors were part of the two-year resistance, while at the same time different NGO employees and students were involved within the resistance.

08.05.2020[7] (V-29/21, 2021). In this sense, the absolute education model, from which we can perceive that an individual's own level of education is the driving mechanism for collective action and part of CSE, can be shown in this case.

Second, the sorting model, which is premised on the assumption that education serves as a marker of social status, can be observed in the related higher education student protest that took place in December 2018. The debate over higher education reform in Albania originally started in 2011 among university communities, the main goals for this reform being credibility and the adoption of the Bologna system in Albanian universities. Over the previous two decades, private institutes had been licenced to operate in Albania as universities but among academics and the public these institutions had begun to look more like businesses than institutions providing quality higher education. In 2013, the government had stated during the electoral campaign that one of its main goals was higher education reform, including strict control over private universities, fees and accreditation of academic processes in both public and private universities. Since then, professors, other academics and students have raised and discussed their concerns about the level of transparency and what such a reform and new laws for higher education should look like.

On 6 December 2018, the Finance Department of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Polytechnic University of Tirana, asked students to pay a new fee. New decisions for public universities (state owned), to be applied by January 2020, sought to regulate the exams and modules. In response a group of students, supported by other students from the Movement for the University

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[7] VKM. No. 377 of 08.05.2020: The Council of Minister Decision No.377 transfers the ownership of land and theatre building from the Ministry of Culture to the Municipality of Tirana. This legal decision gives the right to the new ownership the right to administrate, reconstruct and/or demolished the building, By this, the status of the budling as monument of culture, historical heritage was revoked.

(Lëvizja për Universitetitn), decided to boycott classes and hold a protest in the building of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. Within three days the protest had increased to 10,000-15,000 students from all over Albania (Qori, 2018). Student protest as a collective action and a civic engagement, excluding categorically political organisations such as opposition parties, has changed perceptions in Albanian society about protesting and decision-making. It can be said that for the first time Albania and Albanian society have had a movement in which the students shared the same goal, in terms of higher education, especially in the changing society's perspective on civil engagement. The student movement is influenced by the combination of two elements, namely the need for social change and the force of citizens' power that ultimately leads to social transformation.

In both CSE cases, it is reasonable to assume that the activists' educational background consisted of tertiary education and/or with a university degree. This suggests that education can be considered an important factor for mobilisation and collective action. In contrast to other protest experiences in Albania, in these two collective actions public debate was triggered by university professors, joined later by other academics, students and activists. Higher education institutions from the 1990s until today had only one major reform, in 2015. Socio-economic factors influenced mobilisation, showing the impact and role of (higher) education in sustainable democratisation, decision-making and raising awareness about public policies and public space.

## Conclusion

Albania is one example of a European country where a lack of transparency in relation to government institutions has prevented people from participating in civil and social engagement to tackle issues of concern, a necessary role

for a sustainable democracy. The lack of mobilisation in young democracies like Albania can be explained by important historical reasons. For example, Albanians went through a peculiar development in terms of the social divisions caused by national and industrial revolutions. Moreover, the totalitarian regime had its impact on social division and always controlled the political system.

With the introduction of democracy, social groups such as former landowners were mostly organised within political parties. While the political parties were able to survive in an uneasy period, new social division in Albania, reshaped during the democratisation process, seemed to be politicised, and arguably caused democracy to descend into atrophy. It may be said that only after 2000 was Albanian society able to rehabilitate civic and social engagement including protest. This was due to many factors such as education, technology and opportunities to travel abroad. In this the role of the young generation, particularly students, and citizens with high levels of education, was of great significance.

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**Annex 1**. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was formulated using Google form tool.

Please answer the following questions, stating if you agree or disagree using the scale below: 1- Totally disagree; 2- Somewhat disagree; 3-Neither agree nor disagree; 4- Somewhat agree; 5- Totally agree

1. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Education can be conceptualized as a community.
2. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Education is only a place of learning, like school.
3. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Public space is an element of a sustainable democracy.
4. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Protests are necessary for a sustainable democracy.

5. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree: Was the student protest in 2018 an example of a sustainable democracy?
6. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Was the Alliance for the protection of the theatre in 2020 an example of a sustainable democracy?
7. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? The legal framework should be supportive towards non-conventional forms of participation for a sustainable democracy.
8. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? CSEs, like the student protests in 2018 should be part of decision-making for a sustainable democracy.
9. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Level of education level is related to concern about public issues.
10. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? CSEs, like the Alliance for the protection of the theatre, should be more active in decision-making for a sustainable democracy.
11. From one to five how much do you agree or disagree? Higher education institutions should collaborate more with CSE for a sustainable democracy.

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# EXTENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP? EXPLORING DIGITAL, GLOBAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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**Abstract** Citizenship education has throughout history been used as a tool for articulating and embedding politically set visions of societies. As such, it has functioned as a response to contemporary political challenges and the changing societal landscape. Simultaneously, new forms of citizenship have emerged to equip students - and citizens - with new capacities and values. These citizenships include digital, global, and environmental citizenship, each figuring within education policy discourse to differing extents. The extensions continue to transfer 'citizenship' from its state-centric origins towards contemporary global governance structures and other points of reference. At the same time, these citizenships also create new demarcations and challenge the legal dimension of citizenship. This paper examines how these forms of citizenship are presented on a national and transnational scale. The curriculum and policy approaches of three European nations, three transnational organisations and one academic institution are analysed to assess how citizenship is recontextualized in the face of globalisation, climate change and digitalisation. When applied to the presentations of these citizenships in education, the traditional dimensions of citizenship reveal an emphasis on the values and duties of digital, global and climate citizens, with the onus placed on citizens' responsibility to others. Generally, the rights associated with these citizenships and, particularly who guarantees such rights, are less clear. By discussing these citizenships within contemporary contexts at multiple geographic

levels, the paper provides concrete examples of the debates on and uses of the concept of citizenship and the roles of citizenship education. In so doing, we shed light on some of the more recent extensions of citizenship.

