This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in West European Politics on [Publication Date], available online:

https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1916703

Please cite this article as:

Hernández, E., & Galais, C. (2022). The long-lasting effects of citizenship education. West European Politics, 45(5), 1130-1152. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1916703

© 2022 The Author(s). This Accepted Manuscript is made available under the Taylor & Francis self-archiving policy. It may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with their terms and conditions for self-archived versions, available at https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/sharing-versions/#accepted-manuscript.

The long-lasting effects of citizenship education

Enrique Hernández and Carol Galais

Abstract
Both policymakers and scholars disagree about the effects and suitability of citizenship education standalone courses. Extant evidence about their effects is mixed and inconclusive. This article exploits the discontinuities generated by changes in Spanish education policies to identify the long-term effects of civic education on multiple outputs usually set as the policy goals of these courses: political engagement, institutional support and political values. In 2007, a new standalone citizenship education subject was introduced in the Spanish school curricula. This subject was then progressively removed from the curricula until its disappearance in 2017. These changes gave rise to exog- enous variation in exposure to civic education between young individuals born in different years. In this article these policy changes are exploited to identify the effects of citizenship education through a regression discontinuity design that draws on a 12-wave panel survey. The results point to the emergence of a generation of critical – yet passive – citizens as a result of the implementation of a standalone citizenship education subject in Spanish schools.

Introduction

Since Langton and Jennings (1968) first addressed the effects of civic education courses, the literature has not come to a definitive conclusion on their impact. For the last two decades, and in parallel with a growing concern about democratic backsliding and young people's disengagement, academics have renewed their interest in the potential of Citizenship Education (CE) to bridge the gap between politics and the young (Dassonneville *et al.* 2012; Garcia Albacete 2014; Kerr 2000; Nelsen 2021; Niemi and Junn 2005; Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2013; Whiteley 2014). Citizenship Education, understood as the subject area that is taught in schools with the aim of fostering democratic and civic values and skills, has been shown to have some positive effects on political knowledge and civic engagement (Dassonneville *et al.* 2012; Neundorf *et al.* 2016). Therefore, the current academic debate is not about whether CE works, but about the kind of CE that works.

Among the wide array of CE policies, one stands out for the scarce and mixed evidence with regards to its effects on political attitudes: CE standalone subjects. CE can be taught in schools as a set of transversal competences learned in different subjects (i.e. an 'integrated approach') or as an independent subject (Keating *et al.* 2012). While some scholars do not see an advantage in the last strategy (Pike 2007), others claim that, to maximise its potential effects, CE contents require a specific and independent subject in the school curriculum (Faulks 2006; Hayward and Jerome 2010). Moreover, studies on the effects of standalone CE subjects point in multiple and contradictory directions. Some evidence from the UK indicates that standalone CE courses have positive effects on political knowledge, efficacy and participation (Whiteley 2014), yet no effect on political interest (Prior 2018). At the same time, comparative research indicates that CE taught as a standalone subject has null, or even negative, effects on political engagement (Garcia-Albacete 2013; Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz *et al.* 2017). Some of these contradictory findings could be the result of studies not differentiating between compulsory and elective CE subjects. Furthermore, the wide array of attitudes and behaviours on which CE is expected to have an impact leads to heterogeneity in the research objects examined, which hinders comparisons across studies.

Contradictory findings about the effects of CE are reflected in divergent policy decisions recently adopted by governments across Europe. France approved the reintroduction of compulsory standalone citizenship courses into the French educational system in 2015 in order to reinforce republican values. Belgian authorities adopted a similar decision in 2017, including compulsory citizenship education courses in the French community's secondary schools. However, in Ireland, Cyprus and Norway this subject has been recently substituted by integrated approaches. Such a diverse landscape suggests that policymakers and practitioners will also benefit from empirical work analysing the effects of CE standalone subjects (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017). What are they beneficial for? Do they actually foster a democratic, civic, engaged and critical citizenship?

This article contributes to the CE literature by examining the impact of a compulsory standalone CE subject (*Educación para la Ciudadanía*) taught in Spain between 2007 and 2017. The introduction, and later removal, of this subject from the Spanish school curriculum generated an ideal scenario to identify the causal effects of standalone CE courses. Our results, based on a regression discontinuity design and a 12-wave panel survey, reveal significant effects on a series of attitudes that point to the emergence of a generation of *critical citizens* as a result of the introduction of this subject. While this CE subject appears to slightly

increase political efficacy and knowledge, it also makes citizens less trustful of representative institutions, less satisfied with the way democracy works and less attached to the Spanish nation. Indeed, the generation exposed to this CE subject does not seem enthusiastic about conventional politics, and the loss of allegiance towards traditional political institutions and the nation itself suggests that some of the subject's goals set by policymakers might have, unexpectedly, backfired. We elaborate further on the implications of these findings in the conclusion.

Theoretical framework: why implement citizenship education as a standalone, compulsory subject?

The literature on the effects of CE is divided into multiple strands that expect this type of education to have different 'civic' effects. In the US, CE is mostly conceived as 'the knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences to prepare someone to be an active, informed participant in democratic life' (Campbell 2012: 1). In this context, CE had the initial purpose of reverting the decline in turnout among the young. As a result, American classic works have a broad understanding of CE. This encompasses in- and out-of-classroom educational civics experiences, which should have a positive effect on political participation, as well as 'instructive' effects on political knowledge. These studies also have a recurrent interest in CE's equalising effects, which should bridge the gap between children of different socio-economic backgrounds (Langton and Jennings 1968; Nelsen 2021). According to this perspective, we would expect CE to have an effect on citizens' political engagement, and especially on how much citizens formally know about politics.

The contemporary European perspective is generally more limited in that it tends to focus on formal school curricula (i.e. in-classroom activities), but, at the same time, it has a broader understanding of the potential 'civic' effects of CE. For example, the 2017 Eurydice report on 'Citizenship Education in Europe' defines CE as 'the subject area that is promoted in schools with the aim of fostering the harmonious co-existence and mutually beneficial development of individuals and of the commu- nities they are part of ' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017: 9). This conception of CE is in line with the idea that these subjects might transcend the political realm and promote the acquisition of basic skills such as information collection, argumentation and reasoning, critical thinking, or being empathic when taking decisions (Heater 2004).

