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# Politicizing Teacher Education<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Teaching is, and always has been, a political profession. Teachers of all subjects fulfill an important role for every political system: they transmit the skills and knowledge a society considers important, they are a part of and legitimize power structures, and they shape their students' perception of what a good society and good citizenship look like.*

*The findings of a survey among pre-service teachers at Heidelberg University, presented in this paper, show that student teachers of all subjects feel a responsibility to educate their students to participate as active citizens in a democracy and that they are motivated by a willingness to improve society through teaching. The data indicates that a lack of reflection and knowledge in key areas related to this aim (teachers' neutrality, laws regarding political activities of teachers, connections between political and educational systems) might hinder them from doing so. This, it will be argued, is a result of a depoliticized teacher education.*

*A politicized teacher education should, through interdisciplinary approaches to pedagogy informed by political theory and political science, enable student teachers to critically reflect on the role of schools and teachers for and in a democracy. It should foster an understanding of both politics in general and the politics of teaching in particular which is currently missing from teaching education programmes. In the light of growing inequality and ongoing structural discrimination in and the depoliticization of educational governance worldwide, future teachers need to be prepared to become agents of change – political subjects – themselves, accepting their professional mandate as a political mandate. A politicized teacher education thus also includes improving student participation in teacher education.*

**Keywords:** *Depoliticization, Teacher Education, Neutrality, Teacher Beliefs*

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# 1 Introduction

Teaching is a political profession in a double sense: it is not only politically regulated, but also politically influential. Apart from the fact that education is subject to political governance and regulation, democracy and education are inextricably linked on a deeper level: “public education [...] first produces the cultural and moral capacities” (Honneth 2015, 18) necessary for every democratic political system. This influence of education and teaching becomes especially visible when teachers are supposed to aid in “preventing/countering violent extremism” (Davies and Limbada 2019, 1) or to “counter rising levels of democratic apathy” (Weinberg and Flinders 2018, 573). In response to a perceived crisis of the political system many authors even argue that “education [...] is the only tool which can stop these processes” (Babicka-Wirkus 2019, 240). At the same time the political influence of teaching has stoked fears that teachers “indoctrinate children with a far-left ideology in our schools” (Trump 2019). Over the last years these fears have been exploited mainly by right-wing populist parties and movements worldwide, who posit teacher neutrality as the only solution.<sup>2</sup>

Where something is political, it can be depoliticized. This paper will thus offer one possible answer to the question “How can depoliticization be used by scholars working in different academic fields?” (Fawcett et al. 2017b, 14) by focusing on teaching and teacher education, one of the fields “where public trust and confidence in politics are vital” (Fawcett et al. 2017a, 293). By paying “more attention to possible links between the macrocosm of political, economic and social variables and the microcosm of the classroom” (Kagan, Pinson, and Schler 2019, 3) through the innovative lens of depoliticization, section 2.1 aims “to reveal how new modes of governance conceal or make implicit the contingency of socio-economic arrangements” (Fawcett et al. 2017a, 285) by focusing on educational governance. 2.2 will focus on discursive depoliticization of the practice of teaching through calls for teacher neutrality. Drawing on results of a survey among student teachers, teacher beliefs on neutrality and teacher disclosure will be analyzed in the context of these discursive processes, before measures to counter the previously analyzed developments through a re-politicization of teacher education will be discussed. Interventions appear especially promising there, because teacher education is where the professional socialization of future teachers takes place. Here they “learn, and learn to take on as their own, the beliefs and values of the culture of the profession to which they aspire” (Cech and Sherick 2015, 207).

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<sup>2</sup> Teacher education is also under attack from right-wing commentators (especially in the US) who warn about a “cultural genocide” (Schalin 2019, 43) through, for example, the inclusion of content from critical whiteness studies in teacher education curricula.

## **2 The Depoliticization of Teaching and Teacher Education**

### **2.1 1<sup>st</sup> Dimension: Educational Governance**

The German constitution states that “the entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state” (Art. 7 GG). Similar provisions can be found in most European states. Regulations concern access to the teaching profession, teacher education, the employment status of teachers (European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015) and of course teaching itself. Teaching in schools does not usually fall under constitutional guarantees of academic freedom (Löwer 2007, 751–52), but is work on behalf of the state. The educational system is thus subject to educational policy and regulation:

“Schooling and politics are inseparable. Schools are shaped by the wider economic, political and social context which is reflected in education policy and legislation that delineates what education is and constrains what schooling can be. [...] it is fundamentally political even if the politics of education are often opaque or taken as the normal state of affairs.” (Youdell 2011, 7)<sup>3</sup>