**Keywords:** Global citizenship, climate citizenship, digital citizenship, citizenship education, global trends

**Abstrakti** Kansalaiskasvatus elää ajassa ja sopeutuu yhteiskunnallisiin ja poliittisiin haasteisiin. Sen kautta voidaan artikuloida sitä, miten kansalaisuuden tulisi vastata näihin haasteisiin, ja millaisia kyvykkyyksiä ja arvostuksia niihin katsotaan kuuluvan. Digitaalinen, globaali- ja ympäristökansalaisuus ovat esimerkkejä uusista kansalaisuuden käsitteen käyttöyhteyksistä, jotka ovat löytäneet paikkansa koulutuspolitiikan diskursseissa. Ne siirtävät edelleen kansalaisuuden käsitettä pois kansallisvaltiokeskeisestä tulkinnasta ja sitä vastoin vahvistavat kansalaisuutta osana globaaleja kehityskulkuja. Samaan aikaan ne kuitenkin tuottavat myös uudenlaisia jakolinjoja sekä haastavat kansalaisuutta oikeudellisen aseman kautta tulkittavana käsitteenä. Tämä artikkeli tarkastelee digitaalista, globaalia ja ympäristökansalaisuutta eri esimerkkien avulla ja kysyy, miten kansalaisuutta tulkitaan uudelleen digitalisaation, globalisaation ja ympäristökriisin haasteiden kautta. Linssinä toimivat kansalaisuuden käsitteen vakiintuneet ulottuvuudet. Lähestymistapa osoittaa, että erityisesti velvollisuudet ja arvoihin perustuva tulkinta painottuvat digitaalisen, globaalin ja ympäristökansalaisuuden käsitteellistämisessä, erityisesti siten että yksilön vastuu muita kohtaan korostuu. Oikeudet, ja erityisesti se, kuka voi taata oikeudet yksilölle näiden kansalaisuuden kategorioiden yhteydessä, on aineistossa toissijaista velvollisuuksien ja vastuiden suhteen. Artikkeli tuokin esiin konkreettisten esimerkkien kautta, miten kansalaisuuden käsitteellä kurotetaan kohti uusia merkityksiä eri viitekehysten avulla.

**Avainsanat:** Kansalaiskasvatus, digitaalinen kansalaisuus, globaali kansalaisuus, ympäristökansalaisuus, globaalit kehityskulut

## Introduction: Applying citizenship in contemporary contexts

Citizenship education has throughout history been used as a tool for developing future members of society to match a politically established vision of society embedded within curriculum and policy. It is therefore politically positioned to aim towards normative interpretations of citizenship (e.g. Schugurensky & Myers, 2003/2008). The target groups for citizenship education may become part of the educational system at different points in time, be it at the beginning of their basic education path, integration courses, or adult education. In this article, we examine citizenship education as a tool for articulating interpretations of citizenship. Our examples are all conceptualisations where "citizenship" is paired together with a prefix, naming its specific field of reference: digital citizenship, global citizenship and environmental citizenship. Considering citizenship as a contested concept, our main research questions concern how citizenship education curricula treat these prefixes, and how some of these commonly recognised dimensions of citizenship are applied in these contexts. We explore these questions by examining how these extensions are discussed in curricular documents, policy documents and reports in various European contexts.

Conducting citizenship education via the military for those considered full members of the polity in classical Sparta, Athens, and other *poleis*, is an early example of how duties and virtues were the first keys to full membership of the polity after the formal status was recognised (Heater, 2002, p 457). As an academic exercise, citizenship education can be scrutinised from multiple angles - from critical pedagogy to postcolonial studies and democratic theory (for a recent overview, see e.g. Veugelers, 2019). Because citizenship education is part of our societal structures, it is also influenced by societal,

political and international undercurrents (Keating et al., 2009; Sardoč, 2021), and our cases reflect the significance of emerging technologies, globalisation and environmental change to our societies. Our interest in citizenship education is instrumental to exploring how citizenship as a contested concept features as part of our contemporary global challenges and democracy as part of our ongoing and past research projects.

The pursuit of technological leadership in digitalisation is currently one of the key EU strategies,[1] and the United Nations has also launched initiatives to address technologies as prominent parts of realising Sustainable Development Goals and discussing digital human rights.[2] National governments are adopting digital governance strategies, albeit at varying paces. The hype is accompanied by a growing understanding of the problems in the use of data, resulting in biased algorithms, intense competition over resources and the lack of transparency of expert power embedded in the development and application of these technologies, all of which also have impacts on the lives of individual citizens (e.g. Hintz et al., 2018, Introduction). The concept of global citizenship has formed from several strands, including an openness towards other cultures, advocacy and the development of human rights, and global capitalisation. Reflecting contemporary interconnectedness, global citizenship now generally refers to developing competences and attitudes pertaining to the relationship between individuals and the global community, often through a lens of justice solidarity in spite of criticism that national and local implementations are centred around improving

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[1] See e.g. European Commission 2021: Shaping Europe's digital future https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en

[2] United Nations: UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies. https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/
United Nations: Digital human rights. Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology https://www.un.org/techenvoy/content/digital-human-rights

international competitiveness (Pais & Costa, 2020; Shultz, 2007; UN, n.d.). Finally, environmental citizenship (also referred to as climate citizenship, ecological citizenship and green citizenship) and environmental citizenship education, has been a distinct field for around 20 years. The intensifying climate crisis and its prominence on political agendas is likewise a growing context for citizenship. Environmental citizenship refers to a commitment to the "common good" (Dobson, 2007). The need for environmental citizens - those actively working to preserve and protect the environment - is especially dire as the impact of human behaviour on the environment is creating more and more irreparable damage (Hadjichambis & Reis, 2020).