Indeed, European studies on CE highlight its potential impact on the democratic and critical aspects of citizenship, aiming at preparing students to defend all citizens' rights and act in a socially responsible manner (Maurissen 2018). As a result, this literature considers that CE subjects

can have an impact on a wide array of attitudes that can lead, in turn, to a critical and community-oriented citizenship (Whiteley 2014). Hence, the impact of CE would not be limited to promoting individuals' political engagement. Based on this perspective, we would expect CE to lead to a better informed and empowered citizenry, fostering positive political values such as adherence to democratic ideals or tolerance towards minorities, as well as the capacity to independently exercise critical political judgement (see e.g. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017).

Given that contemporary studies on the effects of CE tend to consider a vast range of research outcomes, it is no wonder that most scholars agree that CE does have some effects. As a result, the main research concern with respect to CE has shifted from analysing whether it has any effects to assessing what type of CE 'works' (Keating *et al.* 2012). Indeed, CE can be informally taught through extra-curricular activities – like service learning (Morgan and Streb 2001), or it can be included in the school curriculum through: formal civic education, open classroom climates and active learning strategies (Campbell 2008; Neundorf *et al.* 2016). Moreover, formal civic education can be taught as a standalone independent subject or transversally in a cross-curricular or integrated mode that incorporates civic education in various courses.[1]

Some evidence suggests that a transversal and integrated teaching of civics might help students see the relevance of citizenship to their personal lives, and will prevent low-achiever students losing interest in a subject that is assessed just like any other (Pike 2007). Conversely, other researchers point out that the wide and complex contents of civic education require an established, specific, and independent subject in the school curriculum in order to convey importance and identity (Faulks 2006; Hayward and Jerome 2010). Claims for an independent CE subject rest on relatively scant empirical work (but see Keating et al. 2010). As Geboers *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis indicates, the effects of CE standalone school subjects have been less frequently examined than other CE types such as classroom climates and extra-curricular activities. Moreover, some of these studies have returned different conclusions. A recent comparative analysis of fourteen European countries indicates that CE was most effective when delivered as a standalone subject at two levels of education – primary and secondary – but only in regard to increasing patriotism (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz *et al.* 2017). Using IEA-ICCS 2009 data to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of the effects of CE, Garcia-Albacete (2013) found that standalone subjects had a negative effect on political interest. The UK's standalone CE subject has been found, though, to have positive effects on political efficacy, political participation and political knowledge, but no effect on subscription to norms of civic conduct, political values or political interest (Prior 2018; Whiteley 2014). Yet, the

British case poses some problems to identify the effects of CE, as schools were free to decide the content, mode and load of the teaching, causing substantial cross-school variation (Kerr *et al.* 2007).

In sum, the evidence about the effects of standalone CE courses is mixed. Moreover, the dialogue between the different literature strands is obscured by the multiplicity of research objects and expectations about CE outcomes. Our review of the literature also reveals some difficulties in isolating the specific feature of CE (whether or not it is offered as a standalone subject, whether or not it is uniformly implemented across schools, and whether it is mandatory or elective) that is responsible for such 'civic' outcomes. Moreover, most empirical studies have analysed whether CE has an effect on political attitudes and behaviour only in the short term. However, the scarce-existing panel data suggest that formal civic education has positive lasting effects well after young citizens leave school (Neundorf *et al.* 2016). Our study contributes to this literature and addresses some of these shortcomings by assessing the long-term effects of a standalone compulsory CE subject, whose goals were explicitly defined in the laws and regulations that implemented the subject.

Research design

The Spanish case

In 2006 the Spanish Government, led by the Socialist Party (PSOE), passed a law (*Ley Orgánica de Educación*, LOE) that, for the first time, introduced CE as a compulsory standalone subject in the school curricula. Following the recommendation of the Council of Europe on education for democratic citizenship, the subject addressed issues related to tolerance, discrimination, cultural diversity and sustainable development, as well as political engagement and political support related topics. Before the approval of this law, Spain had an integrated and transversal approach to CE. Like Scotland, Finland or Walonia at the time, there were some 'civic' content scattered across different subjects, but not a standalone CE subject.

According to the new law, the standalone compulsory subject called 'Education for Citizenship and Human Rights' (EdC) was taught in primary education and compulsory secondary education. The unfolding of the new policy was meant to be progressive and staggered, yet it was filled with obstacles. Spain is a decentralised state formed by 17 regions that have ample powers on education policies. This meant that regions had some leeway in the implementation of this new subject. This decentralised scenario became even more complex due to the strong objection

to the subject by the main opposition party (the Popular Party (PP)). The PP obstructed its implementation, filing complaints and lawsuits at the Regional Courts of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. All in all, this meant that in regions governed by the PSOE or other left-wing coalitions EdC was first taught in secondary schools during the 2007–2008 school year, while in regions governed by PP its implementation was delayed until the 2008–2009 school year.[2] Moreover, depending on the region, EdC was taught either in the second or the third grade of secondary schools. In Online appendix A we provide further details about the implementation of this new CE subject in Spain. In 2011 the PP won the Spanish general election. By the end of 2013, the PP government passed a new education law (LOMCE) that eliminated CE as a standalone subject in the school curriculum. The implementation of this decision was, again, staggered and heterogeneous across the territory, with some regions teaching EdC until the 2015–2016 school year and others until 2016–2017 (see Table A1 in the Online appendix).

Thanks to these policy shifts, the Spanish case provides an ideal scenario to isolate the causal effects of standalone CE subjects. Our expectation, based on the aims explicitly defined in the law that introduced CE in Spain and the previous literature discussed above, is that being exposed to that subject should have a long-lasting positive effect on attitudinal outcomes related to political engagement, institutional support and civic values. That is, significant differences in these attitudes should be observable between cohorts that had to take CE courses and those that did not. The benefit of focussing on this single case is precisely that we can narrow the specific outcomes that might be affected by CE to those that policymakers intended to influence by implementing this policy (see below).

