

Call for Papers Issue 2 | 2027

Political Education

Guest Editor
Michael Schemmann

Editors
Elke Gruber & Ekkehard Nuissl

The primary task of political education in Germany after World War II was to educate and re-educate people in democracy. It underwent increasing changes, which is one reason why there was repeated talk of a “crisis” in the field. The teaching of political structures, institutions, procedures, and principles in a democratic state gave way more and more to discourses on participation, awareness, solidarity, and equality. However, the core of political education—the focus on democracy—remained. “Political education” in Germany, but also in the “Western democracies,” is virtually synonymous with “democratic education.” Democracy must be learned, as Oskar Negt put it. And perhaps democracy and politics today need to be defined differently or more precisely—and learned differently.

In Germany and in many other countries, not only in Europe, a “democratic twilight” has been observed for about ten years (Selk 2023), a kind of erosion of this form of government and its values, such as freedom, participation, self-realization, and peace. In particular, groups and ideologies on the far right of the political spectrum have grown stronger; their goals and methods are changing political culture. There is talk of an erosion of the political center, but also of its depoliticization. Populism and extremism are serious challenges for political education. They become all the more significant as global crises—such as wars, environmental issues, and poverty—place increasing demands on people’s ability to make political decisions. Approaches to a “resilient democracy” through political programs and funding (Bundesministerium des Innern 2024; Widmaier 2024) highlight the urgency and scope of these changes. The following are key problem areas in contemporary political education.

Populism and Education

Populism is not a new phenomenon in the political landscape. For about twenty years now, it has been gaining strength in Europe as well; examples include Berlusconi in Italy, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, the National Front in France, and the AfD in Germany. “Populism” characterizes a political interaction and culture in which the “common people” are pitted against a “corrupt elite,” the “little man” against the establishment. Populism simplifies, stirs up emotions (fears, prejudices, etc.), personalizes, polarizes, and moralizes. Populism is directed against science (simplifying it), against intellectuals and intellectualism, and against institutions. The rise of populism is linked to rapid social change, increasing complexity, crises (e.g. migration, climate change), and growing social inequality. What connections between populism and the social and political situation have been newly researched and related to political education?

Erosion of the Political Center

Recent elections in Germany have shown a rise in support for the right wing of the political spectrum, while the so-called political center is becoming increasingly weaker in terms of numbers. Research on political parties and elections has identified a decline in party loyalty and a rise in political disengagement. The self-definition as a “people’s party” for all segments of the population is becoming increasingly obsolete. A variety of causes have been identified, such as the increase in social and regional mobility, the perception of unresolved crises (migration, poverty, climate), and a loss of trust in political parties and institutions. Recent studies suggest a qualitative shift, the loss of political engagement among the middle class, and a trend toward less political debate, less interest, and lower participation. The process of shaping political opinion and will from the “bottom up” within existing political structures (primarily parties and institutions) is facing increasing challenges, not least due to a lack of trust. The role of adult political education in this context—its activities, possibilities, and limitations—remains unclear. What approaches exist, and what has been the experience with them?

Political Education and Digital Spaces

Social and political discourse is increasingly taking place in digital spaces. Media technology has made it possible to shift direct communication to virtual spaces, thereby helping to mitigate, to some extent, growing communication gaps. Discussions about political events are increasingly taking place on social media, where not only information but also norms and values are exchanged and developed. This is becoming part of everyday reality for more and more people. The influence of digital communication on elections has undeniably grown, and its significance for shaping public opinion and values is increasingly recognized. For political education, opportunities for free discourse, reflection, and the resolution of conflicts are indispensable. With regard to digital spaces, there is a growing recognition of the danger of siloed discourses, echo chambers, and bubbles, which prevent precisely this kind of exchange. It is therefore necessary not only to discuss how political education takes place and can take place in these spaces, but also how digital structures should be designed from the perspectives of media education and media policy to enable and promote political discourse. What are the latest findings regarding political discussion in digital spaces and their appropriate organization? What role do digital and virtual worlds play in the current reality of political education?

Political Education and Work

The educational relevance of workplaces was already a key issue in Federal Germany’s fifteen-year “Humanization of the Working World” program (1974–1989), even though that initiative focused more on individual, general, and vocational education. However, worker participation and involvement were important elements. Workplaces and jobs also played a significant role in the discussion about learning environments. Today, it is undisputed that political education does not end at factory gates and office doors. This is also because social and communication skills are increasingly valued in the workplace. Key issues in political education today—sustainability, the environment, co-determination, justice, migration, and integration—are indispensable in the design and development of workplaces. Nevertheless, many questions remain unanswered. In many cases, opportunities for political education in professional contexts need to be identified and translated into suitable didactic concepts that can also be implemented in the workplace. Cooperation between companies and political education institutions also

needs to be further developed and examined. The debate on learning venues is not yet over, as the program of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung) for strengthening democracy in the workplace illustrates. What new insights are available regarding political education in the workplace and the cooperation between political education institutions and companies? To what extent is political education linked to the world of work, not merely as a learning venue but as an integrative component of a politically relevant living environment? What innovative approaches to outreach education and the development of effective learning venues have been developed and tested?

Narratives and “Conspiracy Theories”

An increasingly important area of political education lies in the field of political education, which must grapple with narratives and conspiracy theories. The traditionally relevant question of “patterns of interpretation” in the social and political context has now reached serious proportions. The debate surrounding narratives and emotions demonstrates that political education, which relies on analysis and rationality, is reaching its limits. Interests and conflicts are embedded in complex narratives that reflect and reinforce people’s lived experiences and realities. An analysis of conspiracy theories reveals that the issue is not merely one of false facts that can be refuted, but rather of fears, uncertainties, suspicions, and ambiguities linked to a loss of trust and resistance. Political education is currently seeking entry points to engage in processes of critical reflection at all. The question is: What knowledge exists regarding the emergence of conspiracy theories and how to address them in political education processes? What new approaches to the pedagogy of political education deal with emotions, narratives, and conspiracy theories?

Finance, Economy & Politics

Economic and financial issues are playing an increasingly significant role in public debate. Whether the focus is on the political or resource-driven (e.g. oil, mineral resources) causes of wars (e.g. Ukraine, Iran) or on global confidence in the stability of a reserve currency (the dollar since Bretton Woods) – the dominance of economics and finance in shaping and steering interests is becoming increasingly transparent. In contrast, politics appears less and less as a means of structuring society and more as an instrument of implementation. The most widely studied subject in Germany and other European countries is now “economics,” with its various specializations in management, markets, and finance. Is this development reflected in adult education programs, and to what extent is it linked to political education? What forms of democracy education have emerged in the age of economism?

In addition, we welcome submissions that explore international or cross-national perspectives on the topic of political education that could not be addressed here. Submissions may be in German or English and may employ quantitative and/or qualitative methods or take a theoretical and conceptual approach.

You may send an abstract of your proposed article (max. 500 words) by **1 September 2026** to the editorial office: redaktion-zfw@die-bonn.de. The abstract should include the names of authors and affiliations, working title, topic(s) that will be addressed, method(s), and countr(ies) of focus.

Please submit your final **manuscript** at: www.springer.com/journal/40955

Deadline for submissions: 30 November 2026

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All manuscripts will undergo a double-blind peer review procedure.

The editorial office accepts manuscripts only for first and single publication (i.e., manuscripts that have not been previously published and are not being considered elsewhere for publication).

Manuscript length: max. 50,000 characters (incl. spaces and reference list).

Further information on the journal and the submission of manuscripts is available on the website <https://www.springer.com/journal/40955/>

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