These “politics of education” are no exception to the broader context of “politics of depoliticization” (Burnham 2001). Depoliticization, however, is “something of a misnomer” because “in reality the politics remains but the arena or process through which decisions are taken is altered” (Flinders and Buller 2006, 296). For educational policy we can observe processes of “scientisation” (Wood and Flinders 2014, 163) which cast questions of educational policy as questions that need to be decided by experts instead of politicians. This “objective ‘expert’ knowledge embodied in policies around curriculum, pedagogy and assessment have marginalised the voices, experiences and subjective judgments of teachers and teacher educators” (Clarke and Phelan 2017, 28). At the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a broad consensus formed between policymakers and researchers that “children deserve the best educational programs, based on the most rigorous evidence we can provide” (Slavin 2002, 15). This focus on evidence-based education has been spurred by the impact of the OECD’s<sup>4</sup> PISA studies and has helped the rise of educational psychology as the leading discipline in educational research (Bellmann 2015). Standardization has become an important aspect and a widely favored solution for measuring and regulating outcomes on a national and international level (Elken 2017, 129), establishing “a ‘measurable’ Europe of knowledge, governed by data, indicators and benchmarks” (Pasiás and

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3 The same is true for teacher education. Policies on schooling will directly or indirectly influence how teachers are prepared for schooling and “politics [...] plays a decisive role in how international structures of teacher education have taken shape” (Craig 2016, 69).

4 The OECD’s role in the depoliticization of educational policy could perhaps be fruitfully analyzed through the lens of “knowledge networks” (cf. Stone 2017).

Roussakis 2012, 128). This has shaped the way in which pedagogical research is carried out and has strengthened (quantitative) empirical research approaches. Pedagogy and educational policy have formed a symbiotic relationship through hypertechnocratic forms of a politicization of science (Bellmann 2015, 47). These developments also affect teacher education, which is now tasked with providing “well-informed professionals capable of improving student outcomes by understanding, selecting, and engaging in evidence-based practice “ (Scheeler, Budin, and Markelz 2016, 171) – and which is evaluated in terms of effectiveness itself (Goldhaber 2019).

Of course the argument could be made that processes of depoliticization are not necessarily problematic but are inherent (and perhaps even necessary) to modern democracies (Selk 2012, 195). Why then is the depoliticization of teaching and teacher education a problem? The scientization of teaching and teacher education not only limits the amount of democratic control and accountability of schooling, but also renders the “collective struggle to preserve education as a basis for creating critical citizens [...] defunct” (Giroux and Giroux 2006, 21). Discussions about the normative content and goals of education are sidelined in the search for “objective” standards and measurements of effectiveness. These standards however, are hardly as neutral or apolitical as claimed, because “political judgments are implicit in the choice of what to measure, how to measure it, how often to measure it and how to present and interpret the results. [...] The crucial question, then, becomes: *who marks the bench?*” (Pasiás and Roussakis 2012, 135–36). The answer does not include the *demos* in many cases (Shore 2011, 301). Referring to a “new regime of EU governmentality” and its focus on technocratic problem-solving, but just as applicable to processes of depoliticization of education on national and regional levels, Shore (2011, 302–3) concludes:

“European governance thus acts as an ‘anti-politics machine’ in which accountability becomes progressively blurred, decision making increasingly remote and obtuse, and the citizens of Europe – in whose name the EU claims to speak – ever-more voiceless.”

## **2.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Dimension: Depoliticization of Teaching**

A second dimension on which processes of depoliticization can be observed is that of educational practice. By speaking of a depoliticization I do of course imply that teaching itself is political, an implication which is supported by the fact that teachers “play a vital role in maintaining the structure of schools and transmitting the values needed to support the larger social order” (Giroux and Penna 1979, 32). Their job is not simply an administrative or executive one. Even though they face institutional constraints and are usually bound to a curriculum, they can “cho[o]se to accommodate to, resist, or create alternatives to the curriculum determined by others” (Ginsburg

and Kamat 2009, 232). When their “curricular, pedagogical, and evaluation activity are viewed as forms of political action” (Ginsburg and Kamat 2009, 232), teachers must be considered political actors. Every classroom is a political classroom and can thus be a battling ground for processes of politicization and depoliticization.

Useful groundwork for analytically approaching such processes can be found in theoretical frameworks which analyze processes of depoliticization in the public sphere. Depoliticization is a performative process, as Veith Selk (2012, 192–93) has aptly observed. Describing matters subject to political decisionmaking as matters that can neither be changed nor influenced, depoliticize. Considering the performativity of depoliticization invites us to look at “the rhetoric and strategies of depoliticization” (Selk 2012, 193, own translation) or what Wood and Flinders (2014, 161–64) call “discursive depoliticization”.