Identification strategy

The identification of the attitudinal and behavioural effects of CE poses multiple challenges. First, there are a number of individual factors (e.g. SES, motivation, intelligence) that predict educational attainment, the scope of schooling effects (i.e. how beneficial schooling is for a particular individual) and civic outcomes. Some of these confounders are particularly difficult to measure and, if unmeasured, they are likely to bias any estimate of the effects of CE. Second, analysing the effects of CE by comparing its effects across countries is subject to similar limitations related to differences between countries and school systems that cannot be controlled away effectively. An alternative is to capitalise on changes in education policies that generate a quasi-experimental scenario that can be exploited to identify the effects of CE.

In Spain, students are assigned to a school grade based on the calendar year when they are born. Combined with the changes in CE polices described above, this generates variation in exposure to CE across birth cohorts. For example, in most regions, those born in December 1992 did not take any CE courses, while those born in January 1993 took one CE course (in secondary school). Crucially, being born in December 1992 or January 1993 is likely to occur as if random. That is, these two groups will be similar on most accounts, except for the fact that the latter took a standalone CE course while the former did not. This is the logic underlying the method that we implement in this article: the regression discontinuity design (RDD). Through the RDD we estimate the effects of CE by comparing the attitudes of those barely above and below a known cut-off or threshold: the birthdate corresponding to the school year when CE was introduced in the school curriculum in each region.[3] The key cut-off in our RDD is defined by the grade and year when CE was first implemented in each region. For example, according to the data summarised in Table A1 in the Online appendix, Catalonia first introduced CE in secondary education in the 2007–2008 school year as a third-grade subject. This means that the cohort born in 1993 was the first one to study CE in Catalonia. We use this cut-off to operationalise our running variable x for each individual i, which, based on the birthdate of each respondent, determines whether or not they studied CE and how far from the threshold (in days) they are. Specifically, the running variable x for individual i is computed as follows:

$$x_i = birth_i - first_{ir} \tag{1}$$

where $birth_i$ is respondent's i birthdate and $first_{ir}$ is the date that corresponds to the birthdate of the first cohort that studied CE in individual's i region r. Since in Spain students are assigned to a school grade based on the calendar year when they are born, 1st January marks the threshold to be assigned to one grade or another. Therefore, $first_r$ always takes the value of 1st January of the birth year that corresponds to the first cohort that studied CE in a given region. Take again as an example the case of Catalonia. To compute the running variable, we calculate the difference in days between the birthdate of each Catalan respondent in our sample and January 1, 1993 (the birth year corresponding to the first cohort that studied CE in this region). Figure 1 summarises the educational stages at which individuals born in different years studied EdC in each region. The first black dot in each row provides us with the date of $first_r$ that we subtract from the birthdate of respondents in each region in order to generate our running variable.[4]

The resulting running variable x takes positive values for those who studied CE and negative values for those who did not. The value of 0

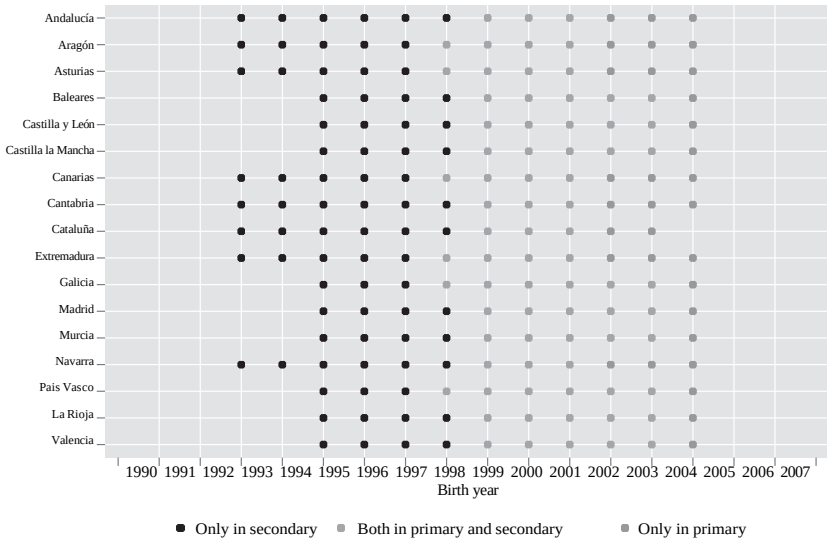


Figure 1. Educational stages at which individuals studied CE by birthdate and region.

Note: Birth years with no markers indicate that individuals born on those years did not follow any CE course [note colour on line only].

is assigned to the individuals born on 1st January, who studied CE during the first year when that subject was implemented in their region. Since our sample does not include individuals born after 2002, all those respondents at the right of the cut-off (x_i values equal or higher than 0) studied CE (i.e. there are no respondents at the right of the cut-off who did not study CE, because those born in 2004 were the last cohort exposed to this subject). Specifically, 432 respondents in our sample took at least one EdC course. Figure B1 in the Online appendix summarises the distribution of the running variable.

Treatment status D_i (having studied CE or not) for each individual is, therefore, a deterministic and discontinuous function of the running variable x_i.[5] Hence, we use a sharp RD specification and we adopt a continuity based RD framework (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019). This implies that our estimates are based on analysing whether or not there is a discontinuity (jump) in the outcome variables at the threshold of the running variable ($x = 0$). Specifically, all our results are based on a local polynomial regression discontinuity estimation with bias corrected confidence intervals (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019).[6] Hence, we estimate the regression functions on each side of the threshold using only observations close to the threshold and a low-order (linear) polynomial approximation, since this has been shown to be less sensitive to overfitting problems (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019). In other words, our estimation does not include all those

respondents above and below the threshold. It is based on a local linear estimation around a pre-selected optimal bandwidth on each side of the threshold, which 'delivers a good trade-off between simplicity, precision and stability in RD settings' (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019: 38).

A key decision is, therefore, how to select the bandwidth that determines which units below and above the threshold ($x = 0$) are included in the estimation of the regression functions. We follow Cattaneo *et al.* (2019) and rely on the data-driven mean square error (MSE) optimal bandwidth selector (for a common bandwidth on each side of the threshold).

All our RD estimates account for the panel structure of our data (see below) through the use of standard errors clustered at the respondent level. Moreover, in the RD estimations of the effects of CE we include as additional covariates the region where the respondent lives and an indicator variable capturing whether they studied CE in primary school.[7] While Table B2 in the Online appendix reveals that there are no regional imbalances at the threshold, there might be some differences in how CE was implemented in each region. These covariates account for these potential differences.