All examples reach out to contexts outside the nation state framework. In this sense, they reflect the complexity of the global interdependence of political and economic systems. This also links them to the recognised political challenges to international co-operation and global governance, such as introspective radical right populism and a re-emphasis of national sovereignty (Sardoč, 2021). Notably, citizenship education has throughout its history been a top-down endeavour. Be it provided by the military, the family or the church, it has been formed around the idea of normativity and socio-cultural cohesion. After the French Revolution and the formation of the modern citizenship concept, the need for public citizenship education increased. As democratic institutions continued to develop and representative democracy in the form of parliamentarism gained strength, citizens were also in need of new skills in order to exercise their political rights. The same was true of decolonisation (for an overview, see e.g. Heater, 2002, p 464). Another perspective on polity formation, i.e., the strengthening of nationalism throughout Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, highlighted *demos* through exclusion and distinction, and citizenship as a political tool. Since the late 1990s, a

distinctive feature of citizenship education has been integration courses, which are tied to the issuance of residence permits and naturalisation policies, among others. The main aim of these activities has been to emphasise the core values, skills and knowledge expected of future citizens (e.g. van Oers et al., 2010). Through citizenship education, our three extensions display the tension and interplay between global, regional, and national level interpretations of citizenship.

## Commonalities in Western citizenship concepts

As an analytical point of departure, we perceive the concept of citizenship as a key concept in politics from a constructive and reflexive perspective rather than something with a fixed definition, as stressed in Wiesner et al. (2018, pp 1-16), in comparison with a more positivist concepts, often employed in comparative politics. This perspective, based on the now internationally recognised fields of conceptual history and the history of ideas,[3] emphasises citizenship as something changing in range and meanings over temporal, political and cultural contexts. Part of this understanding is to consider citizenship as something constituted through practice, rather than established through a shared identity and sense of belonging. Its application is therefore well suited to a reading seeking to address practises of citizenship education curricula and how they shape the use and range of citizenship.

Because emerging technologies, globalisation and environmental change have proven to be contexts where agency is articulated as citizenship, we wonder if these

[3] The emergence of this field is generally attributed to the work of Reinhart Koselleck and Quentin Skinner. A recurring overview of contemporary topics can currently be found in the dedicated publication *Contributions to the History of Concepts*: https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/contributions/contributions-overview.xml

also affect our understanding of citizenship as a key political concept, especially when some of the basic dimensions of citizenship are considered. The basic dimensions here are also a feature of the abovementioned analysis of Wiesner et al. (2018; for an earlier introduction, see Wiesner & Björk, 2014), which we here reapply. The dimensions are divided into four major ones: 1) access to citizenship; 2) rights; 3) duties; and 4) the possibility of participation, or the active content of citizenship. The idea is to recognise commonalities among the most prevalent concepts of citizenship across the contextual differences. The original analysis is based on Western European and democratic concepts of citizenship, and in our analysis we therefore limit our perspective to these. We are also limited to using sources either published in or translated into English, therefore accepting that we may in some cases have some blind spots regarding national-level interpretations. Since our examples all emanate from the state-bound concepts, however, we are willing to accept these limitations and treat the original analysis as a framework for discussing our three examples, all transcending the national, state-centred contexts.

One of the significant undercurrents is the premise that citizenship is linked to democracy and democratisation: If we perceive the formulation of the four dimensions as sites of controversy (Wiesner et al., 2018, p 7), they are not to be treated as mere heuristic tools for sensemaking, but rather as examples of how the (national) concepts of citizenship have been inherent in and instrumental to making claims for the democratisation, recognition and reinterpretations of the polity. The perspectives covered by academics in their analyses of citizenship show the vast range of its use and meanings: Historically, *citizenship* has been attached to e.g. the formation of states or corresponding political entities (e.g. Magnette, 2005; Fahrmeir, 2007; Joppke, 2010). The

political development of nation-states created new practices for state borders and emphasised the significance of having recognised membership of the state. Recently, the tightening of the naturalisation systems across Europe (for an example, see van Oers, 2021) and the difficulty of accommodating citizenship as an inclusive concept (e.g. Graeve et al., 2017), as well as the increasing revival of deprivation of citizenship as a viable part of citizenship politics (e.g. Mantu, 2015) continue to display the inherently conditional nature of citizenship as something based on demarcations. Citizenship is therefore contested in many ways, depending on the historical development and politics (see e.g. Brubaker, 1992, 2001), sense of belonging and discussion on identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2007; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), and importantly to our sources, beyond the boundaries of individual states (on cosmopolitan citizenship, see e.g. Linklater, 1999; Horst & Olsen, 2021; on European union citizenship, see e.g. Kostakopoulou, 2007; Wiesner, 2018). One perspective on our three examples is therefore to raise the question of possible controversy in these contexts, even if articulating extensive conclusions about this fall beyond the scope of the paper. Whether the issue is who is part of the *demos*, what rights and duties are subsumed by the status of citizenship, or what expectations and modes of participation are included, it all points in the direction of expansion or intensification of citizenship and the ability to actually exercise it. The main examples of the paper approach citizenship as conceptual extensions seeking to articulate contemporary expressions of agency. As such, they also imply new possibilities and limitations, i.e., conditionalities, on agency, but also perhaps possibilities for democratisation.