### **2.2.1 Strategies of Depoliticization in Calls for Teacher Neutrality**

As an example for processes of depoliticization of teaching as a practice consider current debates about teacher neutrality. They are, to a large amount, influenced by right-wing movements and parties, who see teachers as the culprits for a “liberal bias” (Biery 2017) and indoctrination in schools. One of their approaches to counter this perceived left-wing indoctrination in schools has been the establishment of online platforms where students or parents can report teachers they suspect of indoctrinating students. Such platforms have been set up in Brazil (Phillips 2018), the Netherlands (DutchNews.nl 2019), and Germany (Eddy 2018).<sup>5</sup>

At first glance one could classify these attempts as processes of politicization, seeing how they encourage public and academic debate about the role teachers play in the classroom. The promotion of an issue itself does not necessarily constitute a politicization, however, as Wood and Flinders point out:

“The promotion of an issue, but alongside a single interpretation and the denial of choice would, therefore, create a form of depoliticisation from this discursive perspective. Moral panics, for example, serve to politicise certain issues in an explosive manner, while at the same time tending to depoliticise those issues by focusing attention on specific ‘folk devils’, alongside a grossly simplified narrative that posits simple solution (constrain, reject, kill the folk devil) to a complex problem” (Wood and Flinders 2014, 161–62)

The image of a folk devil seems quite fitting for analyzing the debate surrounding teacher neutrality. Right-wing populists promote an issue (“leftwing indoctrination in schools”) alongside

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<sup>5</sup> Populist sentiment against teachers might also be stoked constructing teachers as part of a cultural elite which fits well into the populist narrative of “the people” vs. “the elites” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 26).

a single interpretation that does not allow for a choice (“indoctrination is bad and needs to be stopped”) but posits teachers as the devils who need to be constrained – neutralized. This leads to a “closing down [of] debate and deliberation” (Wood and Flinders 2014, 162), which we can find in debates surrounding teacher neutrality.<sup>6</sup>

The strategy might be successful because the fears it stokes about teachers influencing (or rather “indoctrinating”) students do not only have historical predecessors, for example in the anti-communist conspiracy theories of the „Great Red Scare“ (cf. Butter 2014, 223ff.), but are shared by liberal theorists of education (Halstead 2005, 21–22; Strandbrink 2017, chap. 5). They “appeal to the constraint of state neutrality to caution against overburdening school education with political values alien to its purpose; others [...] complain that placing too much emphasis on the theme of democracy might get in the way of promoting career skills” (Honneth 2015, 23). The populist “politicisation of state institutions that are ostensibly no longer neutral” (Corduwener 2014, 431) appears persuasive, because liberal thinkers and politicians have held up and defended the pretense of neutral institutions for so long. It poses a dilemma to a liberal theory of schools, which becomes visible in the responses to populist calls for teacher neutrality. A common argument wrought against right-wing advocates is that teaching cannot be neutral because teachers are obliged to the constitution and human rights, a view that is still compatible with the liberal tradition (Mouffe 2000, 2–4). The argument itself is of course true and can be a valuable starting point for discussions about professional ethics. It does not, however, solve the problem that calls for teacher neutrality pose, because even the AfD frames their actions in terms of constitutional rights. As the answers in Figure 1 indicate, almost no teacher would disagree on the value of democracy and human rights. When the majority of participants in the survey presented below argue that teachers should remain politically neutral, they probably do not mean that teachers should not adhere to the constitution. Referencing human rights in this context might even appear depoliticizing itself, since it frames a pedagogical question (should teachers disclose their views or not?) as a moral choice (“good” teachers who support human rights vs. “bad”, anti-democratic teachers) with only one correct answer, hiding the underlying conflict behind a “veil of rationality or morality” (Mouffe 2004, 48). Reference to human rights also implies that there is such a thing as universal human rights where many contesting interpretations about what constitutes those exist (Mouffe 2014). Referring to democratic values might also be considered somewhat cynical, when most schools and classrooms are quite clearly not democratic.

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<sup>6</sup> Calls for teacher neutrality might also be rooted in gender stereotypes; Journell (2016, 107) points out that conceptions of teacher non-disclosure may “have roots in the 19th century when the vast majority of teachers were women who were discouraged and legally prohibited from engaging in the political arena”.