Data and variables

Our analyses draw on data from twelve waves of the 'Spanish Political Attitudes Panel Dataset' (POLAT), an online panel survey fielded in Spain between 2010 and 2020 through the commercial firm Netquest. The survey sample is restricted to Spanish citizens born between 1951 and 2002 who have internet access. Our sample includes 20,963 observations from 4,628 different respondents.[8] Unlike most surveys, the POLAT panel records the exact birthdate of all respondents, which is a key requirement of our identification strategy. Moreover, the POLAT survey includes numerous questions about respondents' political attitudes that tap into CE's multiple goals and outcomes.

In this respect, the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) from the IEA considers seven processes and 12 topics on which CE can have an impact (Ainley et al. 2013; Schulz et al. 2010). Table 1 depicts the match between the goals of the Spanish CE subject, structured according to the ICCS processes and topics distinction, and the outcome variables analysed in this article. Through the POLAT panel we cover six out of the seven process-related goals and eight of the 12 topic-related aims. The selected variables tap into the most important aims of CE in Spain according to the ICCS 2009 report, and hence should capture the effects of the subject, if there are any. Note that we do not address behavioural outcomes, because these are contingent on

Table 1. Dependent variables and correspondence with CE official aims.

IEA/ICCS REPORT: CE AIMS	POLAT panel survey indicator	Measurement and operationalisation
Processes		
Knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship; which includes knowing basic facts, understanding key concepts, values and attitudes	• Political knowledge	• 0-1 political knowledge index based on the proportion of correctly answered knowledge questions asked in each panel wave (higher values indicate higher knowledge)
	• Sense of duty to vote	• 0=Voting is a choice, 3=Voting is a duty, very strongly
Communicating through, which considers discussion and debate; projects and written work.	• Political discussion	• Additive scale (0-6) resulting from adding the frequency of political discussion (0=never, 1= sometimes, 2=often) with your best friend, family and co-workers
Creating opportunities for students' involvement in decision making in school & community-based activities	• Not available	
Analysing and observing change process in both the school & the community	• Satisfaction with democracy	• How satisfied are you with the way democracy works? 0= completely unsatisfied ,10= completely satisfied
Reflecting on and analysing participation and engagement opportunities	• Sense of duty to vote	• See above
Developing a sense of national identity and allegiance	• National identity	• 0= does not feel attached to the nation at all, 10=feels attached to the nation, very much.
	• Political trust	• Additive scale (0-10) of trust in parliament, government, parties and politicians
	• Satisfaction with democracy	• See above
Developing positive attitudes towards participation & engagement in civic & civil society.	• Political interest	• 0=not interested at all, 3=very much interested
	• Political efficacy	• 0-10 index resulting from adding two questions: (i) I (don't=0) understand (very well = 10) what's going on in politics; (ii) I (never = 0) (always = 10) have opinions about political issues.
	• Satisfaction with Democracy	• See above
Topics		
Human rights	• Attitudes towards homosexuality	• Child adoption by homosexual couples should be 0=forbidden, 10=allowed
	• Attitude towards freedom	• 0=freedom should be prioritised over order, 10= order should be prioritised over freedom

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Legal system and courts	• Political knowledge • Attitude towards freedom • Satisfaction with Democracy	• See above • See above • See Above
Understanding different cultural and ethnic groups	• Attitudes towards immigrants	• Immigrants having the same culture than us is 0 = not important at all, 10 = very important
Parliament and government systems	• Political knowledge • Political trust	• See above
Voting and elections	• Duty to vote	• See above
The economy and economics	• Political knowledge	• See above
Voluntary groups	• Not available	
Resolving conflict	• Political discussion	• See above
Communication studies (e.g. the media)	• Not available	
The global community and international organisations	• Political knowledge	• See above
Regional institutions and organisations	• Not available	
The environment	• Not available	

many other factors such as resources, mobilisation or context (Verba *et al.* 1995).

These dependent variables are grouped into three categories: subjective political engagement (political efficacy, political interest, political discussion, political knowledge); institutional support (sense of duty to vote, political trust, satisfaction with democracy); and values (Spanish nationalism, attitudes towards freedom, attitudes towards gays, and attitudes towards migrants). Note that some questions (political discussion, attitudes towards freedom, or satisfaction with democracy) have only been asked in a limited number of waves of the panel survey, which restricts the number of observations available when analysing these variables.[9]

Results

Before analysing the effects of CE we conduct a key test to validate our identification strategy: whether, around the threshold, treated and untreated units are similar on characteristics that should not be affected by CE (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019). For this purpose, we test whether there is any discontinuity in 34 outcomes: a set of predetermined covariates (respondents' gender and age, whether the respondent attended public or private school, and multiple parents' characteristics and behaviours), and placebo outcomes (size of municipality where the respondent lives, their SES, income, level of education, religiosity, ideology, and identification with Spain's main parties). The results (Online appendix Table B1) reveal that all RD estimates are small and not statistically significant (average of p-values = 0.56). Additional tests also indicate that there are no noticeable discontinuities in respondents' region of residence (Online appendix Table B2). This indicates that, as expected, individuals around the threshold are similar.

Tables 2–4 and Figures 2–4 summarise the results of the RD models that test the effects of CE on each of the 11 outcome variables.[10] We report the conventional RD estimator and p-value along with the robust bias-corrected p-value. The tables also report the size of the selected bandwidths (in days), as well as the number of observations that fall within that bandwidth.

Table 2 summarises the effects of EdC on political engagement. In the case of political interest, the RD estimate is substantively small and clearly not distinguishable from 0. In the cases of political efficacy, political discussion and political knowledge, Figure 2 reveals that, at the threshold, there appears to be a positive impact of EdC. For political discussion, the effect is substantively strong: the positive increase caused by EdC (1.41) is equivalent to a change of 0.93 units in the standard deviation of this variable. However, the reduced number of observations

Table 2. Subjective political engagement variables.

	Political efficacy	Political interest	Political discussion	Political knowledge
RD estimate	0.65	0.15	1.41	0.09
	(0.39)	(0.16)	(0.80)	(0.05)
p-value (conventional)	0.09	0.34	0.08	0.07
p-value (robust bias-corrected)	0.10	0.39	0.11	0.08
Bandwidth (days)	989.33	867.84	408.36	861.71
Effective number of observations	1361	1213	47	1203

Note: Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the respondent level in parentheses.
Covariate-adjusted estimates.