## Contemporary examples of citizenship education for digital, global and environmental citizenships

To emphasise concepts as context-bound, we are here interested in sources where citizenship education is explicitly articulated as a target, tool, or forum for realising citizenship. Hence, whereas it could be argued that citizenship education is somehow the aim of (national) curricula in general, we are interested in the explicitly argued cases. The contexts for citizenship education here include examples from both the national and transnational level for each extension of citizenship. Curricula were chosen by literature reviews and database searches, resulting in an initial selection of 35 national programmes and five transnational programmes. This paper analyses policy documents and reports rather than the in-classroom implementation of these programmes, as the focus is on how extensions of citizenship are articulated and what those articulations reveal about the concept and controversies of citizenship.

The initial scanning of documents included programmes on a global scale, but the selection was narrowed down to the European context, for reasons explained in the preceding section. Final selections were made according to the relevance of the content and the availability of the documents (curricula, resources and policy documents) in English, including three national approaches to the extensions, namely Digital Malta, the National Digital Strategy 2014-2020; the Czech Republic's national curriculum; National Strategy for Global Development Education and Estonia's national curriculum, three approaches developed by non-governmental bodies (Council of Europe Digital Citizenship Education project, the Oxfam Global Citizenship guides, and the ENEC Framework of the Education for Environmental Citizenship), and one report

by an academic institution (the College of Europe report, The Future of Environmental Citizenship in the EU).

As mentioned, the basic dimensions are features which are widely recognised in interpretations of citizenship. Access to citizenship defines who is a member of the *demos*, i.e., who is included in the polity by reason of full citizenship status as opposed to the more limited status of permanent residence etc. The issue of access has in recent decades been debated and contested by mobility and transnational forms of governance, for example. The various forms of access highlight the conditionality of citizenship, and one of the most debated issues in 2000s Europe has been naturalisation, i.e., granting citizenship via an application process.

While access to the extension of citizenships discussed below may be linked to national identities and clearly delineated legal citizenships, it is largely granted through active engagement with rights, duties, and participation. Rights, duties, and active content participation have, in turn, been legal consequences of accessing citizenship.[4] Duties have been a less studied field, with education, military service and taxes as the most famous examples (but also the duty to vote, for example). Active participation refers to the question of "what the *demos* does", such as taking part in elections (Wiesner et al., 2018, p 9). Participation has notably prevailed as a key topic in academic debates and political agendas since the famous "participatory turn" (for an

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[4] Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/udhr.pdf) recognises everyone's right to nationality. The relationship between citizenship and human rights as an analytical discussion falls beyond the scope of the present paper (see e.g. Owen, 2017). It is important to note, however, that the interest in Hannah Arendt's analysis of the "right to have rights" (see *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1968), pp 290-302; esp. revived by Seyla Benhabib, see e.g. 2004) is particularly relevant to the political and societal realities of many, especially in the context of migration flows, debates on immigration and statelessness (in relation to Benhabib's argument, see e.g. Bauböck, 2007), highlighting the relationship between access to citizenship and its consequences.

overview, see e.g. the collection of articles by Bherer et al., 2016), and is one of the ways of realising the complexity of citizenship as a status, democratic processes for exercising power, or building collective identities on multiple scales (Mäkinen, 2021, pp 3-4). Here, we use these dimensions to bring our cases together to see how they relate to these commonalities.

In each case, the examples are used to discuss the extensions from differing perspectives, with the aim of showing that, as with the history of the concept of citizenship in general, its contemporary forms are also far from having singular definitions or subjected to essentialism. They also show the variety of actors involved in the citizenship education discourse, where international organisations and national governments, for example, represent the various dimensions of governance through citizenship.

Table 1 below synthesises the analysis of the approaches, highlighting the similarities and differences in approaches to the four elements of citizenship within the extensions.

| | Access | Rights | Duties | Active participation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Digital citizenship | • Active engagement in online community life (Council of Europe)<br>• Having digital literacy skills (Malta) | • Legal rights (Council of Europe)<br>• To access and inclusion (Council of Europe)<br>• To benefit from technology (Malta)<br>• Access to digital infrastructure (Malta) | • Act responsibly, ethically, and with empathy (Council of Europe, Malta) | • Influencing environment, e.g. through civic technology or social networking (Council of Europe, Malta) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Global citizenship | • Active engagement in local community and "wider world" (Oxfam)<br>• Being part of a European and global community (Czech Republic) | • UN approach to human rights (Oxfam, Czech Republic)<br>• Legal rights as citizens of Europe and the nation (Czech Republic) | • Act as agents of positive change in local and global community (Oxfam, Czech Republic)<br>• Respect diversity (Oxfam, Czech Republic) | • Community participation (Oxfam, Czech Republic) |
| Environmental citizenship | • Responsible environmental behaviour (ENEC, Estonia)<br>• Relationship/connection to nature (ENEC, Estonia, College of Europe)<br>• European citizenship (College of Europe) | • Right to clean environment (ENEC, College of Europe)<br>• Legal rights (ex. Aarhus convention) (ENEC, College of Europe)<br>• No specific reference to rights (Estonia) | • Obligation to not harm environment (ENEC)<br>• Actively work to solve and prevent environment problems (ENEC, Estonia)<br>• Act in an environmentally friendly way, including personal choices (Estonia)<br>• Protect environmental rights of future generations (College of Europe) | • Civic participation (ENEC, Estonia, College of Europe)<br>• Acting as agents of change (ENEC) |

Table 1. Four elements of citizenship within the extensions.