Another aspect through which liberal argumentative strategies have eased the way for populists is the demonization of “indoctrination”. Historically both indoctrination and education have essentially denoted the same concept so that the attempt at a distinction between the two is a relatively modern concept (Gatchel 2010, 8). After a process of intense moralization, which has led to “indoctrination” being seen as a derogatory term referring to “amoral” processes of education, the concept is analytically almost useless. The way in which the debate on neutrality is framed – teachers can either be neutral or indoctrinate – does not allow for a deeper discussion about the underlying concepts.<sup>7</sup> It also can contribute to „depoliticiz[ing] politics by blaming subversion on personal influences“ (Rogin 1984, 9). It is perhaps easier and more comfortable to imagine that students protest because they had bad, amoral teachers and were indoctrinated, than to reflect on the actual causes of their dissatisfaction. The depoliticization of teaching can thus also lead to a depoliticization and delegitimization of youth activism. The goal of a neutral school poses a “threat to one of the very few instruments that a democratic society has at its disposal to regenerate its own ethical foundations” (Honneth 2015, 24) and the idea of a value-free school is both “untenable and undesirable” (Kelly 1986, 114). The discursive framing of „neutrality“ as protection of children thus rings hollow and it would be naive to assume that right-wing populists act out of a genuine fear for the autonomy of children. Their goal appears to be “to create a human being incapable of offering real resistance when life surrounds him with an arsenal of doctrines and propaganda” (Mannheim 1943, 67–68). Not the fact that students are influenced in schools, but the fact that it is the “wrong” influence is the populists' real concern (Hafeneger and Jestädt 2020, 100). This indicates that the public debate about neutrality is, at its core, concealed through depoliticization, not about whether education or teachers are neutral or not, but revolves around the question: “What then should the teacher's role be?” (Kelly 1986, 116).

### 2.3 Teacher Beliefs and Depoliticization

How teachers answer this question and how they deal with calls for neutrality and against “teacher disclosure” (Journell 2016) can be considered a part of *teacher beliefs* (Oberle 2017, 123). Understanding these beliefs is of importance for teacher education not only because they can hint at how pre-service teachers are influenced by discourses on teacher neutrality, but also because teacher education is where interventions appear especially promising (and feasible).

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<sup>7</sup> An “un-dichotomization, normalization and empirization” (Stroß 2007, 25, own translation) of the concept would also open it up to closer inspection by political theorists. One could, for example, develop a communitarian understanding of indoctrination by taking Walzer's thoughts on the subject as a point of departure. He argues that “parties, movements, and communities of many different sorts do seek to indoctrinate their members – to bring them to accept a doctrine – [...] so that each indoctrinated member becomes an agent of doctrinal transmission. Whether this sort of thing is good or bad, it is enormously important in political life because the political identity of most people or, better, of most of the people engaged by politics, is shaped in this way” (Walzer 2004, 92–93).

To explore those beliefs, a survey was administered online and pre-service teachers studying at Heidelberg University were invited to participate via e-mail, e-learning platforms and posters in summer 2018. 178 participants were female, 70 male and 4 persons did not disclose their gender. The average age of participants was 24.0 (M = 23, SD = 4.99), which is relatively high in comparison to the university's average. Because participants could quit the survey at any point, the number of responses varies from question to question.

### 2.3.1 Results

Participants appear to share a consensus on teaching democratic values to students and welcome teacher and student political engagement (Figure 1). Teacher neutrality is more controversial,