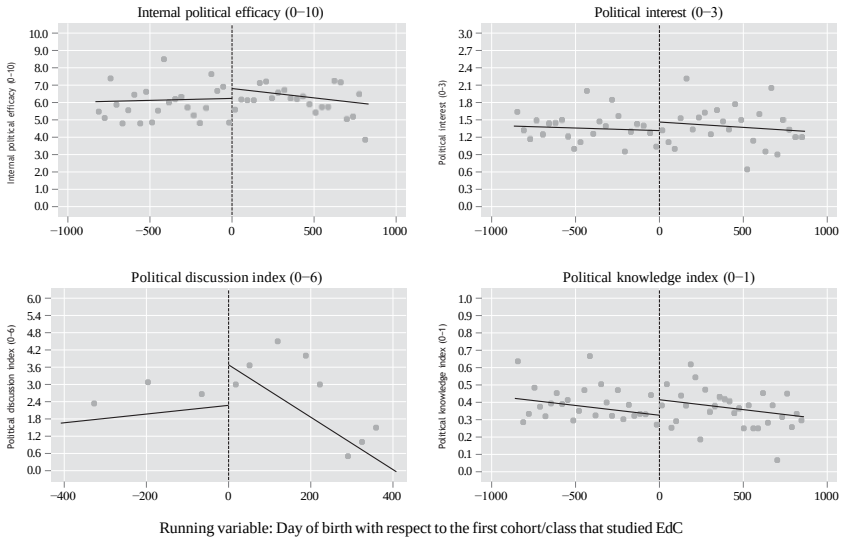


Figure 2. Subjective political engagement variables.

Table 3. Institutional support variables.

	Duty to vote	Political trust	Satisfaction with democracy
RD estimate	−0.07	−1.37	−1.56
	(0.26)	(0.41)	(0.53)
p-value (conventional)	0.80	0.00	0.00
p-value (robust bias-corrected)	0.85	0.00	0.00
Bandwidth (days)	839.67	673.79	826.41
Effective number of observations	998	748	625

Note: Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the respondent level in parentheses.
Covariate-adjusted estimates.

available for this variable, which is only included in one wave of the POLAT dataset, makes this estimate quite imprecise and not distinguishable from zero. In the case of political interest, we observe a weaker positive effect (0.65), equivalent to an increase of 0.47 units in

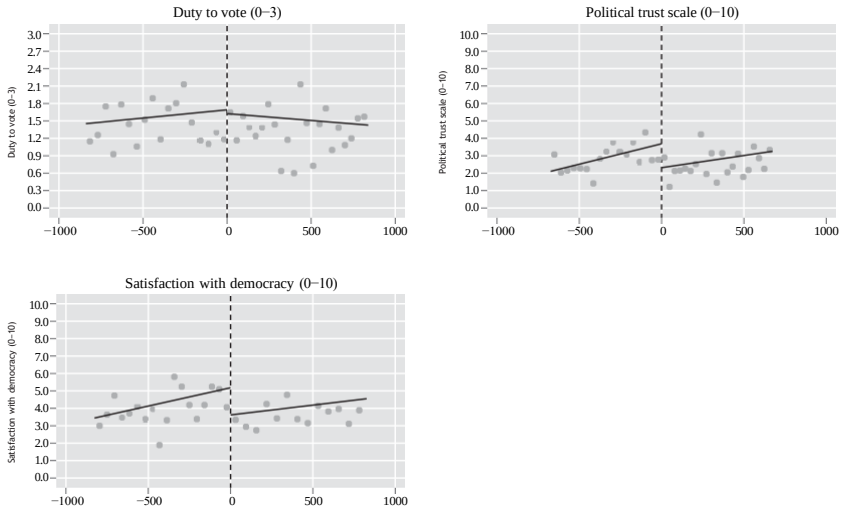


Figure 3. Institutional support variables.

Table 4. Values.

	Spanish nationalism	Freedom vs order	Gay adoption	Immigrants should assimilate
RD estimate	−2.04	−2.15	0.36	−0.48
	(0.59)	(0.66)	(0.56)	(0.39)
p-value (conventional)	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.21
p-value (robust bias-corrected)	0.00	0.00	0.37	0.34
Bandwidth (days)	740.09	677.34	621.89	824.95
Effective number of observations	996	521	744	1142

Note: Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the respondent level in parentheses.
Covariate-adjusted estimates.

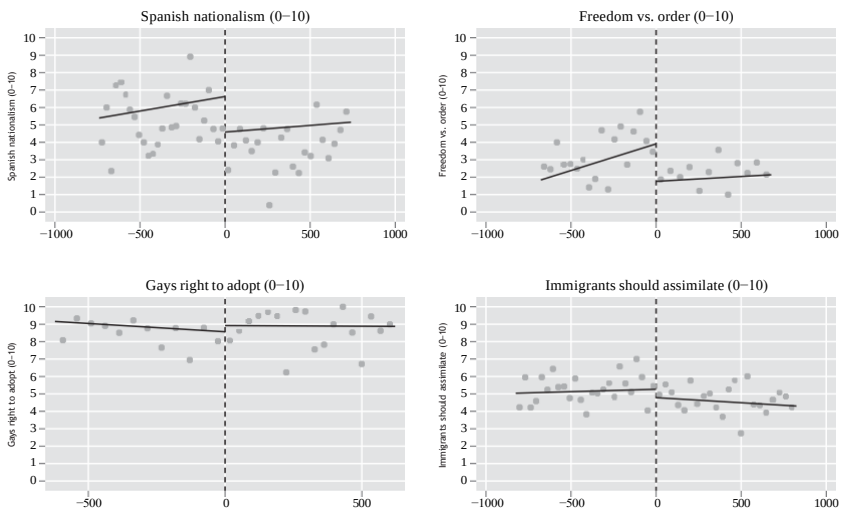


Figure 4. Values.

the standard deviation of this variable. However, this estimate is also quite imprecise, since both types of p-values are very close or even higher than 0.10. In the case of political knowledge, the estimate of the positive effect of EdC is slightly more precise, with both conventional and robust bias-corrected p-values consistently below 0.10 (but above the 0.05 threshold). The positive increase of 0.09 units in the political knowledge index caused by EdC is of moderate magnitude, since it only amounts to 0.27 units in the standard deviation of this variable. Overall, it seems that EdC has a slight positive effect on some variables related to political engagement, although in most cases our inferences are limited due to the high uncertainty surrounding these estimates of the effects of CE.