### *Digital citizenship education*

To tackle the intensifying impact of new technologies on key societal processes, institutions and individuals, citizenship education curricula have started to address digitalisation as a prominent part of citizenship articulations. Examples of digital citizenship education are 1) the Council of Europe Digital Citizenship Education Programme; and 2) Digital Malta. While the duties and active content of citizens are similar, these programmes illustrate two different priorities within digital citizenship; the first being concerned with the human rights based perspective on digitalisation, and the latter on the potential of digital citizens to benefit from online engagement.

Digital citizenship, while previously often approached solely from a competence-based definition, has shifted toward a focus on *how* the internet is used (Jones & Mitchell, 2016). It is not just the ability to use the internet and digital technology, but also requires responsible, active and ethical engagement (Buchholz et al., 2020; Jones & Mitchell, 2016; Pedersen et al., 2018). Lozano-Díaz, Figueredo-Canosa and Fernández-Prados (2020) suggest that digital citizenship is a more active exercise of democracy, using the digital world as a political space. As an extension of citizenship, digital citizenship means the definition of norms, duties and participation in a context which is not strictly local and is dependent on accessing a specific infrastructure.

The Council of Europe developed a Digital Citizenship Education programme, identifying digital citizenship as a "a range of competences, attributes and behaviours" that allow online users to engage with and benefit from online communities while promoting respectful, responsible and safe online behaviour (Council of Europe, n.d.-b). The Council of Europe is an international human rights organisation of 47 member states, aiming to promote

human rights, democratic ideals, and a European identity, and is funded by member state contributions (Council of Europe, n.d.-d). The Digital Citizenship programme was developed in 2016 under the Council of Europe Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) programme, following the Council of Europe principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Digital Citizenship Education programme provides resources for educators and policy recommendations in the European context but is not formally required to be included in European national curricula (Council of Europe, n.d.-c). The Council of Europe defines digital citizens as more than just internet users; they actively and responsibly use the internet to engage in community life (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019). To realise this goal of engagement, The Council of Europe proposes using citizenship education, as education is "both the spark and as effect of a process of citizenship" (Council of Europe, n.d.-b).

A digital citizen is obligated to be ethical and empathetic in online interactions, and has the right to "privacy, security, access and inclusion, freedom of expression and more" (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019, p 14). Understanding and valuing human rights is also reiterated throughout the Digital Citizenship Handbook. Specifically, the handbook refers to rights guaranteed under the GDPR, including the right to request access to or deletion of personal data. Brief reference is also made to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Code of EU Online Rights.[5] While some of the rights mentioned are guaranteed under the GDPR registration, others - such as the right to access and

[5] The Code of EU Online Rights is a compilation of basic rights guaranteed in EU law, such as access to services and networks, non-discrimination in online services, and protection of personal data. The document itself has no legislative power. https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/sites/digital-agenda/files/Code%20EU%20online%20rights%20EN%20final%202.pdf

inclusion - are less clearly defined and depend on the behaviour of others, the national legislation and the actions of technology companies. When digital citizenship education is provided, the expectation is that children will be empowered to actively participate in digital society, and those who may be marginalised by limited technology skills or access are able to participate (Council of Europe, n.d.-b). One of the domains of DCE, "active participation", emphasises that digital citizens work to influence their environment through tools such as civic technology or online communities like Wikipedia (Council of Europe, n.d.-a). Engagement is encouraged on the local, regional and global levels.

A national-level perspective on digital citizenship is introduced by Digital Malta, the government of Malta's ICT strategy for 2014-2020. Digital citizenship is approached as a collection of competences that enable and empower citizens to benefit from the internet, including the creation of content (Digital Malta, 2019). It is "about action", reflecting the shift of digital citizenship as a step beyond digital skills (Department of eLearning, 2015, p 12). All Maltese citizens should have the opportunity to "grow as a digital citizen" and benefit from the opportunities provided by technology, regardless of skills, age, disability or economic means. Free wireless internet in public spaces around Malta is listed as a way to promote the development of digital citizenship (Digital Malta, 2019), addressing the role of the national government to ensure sufficient infrastructure in support of the programme's aims.

It is argued that being a digital citizen requires treating people with respect online and actively communicating with the wider community, including local government and NGOs (Department of eLearning, 2015; Digital Malta, 2019). Specifically mentioned are the use of mobile apps and social networking websites. According to the plan, one of the benefits of increased digital citizenship

is the promotion of Maltese language, culture, and identity. The implementation of the programme has not, however, been followed to the letter: The Digital Malta strategy included a plan to add digital citizenship to the national curriculum, but no mention is made there of digital citizenship. Despite this, Digital Literacy has been a cross-curricular theme in the National Curriculum Framework since at least 2012 and digital ethics is included as a topic in the 2019 ICT syllabuses for secondary schools. The only mention of digital citizenship in the curriculum is in the optional Media Literacy programme, a part of the Maltese Matriculation Certificate (MATSEC),[6] which includes “Act as a responsible digital citizen” as an aim of the optional Media Literacy Education programme (MATSEC, n.d.). Furthermore, the Ministry for Education’s Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills has hosted digital citizenship workshops for teachers and students, including one using the Council of Europe’s dimensions of digital citizenship (Digital Literacy Malta, 2021). Overall, digital citizenship in Malta is defined mainly in how Maltese citizens connect to each other or to government bodies, with less focus on the wider global digital community.