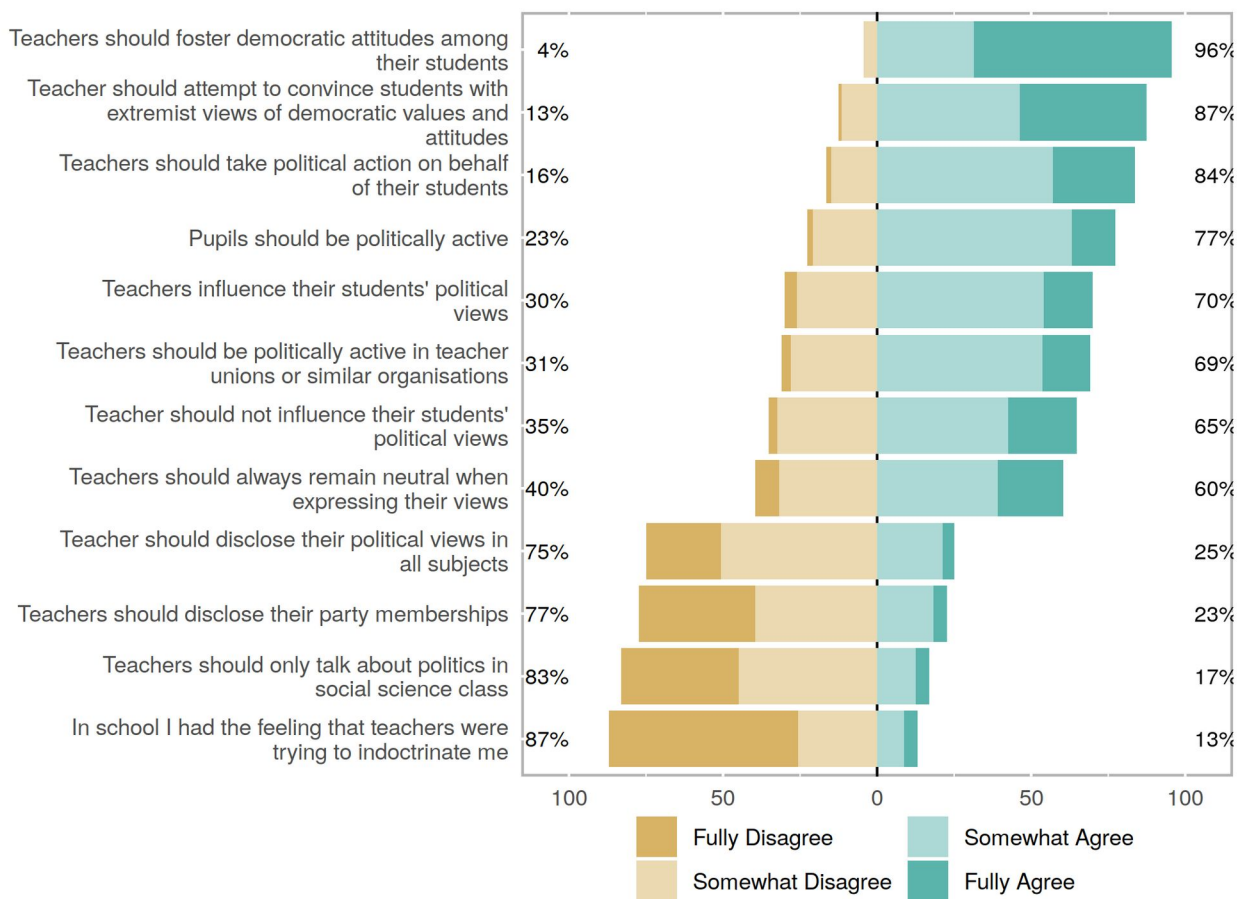


Figure 1: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" (n = 207)

however: 70% of participants agree that teachers do influence political opinions of their students, whereas 65% of participants think that teachers should not influence their students' opinions on politics. A majority of student teachers agree with the statement that "teachers should always remain neutral when expressing their views"<sup>8</sup>. Most student teachers argue against teacher

8 German: "Lehrer\*innen sollen sich immer politisch neutral äußern"



disclosure of opinions or party membership but welcome speaking about political topics outside the social sciences classroom.

A slight majority (54.5%) of participants state that as teachers they do not want to disclose their political views to the students. This rejection of disclosing one's own political stance was found to a similar extent among German civics teachers (Oberle, Ivens, and Leunig 2018, 59) and among teachers and pre-service teachers in international studies (Hess and McAvoy 2015, 187; Journell 2011, 221–22). The probability that student teachers are willing to disclose their views increases significantly with a higher level of subjective political interest<sup>9</sup> (odds ratio: 2.39;  $p < 0.001$ ). Politically active participants are also particularly willing to make their political opinions transparent. Of the 17 participants in the sample who are active in parties, unions or other political organizations, 14 want to disclose their opinion; of the 171 who are not politically active, only 72 want to do so,  $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 8.54$ ;  $p = 0.003$ .

Participants could give reasons for not disclosing or disclosing their views in an open question<sup>10</sup>. A coding manual was developed and used by two individual coders to categorize the 76 answers in favor of non-disclosure into four distinctive categories (and one residual category). The raters achieved a substantial agreement (% agree = 82.9; Cohen's Kappa = 0.726). After calculating the inter-rater reliability, consensual ratings were found by both raters for disputed cases.

Table 1: Student teachers' reasons for not disclosing their political views

Category	Example in Coding Manual	n	Percentage of Answers
A (Fear of undue influence)	"I don't want to influence my students, so that they can form opinions on their own"	41	53.9
B (Privacy)	"My private opinions have no place in school"	17	22.4
C (Insecurity)	"I don't have an opinion on politics"	8	10.5
D (Neutrality as a value)	"Teachers should remain neutral"	6	7.9
E (Residual category)	Answer unclear/Does not fit into other categories	4	5.3

A majority of those who oppose disclosing their political views argue that doing so might unduly influence their students' views, around a fifth of respondents consider their political views a private matter, while 10 % state that they do not feel comfortable sharing their political views, because they feel insecure about them. Six answers refer to neutrality as a value or goal in itself.