When it comes to institutional support, Table 3 reveals that following an EdC course erodes this type of support, but, at the same time, it has no significant effect on the sense of the duty to vote. The RD estimate indicates that taking a CE course does not make citizens more or less likely to think that voting in elections is either a duty or a choice. However, those who took an EdC course are clearly less trustful of representative institutions (such as the parliament or political parties), as well as less satisfied with how democracy works in Spain. For these two estimates, the identified negative effects of EdC are statistically significant at conventional levels, both when considering conventional and robust bias-corrected p-values. Figure 3 illustrates the substantial negative jump in political trust and satisfaction with democracy observable at the threshold. The negative RD estimate for political trust is equivalent to a change of −0.68 standard deviations in this variable, while the negative effect on satisfaction with democracy caused by studying EdC corresponds to a reduction of 0.56 standard deviations in this variable. These results indicate that EdC clearly makes citizens more critical by reducing their trust in political institutions and their satisfaction with the way democracy works in Spain.

Table 4 and Figure 4 summarise our findings about the effects of CE on citizens' values. The results indicate that, at the threshold, those who took a compulsory EdC course became less attached to the Spanish nation and more likely to think that freedom should be prioritised over order. For these two outcome variables the RD estimates are statistically significant both when considering the conventional and the robust bias-corrected p-values. Moreover, in both cases the magnitude of the effects of EdC are substantial. In the case of Spanish nationalism, the estimated effect of EdC equals −2.64 in a 0-10 scale, which is equivalent to a change of −0.66 standard deviations in this variable. Similarly, when it comes to respondents' preferences about the freedom vs. order trade-off, which is also measured from 0 to 10 with 0 indicating a

strong preference for freedom, the RD estimate equals −2.47. This estimate is equivalent to a change of −0.73 standard deviations in this variable.

EdC, therefore, has a strong negative effect on individuals' attachment to the Spanish nation and clearly increases the likelihood of prioritising freedom over order. However, EdC does not appear to affect other values such as individuals' attitudes towards gays and immigrants. The RD estimate indicates that those who studied EdC are slightly more likely to think that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children. However, this RD estimate is of reduced magnitude and not statistically significant. Similarly, the RD estimate about the effects of EdC on the belief that immigrants should adapt to the culture of the county of destination is of reduced magnitude and not statistically significant neither when using a conventional nor a robust bias-corrected p-value.

Regional heterogeneity and robustness checks

We have conducted additional analyses to assess the robustness of our findings. First, as we point out above, regions had some leeway on the implementation of the new CE subject. This led to differences on the exact grade in which EdC was taught in primary and secondary education, as well as to differences in the school year when the new subject was implemented. Generally, the conservative opposition party, the PP, attempted to obstruct the implementation of the new subject in the regions it was governing by, for example, delaying for one year its starting date (see Online appendix A). This might generate differences in the effects of EdC across regions. In order to explore these potential differences, we have re-estimated all our models distinguishing between *early adopting* regions, mostly ruled by left-wing parties and where EdC was first taught in the 2007–2008 school year, and *late adopting* ones, generally ruled by conservative parties and where EdC was first taught in 2008–2009. The results, summarised in Figure B2 in the Online appendix, do not reveal any relevant differences in the effects of EdC between these two groups of regions.

Second, there are multiple types of RD estimates that can be computed (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019). In Figure B3 in the Online appendix we summarise the results of all of our RD specifications reporting three types of estimates for each of them: conventional, bias-corrected, and robust bias-corrected. All these different estimates lead us to the same conclusions.

Third, a key falsification test of the RDD is testing for treatment effects on the outcome variables at alternative (placebo) cut-offs of the

running variable, where such an effect should not exist (Cattaneo *et al.* 2019). We follow Imbens and Lemieux (2008) who recommend testing for discontinuities at the empirical median of the control and treatment groups, since this increases the statistical power of these robustness checks. Using only observations on either side of the cut-off, we test for discontinuities at values $x = -6136$ and $x = 852$. Figures B4–B6 in the online appendix summarise the results of these placebo tests. If we focus on those outcome variables for which we identified an effect of EdC (political efficacy, knowledge, trust, satisfaction with democracy, Spanish nationalism, freedom vs. order), none of the RD point estimates of the placebo cut-offs equals or is larger than the original estimate obtained with the true cut-off (x = 0), and none of these estimates is statistically significant either at the five or ten percent levels.

Discussion

Scholars do not agree on the effects of CE standalone subjects. As a result, some policymakers keep on deploying these subjects as a way to foster a harmonious co-existence, along with a critical, engaged, tolerant, informed and responsible citizenry. At the same time, other nations are reverting to integrated approaches as a more effective path to achieve these goals. In order to shed some light on this matter, this article exploits a quasi-experiment generated by the implementation of a new CE stand-alone subject in Spain.

Following previous studies on CE and the ICCS reports, we have selected a series of outcome variables that capture some of the aims of the Spanish CE subject. We have grouped these variables in three categories: political engagement, institutional support and political values. As for the first category, it seems that the Spanish CE subject had a slight positive effect on some variables related to political engagement. We identify a small increase in individuals' political efficacy and political knowledge as a result of this CE subject, but these inferences are limited by the high uncertainty surrounding our estimates of these effects. In contrast, most of the institutional support variables seem to be clearly affected by CE. Those exposed to this subject are significantly less trustful and less satisfied with the way democracy works. All in all, this paints a critical portrait of Spanish CE students, who seem alienated from the political system, and particularly from representative institutions. Finally, CE had an effect on two of the four values analysed. For a start, individuals have about the same attitudes towards minorities (migrants and gay couples), no matter whether they took a standalone CE course or not. Yet those exposed to the new CE subject turn out to be more 'libertarian' and also less attached to the Spanish nation.