The two examples show how digital citizenship is referred to in the curricula in terms of spatiality (from Council of Europe transnational level towards Maltese local applications), participation and engagement (Council of Europe and the Maltese example of infrastructure and social connection) as well as safeguarding human rights by emphasising the responsibilities and ethics of online behaviour and use of digital space. However, they do not specify exactly who is a digital citizen; whether it is a question of access to the technology and skills provided by the national governments, or guaranteed in some other

[6] MATSEC is a series of exams required for admission to the University of Malta.

way. Digital citizenship therefore seems to remain at least partly dependent on the national forms of citizenship, given that there is no other way to ensure access to the necessary tools.

### *Global citizenship education*

Global citizenship education, like other forms of 'citizenship education', does not have a clear and agreed definition across academia and policy. As the Cold War came to a close and the world began to open up, the concept of a global community and mediating peace rose to prominence; by the 1990s, global citizenship had become significant in education discourse, developing from the cosmopolitan tradition (Schattle, 2009). Alongside the articulation of global citizenship, European Union citizenship as established in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) represents a legally prescribed form of non-national citizenship. The EU therefore provides a further transnational reference point for citizenship education curricula aiming at identification with other than national contexts.

Several educational frameworks overlap with global citizenship, including peace education, development education and environmental education (e.g. Mannion et al., 2014; Sant et al., 2018). Global citizenship education, as well as these overlapping educational frameworks, all include a sense of global connection and responsibility. Examples of global citizenship education include 1) Oxfam (international organisation) and 2) the national curriculum of the Czech Republic. They supplement each other by explaining how the pursuit of something understood as the "International community" can be articulated by an international actor and a national government. Both understandings of global citizenship utilise scales of participation (Mäkinen, 2021), framing participation on a local, regional and global scale to define

global citizenship. The aim common to both is to use the UN human rights-based approach as the key reference point, but the latter example represents an attempt to identify a national articulation of citizenship as part of the global community.

Taking the interconnectedness of humanity as its main framework, Oxfam, an international charitable organisation working to end poverty and inequality, first developed a global citizenship curriculum in 1997. In line with several other citizenship educations,[7] Oxfam approaches global citizenship education as an overarching framework for learning, rather than as an independent additional subject (Oxfam, n.d.). The central ideas of global citizenship education include: 'globalisation and interdependence', 'social justice and equity', 'equity and diversity', 'sustainable development' and 'peace and conflict' (Oxfam, 2015b, p 6-7). Oxfam defines a global citizen as a person who understands the "wider world" and takes an active part in their community "to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and fairer" (Oxfam, n.d.).

In the Oxfam reading, human rights are central to global citizenship, with specific reference made to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as rights children have in classrooms and schools (Oxfam, 2015a). As global citizens, students are expected to take responsibility for their actions, act as agents of change for a better future, respect diversity and make informed choices based on critical thinking (Oxfam, 2015a; Oxfam, 2015b). Additionally, global citizens participate "in the community at a range of levels, from the local to the global" (Oxfam,

[7] See e.g. cross-curricular subjects in the Czech Republic (including Democratic Citizenship, Education Towards Thinking in European and Global Contexts, and Multicultural Education), transversal competences in Finland (including Global and Cultural Competence and Societal Competence), and as an interdisciplinary and cross-curricular theme in Croatia (citizenship education)

2015a, p 5). Participation begins as young as ages 7-11 by contributing to decision-making in school and expands to wider spheres, including participation in political processes. The curriculum is grounded on the idea that all people are capable of contributing to positive change in the world. The references to the UN framework, as produced by an established international organisation, including sustainable development, which is a major international tool for cooperation, emphasises the feasibility and importance of realising such citizenship.

In the Czech Republic, the connection to Europe and the wider global community is a key part of Czech education policy, and several tenets of global citizenship are reflected in the curriculum. While global citizenship is not mentioned specifically in the education curriculum, understanding global and European values is one of the seven goals of education listed in the National Education Act (Parliament of the Czech Republic, 2004). The most recent education policy strategy includes improved citizenship competences as one of the main strategies but focuses these on the more traditional understanding of citizenship at the local and national level (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020).

In the curriculum, the connection between students, the Czech Republic, Europe and the global community is mentioned in several subjects, including civic education and social sciences (Balada et al., 2007a, 2007b). Both basic and secondary education curricula include cross-curricular subjects, namely “Education Toward Thinking in European and Global Contexts” and “Multicultural Education”, reflecting the same principle presented by Oxfam that these topics should permeate all subject matter. These two subject areas promote respectively critical thinking towards globalisation and development, and respect for diversity.

Although mention is made of the relationship between the Czech Republic and the global community, more

emphasis is placed on the relationship between Europe and the Czech Republic and on learning European culture and values (Balada et al., 2007a, 2007b). Students are expected to understand their obligations and rights as citizens of the Czech Republic and of the European Union and to participate in efforts to solve problems on the local, national, and international levels (Balada et al., 2007a, 2007b). Human rights and the rights of children are also taught under "Education Toward Thinking in European and Global Contexts", a cross-curricular subject, and are mentioned in subjects like civic education, history and "Humans and their World" (a primary education subject) (Balada et al., 2007a, 2007b). Additionally, the responsibility to create "a world where all people may live with dignity" is listed in the 2011-2015 National Strategy for Global Development Education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2011). Compared to the curriculum documents, this national strategy is less Eurocentric and encourages a commitment to wider, global development.