<sup>9</sup> Item: *How strong is your interest in politics?* [*Wie stark bist du an Politik interessiert?*], 4 point likert scale adapted from (van Deth 2013).

<sup>10</sup> All answers (in German) are available in the appendix to (Heil 2020).

Participants' beliefs about neutrality seem to be linked to misconceptions about corresponding legal regulations. As Figure 2 shows, a majority (68.4%) of student teachers believe that teachers must not disclose their political views in class. This value is more than 10 percentage points higher than the proportion among prospective and active social science teachers in (Oberle, Ivens, and Leunig 2018, 57). A surprising amount of pre-service teachers (28.3%) seem to believe that teachers

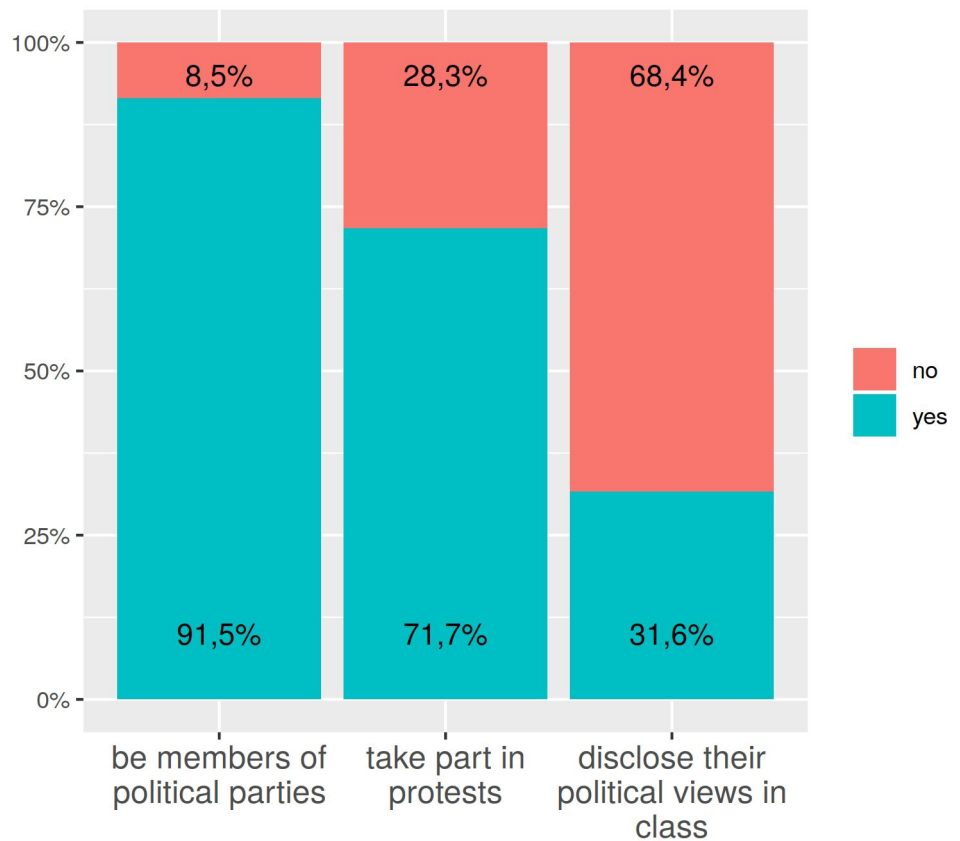


Figure 2: "Are teachers allowed to ...?" (n = 212)

are not allowed to take part in protests and 8.5% of those surveyed assume that teachers are not even allowed to join a political party.

### 2.3.2 Discussion

These misconceptions are cause for concern; of course teachers are allowed to be party members and attend demonstrations and even the legally non-binding Beutelsbach Consensus, often quoted in such discussions in Germany, does not forbid teacher disclosure (Oberle 2017, 124). In recent years, German courts have emphasized that even in cases such as speaking at events of right-wing extremist groups, the right to freedom of expression and political activity applies to teachers and that such activity does not constitute a breach of duty outside of work (Verwaltungsgericht Münster 2014). Even though participants in the survey answered that they supported political action on behalf of their students, their views on teacher neutrality might hinder them from doing so. As findings from Israel indicate, "teachers who strive to avoid political minefields at all costs also adopt apolitical strategies to address the particular needs of [their pupils]" (Kagan, Pinson, and Schler 2019, 14). The results presented above can be taken as a sign that this relationship does not only hold for strategies to address the needs of their students, but for political action by

teachers in general. Student teachers' misconceptions about their possibilities for political action indicate a kind of preemptive self-depoliticization:<sup>11</sup> They abstain from legitimate political action out of a misguided fear of violating rules about neutrality. It appears plausible that their insecurities are a result of the discursive depoliticization of teaching mentioned above. They also seem to have internalized publicly voiced fears of indoctrination in schools.