Some of these results are at odds with Whiteley's (2014) study of CE in the UK, since we do not find an effect on political interest. We do, however, identify some effects on political values: individuals become more 'civic' in the sense that they are fonder of freedom and unwilling to trade it for more order. When it comes to political interest, though, our findings are in line with those of the most recent study by Prior (2018), who did not identify any effects of CE on political interest in the UK. Moreover, conversely to what Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz *et al.* (2017) found, the Spanish CE subject not only did not foster nationalism, but undermined it. Indeed, youngsters having taken the course feel less attached to their nation than the rest.[11]

These results clearly clash with some of the goals of CE that practitioners considered a priority: citizens may have become more critical as a result of the subject, but in a seemingly unproductive way, as they seem alienated from the political process and not particularly interested in politics. The only remarkable outcome in this respect is the increase in their political knowledge and in their subjective feeling that they are able to understand what is going on in politics. However, our evidence on the positive effects on these particular variables is less conclusive. Moreover, the course failed to foster national allegiance and any sort of political support. Given the number of non-significant results and findings that go against some of the expected goals of the policy, we can claim that the policy has, to some extent, backfired, at least in the long run.

From a more optimistic standpoint, though, one could think that this CE subject led to the emergence of a generation of *critical citizens* (in the optimistic sense that Norris (1999) defined these citizens). One of the aims of CE is to enhance individuals' capacity to independently exercise critical political judgement. Hence, the reduction in political trust or satisfaction with democracy could be a reflection of this enhanced capacity. This interpretation is rendered more credible if we take into consideration the Spanish context during this particular period, which was characterised by low confidence in political institutions due to, among others, salient corruption scandals (Ares and Hernández 2017), and a profound and long-lasting economic crisis. The negative impact of CE on these political support variables might be, therefore, taken as an indication that the new CE subject worked. In this rather negative political context, it is fair to assume that an enhancement of one's capacity to process and understand political information and exercise political judgement could lead to a reduction in institutional support. However, a more robust effect of CE on variables related to political engagement would make us more confident about this rather optimistic conclusion.

In any case, more data is required to determine whether the quantity of courses taken (one, two or three in the Spanish case) has a robust impact on the dependent variables considered in this research, and whether such effect varies if individuals are exposed to civic contents early (primary education) or later (secondary education). Once data on the attitudes of the youngest generations, who only studied CE in primary school, becomes widely available it will be possible to analyse these differences in greater detail.

Future research should also tackle an intrinsic limitation of our study: the local nature of our results. We have estimated the effects of CE among a particular subset of the Spanish population, who were born in the period comprised by the bandwidths of our RD estimations. These effects might be different in other cohorts socialised in a different period. Moreover, the implementation of the CE subject in 2007 in Spain was characterised by a high politicisation around the subject and a particular context, marked by the Great Recession and a succession of salient corruption scandals. It is possible that the same civic education contents implemented in a different (more positive) context might yield different results. This might be especially so when it comes to the effects of CE on attitudes related to institutional support. If CE enhances individuals' capacity to exercise critical political judgments, its impact on attitudes such as trust in political institutions might depend on the actual performance of these institutions. In countries with good/bad institutional performance the effects of CE on these variables might be positive/negative. In fact, if CE standalone subjects amplify the effects of the political context, the Spanish case may serve as a cautionary tale for practitioners and politicians, who might want to avoid implementing a CE subject when the political system is underperforming.

Further research should also consider whether CE might have heterogeneous effects depending on individuals' upbringing and primary socialisation. Recent studies conducted in other contexts indicate that CE has a stronger effect among young people less exposed to political information at home (Campbell and Niemi 2016; Neundorf *et al.* 2016). This is a relevant and fruitful avenue for further research since these heterogeneous effects might imply that CE can reduce political inequalities.

It would also be advisable to explore behavioural outcomes to see if any effects go in the same direction as the attitudinal effects identified in this article. Yet, all the signs indicate that standalone CE subjects, at least the one deployed in Spain between 2007 and 2013, have achieved their goal of fostering some critical attitudes among citizens. However, the subject might have also led to the development of some passivity

among citizens, turning them into dissatisfied, disaffected and suspicious spectators of the political process.

Notes

1. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has assessed the different approaches to CE. In its last study, 'International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009' it distinguishes between a) CE taught as a separate subject, b) CE taught as a subject related to human and social sciences, c) as a competence or content integrated in all subjects taught at school, d) as an extra-curricular activity, e) as an outcome of school experience as a whole, and f) it is not part of the school curriculum.
2. The exception to this pattern was the region of Castilla la Mancha. Although governed by PSOE, in this region EdC was first taught during the 2008–2009 school year.
3. This identification strategy has been used to assess the effects of education reforms on voting (Lindgren *et al.* 2019), as well as the effects of CE policies on political interest (Prior 2018).
4. To calculate the running variable, respondents are assigned to the region where they currently live. A limitation of this operationalization is that respondents might not be currently living in the same region where they attended school. However, we consider this to be unlikely given the low rates of interregional mobility in Spain (Maza and Villaverde 2004).
5. That is, $D_i = 1$ if $x_i \geq 0$ and $D_i = 0$ if $x_i < 0$.
6. The estimation is based on the *rdrobust* Stata package developed by Cattaneo *et al.* (2019).
7. In Spain CE was implemented in both primary and secondary schools. However, our sample only includes individuals born before 2003. As a consequence, our sample only includes 74 respondents who studied EdC in primary school (and 73 of those also studied EdC in secondary school).
8. Further details about the survey and its sampling procedures can be found in Online appendix B.
9. Further details on the wording of survey questions and the distribution of all the variables can be found in Online appendix C.
10. In all figures solid lines are first order (linear) polynomials fitted separately on the common bandwidths at each side of the threshold. Dots represent bin averages of the outcome variable. The number and size of bins are selected through the mimicking variance evenly-spaced method. Note that the polynomials are fitted using the original observations (raw data), not the binned ones.
11. Tony Venables for Bundeszenttrale für politische Bildung (12/12/2018) states: 'From reading the academic literature about European citizenship education […], the way citizenship education is articulated appears less nationalistic and gives more scope to universal values and critical thinking'. According to this approach, what we find in Spain is actually consistent with a general European trend in CE.

Acknowledgments

We thank Juan Pérez-Rajó for his valuable help in collecting information about the implementation of Citizenship Education in Spain. We are also grateful to Macarena Ares, the editors and anonymous reviewers of *West European Politics*, and participants at the 2019 ECPR General Conference for helpful comments and suggestions.