Global citizenship and both global and European values as reference points to national citizenships are attempts to accommodate the realities of multilateral governance. They are also tools for arguing for an interpretation of citizenship which clearly acknowledges a democratic premise of citizenship. Intuitively, a global citizenship education would be a reading of citizenship as a counter to nationalism and a nation-state understanding of citizenship. As the Czech examples show, however, in the national context even global and European emphases on the concept of citizenship remain to be interpreted through a national lens of access, rights and political processes as the country joined the European Union in 2004 and the reinterpretation of national citizenship was applied to the new multilateral governance system.

## *Environmental citizenship*

Responsibility for the environment appears often as an aspect of global citizenship as an extension of rights beyond the human sphere (Mannion et al., 2014). Usually, this perspective is taken as the duty of global citizens to promote sustainable development (Gough, 2018). The relationship between humans and nature is a central part of environmental citizenship, with some approaches viewing humans as stewards of the environment, and others presenting nature and humankind as living in harmony. While all the approaches emphasise a commitment to sustainability, they diverge in some definitions of the rights and duties of environmental citizens, as well as in their scale of participation.

The European Network for Environmental Citizenship (ENEC) is an EU funded project with the aim of strengthening the field of environmental citizenship in Europe and participating countries. While it has not created a specific curriculum, ENEC has published a Framework of the Education for Environmental Citizenship, emphasising the urgent need for this form of education and defining the goals and objectives of such education (ENEC, 2020). Environmental citizenship is defined as the "responsible environmental behaviour of citizens" actively contributing to sustainability and developing "a healthy relationship with nature" (ENEC, 2019, p 7). This active effort to resolve problems is key in defining an 'environmental citizen'. The framework specifically identifies examples of environmental rights and duties including: "Right to life and to a pure environment for every human being", "Public access to environmental data and information", "Obligation not to cause environmental impacts", and "Inter- and Intra-generational equity." (ENEC, 2020, p 11). Environmental citizens are expected to solve and prevent environmental problems and to promote the common good (ENEC, 2020).

The importance of long-term impact is emphasised throughout, as intergenerational justice is mentioned as a main output of environmental education and students are expected to learn to serve as agents of change, with encouraging civic participation and action on a local, national, and global scale as part of the educational content.

As an environmental right, ENEC highlights the right to access environmental data as promised under the Aarhus Convention. The Aarhus Convention, or the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, was adopted in 1998 by the UNECE (European Commission, n.d.). The Aarhus Convention makes a direct connection between human rights and the environment, indicating the value of protecting the environment (European Commission, n.d.). The Convention guarantees the rights of the public under three pillars: the right to "access to environmental information", including information on the state of the environment, public policies and human health; the right to participate in environmental decision-making; and "access to justice", which allows citizens to challenge governments when the first two pillars are infringed (European Commission, n.d.).

In Estonia, responsibility for the environment is reflected throughout the curriculum. Although environmental citizenship is not specifically mentioned, as with the example of global citizenship education in the Czech Republic, the values and competences of environmental citizenship are present throughout basic and secondary education. Environmental sustainability is listed as a core social value in basic and upper secondary education (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2014a, 2014b). Estonia's commitment to environmental education has been reinforced by the implementation of the Environmental Education and Awareness action plan

2019-2022, signed in 2017 (Ministry of the Environment of Estonia, 2018). In basic education, students are expected to understand the value of a sustainable lifestyle and the relationship between humanity and nature (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2014a). In the upper secondary curriculum, students are expected to develop social and citizenship competences, including learning to "value and follow the principles of sustainable development" (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2014b, p 3). Further, 'environment and sustainable development' serves as a cross-curricular subject intended to be taught throughout multiple courses. Humanity's valuing of and responsibility for the environment is reiterated throughout multiple curricular documents, highlighting the interconnectedness between humans and the need to behave in an environmentally friendly way (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). This responsibility includes not only individual actions, but also participation in environmental initiatives on a social and global level (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2014d). The Estonian curriculum does not specifically define rights in relation to the environment or environmental sustainability.

In 2021, students in the College of Europe[8] published a report on the concept of environmental citizenship. The report was published as part of the "TellUs - EU Environmental Policy Lab" programme, a joint initiative between the College of Europe and the Directorate-General for Environment of the European Commission, intended to enable students to contribute to the European policy agenda (Amand & Jareño Cuesta, 2021). While it offers no specific curriculum, it does present education as a key tool for furthering environmental citizenship and

[8] The College of Europe is an academic institution offering postgraduate studies in the field of European studies. It was founded to promote European cooperation as a direct response to World War II.

environmental sustainability, framing environmental citizenship as an added dimension of European citizenship. Citing Hellen Pallett (2017), environmental citizenship is defined as a "means of promoting goals of sustainability and environmental protection and integrating environmental concerns into political theory and modes of political engagement" (as cited in Amand & Jareño Cuesta, 2021, p 27). According to this report, the key principles of environmental citizenship include: inclusivity and intersectionality; the rights and duties of environmental citizens at multiple levels; a "societal model that moves beyond anthropocentrism and that offers a holistic approach to human interactions with the environment"; and a redefinition of "value" (Amand & Jareño Cuesta, 2021, p 10). Environmental citizenship requires educational initiatives to prepare youth for the challenges of building a sustainable future. Environmental citizens are expected to educate others on sustainability and to participate in civic and local action. Protecting the environmental rights of future generations is approached as a moral obligation (p 17). Some of the rights introduced in the report rely on collective efforts for sustainability, such as the right to clean air and clean water. Specific mention is also made of the legal framework within the EU that guarantees certain rights, such as the Aarhus Convention[9] and two EU directives to improve access to environmental information and the right to public participation in environmental governance (Amand & Jareño Cuesta, 2021).