Those pre-service teachers who argue against teacher disclosure out of fear of influencing their students can nevertheless “be applauded for recognizing the power they hold in the classroom and the potential influence they have over their students” (Journell 2011, 237). There is, however, no clear evidence on whether and how teachers actually influence their students' political views (Hess and McAvoy 2015, 187–88) and research into political socialization does not yet allow us to understand “the precise way in which schooling influences students” (Neundorf and Smets 2017, 8). US-American students seem to prefer teacher disclosure to non-disclosure “as long as they do not perceive their teachers as trying to force their students to adhere to specific political views” (Journell 2016, 104). Teachers who are politically active might not be able to hide their political views anyways. Withholding political views does also not change the power imbalance in the classroom, which can only be tackled by measures strengthening students' rights, student participation and teacher accountability. This would allow the classroom to become an arena for the “vibrant clash of democratic political positions” (Mouffe 2000, 104) that is constitutive of a well-functioning democracy but remains impossible when teachers try to hide their political views. A closely related objection to non-disclosure is that teachers act as role models for students: teachers who appear politically neutral can hardly be considered role models for democratic citizenship, whereas teachers who disclose their views (without penalizing students with differing opinions) “can model appropriate ways in which to articulate and defend one's political opinions in a pluralistic society” (Journell 2016, 105). Relegating political opinions to the realm of private life might taboo disclosing political opinions, a view which might be linked to a widely held negative sentiment towards politics, called “anti-politics” by Stoker (2017, 268–70).

### **3 Repoliticizing Teacher Education**

The good news is that depoliticization can be stopped or reversed (Selk 2012, 197). Before doing so, however, it is important to recognize processes of depoliticization and to deconstruct them. This means that teacher educators need to accept “the inescapably *political* nature of teaching and

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<sup>11</sup> Some parallels can be drawn to journalism, a field also under attack by populists. Some journalists go as far as to say “I don't support any candidate, I don't give money to interest groups and I don't vote” (Wilson and Takenaga 2020) in order to hold up the impression of impartiality and neutrality. For a critical discussion of this stance see (Ward 2019).

teacher education” (Clarke and Phelan 2017, 80) and understand how this political nature is denied or hidden through processes of depoliticization. If this deconstruction involves student teachers, they “may learn to recognize depoliticizing forces and even attempt to re-politicize their own educational spaces” (Cech and Sherick 2015, 212) themselves. At the core of a program for repoliticization of teacher education thus lies reflection – because “the only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection” (Adorno 2005, 193). The term “reflection” has recently become a buzzword in a sense that has little to do with Adorno's ideas for education; advocates for reflective practice often neglect “the social conditions of schooling that influence the teacher’s work within the classroom” (Zeichner and Liu 2010, 71) and thus run the risk of supporting strategies of depoliticization themselves. To make reflection a tool for repoliticization, it must enable future teachers to achieve “greater political clarity about whose interests are served by their daily actions” (Zeichner and Liu 2010, 74). A teacher education that does not itself reflect on how “teaching and teacher education have been refashioned as technical processes at the expense of richer notions of ethical and political practice” (Clarke and Phelan 2017, 60) cannot in good conscience expect students to become reflective. This means that “teacher educators need to reflect critically and act strategically upon the nature of their own pedagogical practices and the institutional contexts in which they work” (Liston and Zeichner 1987, 133). Liston and Zeichner also emphasize that reflection alone is not enough and that teacher educators need to “become much more involved than is now the case in the political arenas of teacher education, higher education, and state government” (Liston and Zeichner 1987, 133). As a result of the processes of depoliticization outlined above, we are now in a situation where decisionmakers’ “reliance on expert consultation, evidence construction, and technocratic deliberation” (Stone 2017, 95) could possibly be used by teacher educators to their own advantage. As experts in their field they could wield their power in an unexpected (and probably also unwanted) way: by demanding a democratic restructuring of teacher education. This consequently requires teacher educators to take a step back themselves; “education and teacher education require ongoing democratic contestation and debate” (Clarke and Phelan 2017, 91). Decisions about teacher education should not only be made by “experts” but by the *demos*. This calls for teacher educators to communicate their goals, approaches and findings to the wider public – and to be open to public debate about teacher education.