References

Ainley, J., W. Schulz, and T. Friedman (2013). *ICCS 2009 Encyclopedia: Approaches to Civic and Citizenship Education around the World*.

Ares, M., and E. Hernández (2017). 'The Corrosive Effect of Corruption on Trust in Politicians: Evidence from a Natural Experiment', *Research & Politics*, 4:2, 205316801771418.

Campbell, D. E. (2008). 'Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement among Adolescents', *Political Behavior*, 30:4, 437–54.

Campbell, D. E. (2012). 'Introduction', in D. E. Campbell, M. Levinson, and F. M. Hess (eds.), *Making Civics Count: Citizenship Education for a New Generation*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 1–13.

Campbell, D., and R. Niemi (2016). 'Testing Civics: State-Level Civic Education Requirements and Political Knowledge', *American Political Science Review*, 110:3, 495–511.

Cattaneo, M. D., N. Idrobo, and R. Titiunik (2019). *A Practical Introduction to Regression Discontinuity Designs: Foundations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dassonneville, R., E. Quintelier, M. Hooghe, and E. Claes (2012). 'The Relation between Civic Education and Political Attitudes and Behavior: A Two-Year Panel Study among Belgian Late Adolescents', *Applied Developmental Science*, 16:3, 140–50.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017). *Citizenship Education at School in Europe-2017. Eurydice Report.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Faulks, K. (2006). 'Education for Citizenship in England's Secondary Schools: A Critique of Current Principle and Practice', *Journal of Education Policy*, 21:1, 59–74.

Garcia-Albacete, G. M. (2013). 'Promoting Political Interest in Schools: The Role of Civic Education', in Abendschön, S. (ed.), *Growing into Politics. Contexts and Timing of Political Socialization*. Colchester: ECPR Press. 91–114.

Garcia Albacete, G. M. (2014). *Young People's Political Participation in Western Europe: Continuity or Generational Change?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Geboers, E., F. Geijsel, W. Admiraal, and G. ten Dam (2013). 'Review of the Effects of Citizenship Education', *Educational Research Review*, 9, 158–73.

Hayward, J., and L. Jerome (2010). 'Staffing, Status and Subject Knowledge: What Does the Construction of Citizenship as a New Curriculum Subject in England Tell us about the Nature of School Subjects?', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 36:2, 211–25.

Heater, D. (2004). *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Imbens, G. W., and T. Lemieux (2008). 'Regression Discontinuity Designs: A Guide to Practice', *Journal of Econometrics*, 142:2, 615–35.

Keating, A., T. Benton, and D. Kerr (2012). 'Evaluating the Impact of Citizenship Education in Schools: What Works and What Are We Measuring?', in Print, M., and Dirk L. (eds.), *Schools, Curriculum and Civic Education for Building Democratic Citizens*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 57–72.

Keating, A., D. Kerr, T. Benton, E. Mundy, and J. Lopes (2010). *Citizenship Education in England 2001-2010: Young People's Practices and Prospects for the Future: The Eighth and Final Report from the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* (CELS). Department for Education.

Kerr, D. (2000). 'Citizenship Education: An International Comparison', in D. Lawton, J. Cairns, and R. Gardner (eds.), *Education for Citizenship*. London: Continuum, 200–27.

Kerr, D., J. Lopes, J. Nelson, K. White, E. Cleaver, and T. Benton (2007). *'Vision versus Pragmatism: Citizenship in the Secondary School Curriculum in England'. Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study: Fifth Annual Report.* Nottingham: National Foundation for Educational Research–NFER.

Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, B., A. M. Zalewska, and D. Karakatsani (2017). 'Does Citizenship Education Matter? Young People's Citizenship Activity in Countries with Different Citizenship Education Experience', *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, 12:2, 171–88.

Langton, K. P., and M. K. Jennings (1968). 'Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum in the United States', *American Political Science Review*, 62:3, 852–67.

Lindgren, K.-O., S. Oskarsson, and M. Persson (2019). 'Enhancing Electoral Equality: Can Education Compensate for Family Background Differences in Voting Participation?', *American Political Science Review*, 113:1, 108–22.

Maza, A., and J. Villaverde (2004). 'Interregional Migration in Spain: A Semiparametric Analysis', *Review of Regional Studies*, 34, 156–71.

Maurissen, L. (2018). *Civic Engagement of Adolescents. A Quantitative Study of the Relation between Citizenship Education, Democratic Attitudes, and Political Participation*. PhD Thesis. KU Leuven.

Morgan, W., and M. Streb (2001). 'Building Citizenship: How Student Voice in Service-Learning Develops Civic Values', *Social Science Quarterly*, 82:1, 154–69.

Norris, P. (ed.) (1999). *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government, Oxford Scholarship Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nelsen, M. D. (2021). 'Teaching Citizenship: Race and the Behavioral Effects of American Civic Education', *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, 6:1, 157–86.

Niemi, R. G., and J. Junn (2005). *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Neundorf, A., R. G. Niemi, and K. Smets (2016). 'The Compensation Effect of Civic Education on Political Engagement: How Civics Classes Make up for Missing Parental Socialization', *Political Behavior*, 38:4, 921–49.

Pike, M. A. (2007). 'Values and Visibility: The Implementation and Assessment of Citizenship Education in Schools', *Educational Review*, 59:2, 215–29.

Prior, M. (2018). *Hooked: How Politics Captures People's Interest*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schulz, W., J. Ainley, J. Fraillon, D. Kerr, and B. Losito (2010). *ICCS 2009 International Report: Civic Knowledge, Attitudes and Engagement among Lower Secondary School Students in Thirty-Eight Countries*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Amsterdam.

Torney-Purta, J., and J. A. Amadeo (2013). 'The Contributions of International Large-Scale Studies in Civic Education and Engagement', in M. von Davier, *et al.* (eds.), *The Role of International Largescale Assessments: Perspectives from Technology, Economy, and Educational Research*. Dordrecht: Springer, 87–114.

Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, and H. E. Brady (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Whiteley, P. (2014). 'Does Citizenship Education Work? Evidence from a Decade of Citizenship Education in Secondary Schools in England', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 67:3, 513–35.