While all three approaches to environmental citizenship stress the importance of active participation on multiple geographic levels, the College of Europe and ENEC provide an understanding of environmental citizenship on a Euro-local scale. Although ENEC does not specifically mention European citizenship as the College

[9] Although not strictly a European Union treaty, it has only been ratified by the EU and countries in Europe and Central Asia.

of Europe document does, the reference to the Aarhus Convention and the fact it is an EU funded project implies a tacit boundary of who is included. These multi-scale approaches highlight the ability of the citizenship extensions to transcend geographic borders and reflect the need for action on multiple levels to address a global challenge.

## Conclusions: Extensions of citizenship in newly established contexts

We have named our examples extensions *of citizenship*. This reflects our starting point, *the basic dimensions* of citizenship, and an attempt to emphasise that citizenship still functions as a crucial key concept in politics even if it entails different prefixes and annexes. In choosing our examples, however, uncertainty emerged over which conceptual choice would best illustrate our reading of the three citizenships: new *layers* of citizenship, *alternative* citizenships or possibly something entirely different. By settling with *extensions*, we have hoped to do justice to the flexibility and persistence of citizenship as a reflexive concept fit to many contexts.

Interpreting the four dimensions of citizenship in the contexts of digitalisation, globalisation and the environmental crisis would perhaps not be an adequate framework for an analysis if citizenship still were not a key political tool for defining who exactly is a member of the polity. Accessing citizenship in the classical sense would refer to ways of acquiring citizenship as a legal status. To some extent this remains the case in our extensions as well, at least in the contexts of the national interpretations of digital, global and environmental citizenship: the rights, duties and participatory expectations are interpreted through membership of a particular state-polity. The debates on the relationship between citizenship and human rights also touch upon this dimension, and even if

this paper omits it, the link between our extensions and the right to have rights is one way to analyse controversies regarding access. In accessing e.g. digital citizenship at a global level, the basis for citizenship is defined more in the context of human rights framework and global citizenship, leaving open the question of who exactly would guarantee the realisation of this type of citizenship. The lack of basic digital infrastructure is not a minor limitation for making this type of citizenship accessible in a truly global sense.

Overall, being a digital, global, or environmental citizen seems to be defined by assuming an active role in these fields. In this scenario, education is a way to gain that citizenship by building the skills, knowledge, values, and drive needed to participate in these arenas. Alternatively, access to these is granted by mere existence and these education programmes merely seek to create 'better' citizens. In any case, each case emphasises participation (albeit not in very definite form) as key to realising the particular extension of citizenship. It would therefore not be too bold to argue that active participation is also one of the keys to accessing these citizenships if the link to the legal status is outside a national context. Further, by viewing participation as scalar (constituted across multiple levels), we can highlight the significance of both bordered citizenship practises and extra-national citizenship practises (Mäkinen, 2021).

Political rights have been a key claim in citizenship battles since the French Revolution, most notably whether in the sense of class, gender, ethnicity, or other potentially discriminatory intersections, but responsibilities and duties seem to have recently gained ground. In the context of environmental citizenship, for example, the argument about realising one's own rights through mutual respect for the same rights of others is among the key elements. Rather than having the duty to protect a country, political regime or territory, the individual has responsibilities towards the environment or, as the first examples show,

other human beings in the digital forums. Arguably, skills and duties (and values) are the main focus of educational content, possibly because it is the easiest to 'teach'. Rights in these contexts seem less clearly defined, and when defined, it is unclear who guarantees them to whom. For example, in the case of digital citizenship, depending on how rights are defined, some are provided by the government (e.g. Internet access), while others are dependent on the behaviour of others.

Finally, it is conceivable that the three extensions of citizenship here are actually better for describing and making visible the many positionings and intersections that citizenship inherently fosters. Our approach has sought to address the four basic commonalities discernible in most interpretations of citizenship and is based on approaches familiar from citizenship studies and conceptual history as an interdisciplinary field. By making this choice, we have focused on aspects of citizenship enabled by having a legal citizenship status as part of the state-polity. Therefore, having explored extensions apparently gravitating towards non-state contexts and interpretations, the lens is limited as regards some other possible framings of the topic. For example, emphasising the extensions as sites of struggle in terms of classifications and claiming recognition to specific agendas or groups as part of the social order (in the sense of Bourdieu, 1987, pp 479-484), would pave the way for analyses engaging more with social and cultural identification. Linking this with the question of power (e.g. Swartz, 2013, pp 137-142), would further explain the extensions as a nexus of state power and classification. Together with the abovementioned link between citizenship and human rights, these approaches to the questions of contemporary extensions and the flexibility and political use of the concept of citizenship could be further developed in future research. In the chosen context, the extensions seem to both readjust, and reach

beyond the classical commonalities: While they do provide new tools for participation, a sense of belonging to a wider (global) community and emphases on particular rights, they also are not equally accessible and realisable to all individuals irrespective of their background or place of residence. Rather, they introduce further sites of struggles for equal opportunity and equity in the politics of citizenship, where identification and recognition play important roles. Which concepts and meanings are established, and which are omitted in the process remains debatable.

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