Enabling meaningful political participation in teacher education for students is equally important. It needs to open up “spaces in which teachers’ voices, both novice and established, might be heard rather than silenced, sublimated rather than repressed” (Clarke and Phelan 2017, 27). That student

teachers in the survey indicated an interest in political action in education policy can be considered a cause for optimism, especially when one shares critical pedagogy's central tenet that “critical educators must *act* in concert with the progressive social movements their work supports or in movements against the rightist assumptions and policies they critically analyze” (Apple and Au 2009, 992) and that “teachers, as citizens and workers, can and should engage in political action outside the classroom, especially that action which would create better conditions for schooling” (Liston and Zeichner 1987, 122). Of course this requires teacher misconceptions about their opportunities for political action to be cleared up. Inspiration for this can be drawn from the debate about a political mandate and “social work as a human rights profession” in social work (cf. Mapp et al. 2019), where the question of whether and how professionals can and must be politically active has been discussed in great detail.

The primary focus of teacher education, however, is on pedagogical action *inside* the classroom, which means that teacher education needs to tackle the question of teacher disclosure. As the survey above shows, quite a few insecurities persist among pre-service teachers. The goal of teacher education cannot be to advocate for full teacher disclosure, but rather to teach students to “think about disclosing and withholding their views as pedagogical tools that can have a profound effect on classroom dynamics” (Hess and McAvoy 2015, 202). Reflection and repoliticization should, however, not only be focused on teacher disclosure but also on more subtle ways in which teachers might influence their students. Another task of a reflective teacher education must thus be to confront student teachers with the fact that they might “unconsciously hold beliefs and attitudes about the existing social order that reflect dominant ideologies that are harmful to so many students” (Bartolomé 2004, 100), because they “normalize and naturalize” (Denis and Schick 2003, 67) and thus depoliticize inequalities. Where teachers hold supposedly “neutral” attitudes of color-blindness, for example, they might fall into “racist passivity” (Kendi 2019, 9). For teacher education this means that

“*White* [...] student teachers and *white* teachers in general should learn to critically reflect on Whiteness and their (in)visible privileges, in order to deconstruct them. Constant self-reflective questions need to be asked: How does racism appear in my school? How can understanding, knowledge and self-reflection contribute to avoiding racist behavior. Teachers and student teachers of Color need space for empowerment.” (El and Fereidooni 2016, 133)

Learning and reflection are not limited to racism but to all other forms of inequality and discrimination and thus requires knowledge about the injustices of the (educational) system. Reflection on the institutional and structural contexts in which teaching is embedded is

intrinsically connected to reflection about the normative goals of education. For this we need a strengthening of social sciences in teacher education curricula. Adorno's insight is true for teacher education as well; it must “teach about the societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms” (Adorno 2005, 203). A teacher should know “the social world from which his pupils come, for which they have to be prepared, and if he is capable of assessing most of the things he does in terms of social results” (Mannheim 1943, 60). An interdisciplinary teacher education should not only include sociology but also open up towards disciplines like political science and especially political theory<sup>12</sup>, as well as economics and philosophy of education, which can all shape student teachers' understanding of society, education, and how both are connected. Examples of such approaches can already be found in several subdisciplines such as critical mathematics education (Skovsmose 2011; Jurdak et al. 2016). Interdisciplinary approaches to teacher education can also remind us of how disciplinary boundaries, which are accepted and enforced in schools and teacher education might contribute to a depoliticization of teaching. Teaching sex education primarily as part of biology curricula, for example, might lead to neglecting the various ways in which sexuality and gender are politically important categories.

The program for teacher education outlined here is certainly ambitious. But even though the diagnosis presented here might appear disheartening, there is cause for optimism. There has been a renewed interest in education and its relationship to democracy which might offer a window of opportunity for repoliticization. In reaction to riots targeting migrants in the East-German town Chemnitz, Germany's minister for youth called for more and better civic education (Deutsche Welle 2018), and in response to populist electoral successes states like Baden-Württemberg have implemented guidelines for democratic education which are compulsory for teachers of all subjects<sup>13</sup> (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport BaWü 2019). It remains to be seen and – in the spirit of repoliticization – to be shaped, how these measures influence teaching and teacher education.

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12 This would hopefully also lead to an intradisciplinary reorientation towards questions of education. As these questions have long been relegated to the margins of the field, political philosophy has “deprived itself of the chance to make a proper contribution regarding the normative functions of [...] education” (Honneth 2015, 20).

13 As many of these fall under the wide umbrella of democracy education, it is worth remembering that methods such as service learning can also contribute to depoliticization (Burth 2016, 63–64).

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