RESEARCH

Civic competencies and a proposal for a democratic school by students of Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora

Competencias ciudadanas y propuesta para una escuela democrática por estudiantes del Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora

Mireya Berenice Yanez Diaz[1]
and María Guadalupe González Lizárraga[2]

1 Corresponding author. Part-time professor at the Department of Foreign Languages, Universidad de Sonora.
   Email: mireya.yanez@unison.mx ORCID: https://0000-0002-2756-4258

2 Full-time tenured professor, level 1 member of the Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI), Department of Economics, Universidad de Sonora.
   Email: ma.guadalupe.gonzalez@unison.mx ORCID: https://0000-0001-6716-737

Abstract

This article reports on the four aspects of citizenship competences: knowledge, behavior, values, and attitudes in a group of young high school students, and their proposal for a democratic school. Democracy and state of law were used as the two specific dimensions of citizenship. The data was gathered with a survey answered by 477 students enrolled in their senior year in a public school in the urban area of Hermosillo. According to the results, the students have a working knowledge about their rights, obligations, and the concept of democracy. They privilege respect above other values and report few chances to participate at school. Based on their written narrative, the school doesn't have a democratic environment hence they propose to integrate students in the decision-making process on regards to evaluation criteria, school life and topics of courses they can take part in. Thus, the results let us infer that the new generation of citizens is passive and reproduces an established structural system in which they can sometimes express their opinion but cannot participate actively in its changes.

Keywords: Education, democracy, citizenship, competencies, high school education

JEL code: I2, K36, I21, I28

Resumen

El presente trabajo muestra los cuatro aspectos de las competencias ciudadanas: conocimientos, comportamientos, actitudes y valores de jóvenes estudiantes de educación media superior, y su propuesta de una escuela democrática. La indagación se delimitó a dos dimensiones que forman parte de la formación en ciudadanía: democracia y estado de derecho. Los datos se recabaron con una encuesta que respondieron 477 estudiantes que se encontraban cursando el último año de bachillerato en una institución pública del área urbana en Hermosillo, Sonora. De acuerdo con los resultados obtenidos los estudiantes poseen conocimiento sobre sus derechos, sus obligaciones y el concepto de democracia. Privilegian el respeto sobre otros valores y reportan pocas acciones de participación. Conforme a la narrativa escrita de los jóvenes, expresan que la institución educativa en la que se encuentran no cuenta con un ambiente democrático por lo cual proponen una mayor integración estudiantil en la toma de decisiones respecto a la forma de evaluación, la organización de la vida escolar y los temas de los cursos a participar. Con los resultados obtenidos se puede vislumbrar la generación de ciudadanos pasivos que reproducen un sistema jerárquico establecido que, si bien opinan, no se involucran de manera activa en propiciar cambios.

Palabras clave: Educación, democracia, ciudadanía, competencias, educación media superior

Código JEL: I2, K36, I21, I28

Introduction

One of the enduring concerns of humankind, since the origins of modern societies, has been the formation of citizenship. This concern remains relevant today under a rights-based approach that promotes democracy and fosters a culture of peace (UNESCO, 2015 and 2021 The Mexican State has incorporated elements aimed at this type of civic formation into its curricula and educational programs from preschool to upper secondary education, attempting to respond to demands set by international organizations through the Sustainable Development Goals included in the 2030 Agenda. However, the content integrated into these curricula offers little analysis of the real-life situations experienced in schools and surrounding communities. Thus, public policy regarding citizenship remains limited to moral values and principles that are rarely practiced in educational environments or in the spaces where students live and interact.

In this national context, around 5% of the Mexican population reaches the age of majority each year, as established by the Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Diputados, 2021), and 80% of them enroll in upper secondary education. Ideally, these students should understand the logic behind the formal rules that govern social interaction to coexist, express opinions, and participate in decision-making processes led by the government to maintain or improve life in society. Furthermore, they participate in elections to choose whether to keep or replace their municipal, state, or national leaders, thus contributing to participatory democracy, a culture of peace, and the promotion and enforcement of the rule of law.

At the same time, the experience of attending high school enables the development of skills and knowledge that contribute to personal, family, and even community social progress. In this sense, this level of education becomes a space for emotional, cognitive, and social maturity, where individuals take on responsibilities and begin to shape themselves as reflective subjects (Weiss, Guerra, Hernández, Grijalva, & Avalos, 2008).

Youth is the most powerful force for driving social change; young people need to strengthen, redirect, and redefine their knowledge, values, attitudes, and actions to foster democracy. Their role as active agents can be redefined by altering their relationship with the political sphere and society at large (Giroux, 1993). Having access to data about this population allows for the design of higher education programs that promote participatory democratic citizenship, as well as non-formal education initiatives for those who do not continue their studies, in order to guide public policy toward youth empowerment Based on the above, this study aimed to assess the civic competencies of high school students in Hermosillo, with the goal of understanding the skills that young people possess to meet the demands of their status as citizens. This publication seeks to present and discuss findings regarding the civic competencies developed by pre-citizens and to amplify their voices by sharing their proposals for a democratic school, based on a sample of students from the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, located in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico.

1. Conceptual framework of the research

The concept of citizenship has multiple definitions and has been employed as a strategy to address a variety of social challenges (Aragón, 2015). In this study, it is understood as a social construction of personal identity situated within a sociopolitical context that, as such, is linked to a democratic way of life. This includes the personal and family spheres and incorporates individuals' experiences, the recognition of human rights, and the struggle for new spaces where people can act as political agents in various social domains. To educate citizens, a competency-based educational approach is used. In this framework, civic competencies are understood as knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Marco, 2003)—elements that come together in the formation of citizenship and constitute the pedagogical model implemented in Mexican schools (Fernández, 2013).

Consequently, it is formally recognized that schools should educate students as citizens by promoting knowledge of fundamental human rights, encouraging participation and representation, and fostering values-based attitudes applicable across diverse social settings (Aragón, 2015; Heater, 2007; Mejía & Perafán, 2006). These attitudes and values are either reinforced or challenged by those promoted within families, society, and the media.

A review of previous studies reveals that research

on civic competencies varies in its approaches, methodologies, and even the subjects addressed within different academic disciplines. Noteworthy examples include national-level studies conducted in countries such as Colombia, Spain, and Argentina (Astiz, 2007; Ruiz & Chaux, 2005; Marco, 2003). In Mexico, the most extensive studies found have been carried out by governmental institutions (INE, 2016; IFE, 2013). Other studies focus on specific aspects of civic competencies, such as political knowledge (Saldierna, Muñiz, & Marañón, 2017), political participation through voting (Gómez, Tejera, Aguilar, Ramírez & Díaz, 2012), or citizenship as a general topic. Within the framework of upper secondary education in Mexico, the curriculum is designed to develop citizens for a democratic society (DGB, 2017), emphasizing participation, civic and ethical awareness, recognition and respect for the rule of law, and prioritizing respect as a core value. The reviewed literature was organized into two thematic dimensions: democracy and the rule of law.

1.1 Democracy

The term democracy refers to a political system and regime that requires a way of life based on peaceful coexistence and assertive communication. It relies on a series of procedures and institutions as tools to acknowledge the essence of both the individual and the collective, to regulate power, to claim and safeguard rights, and to integrate society into a community with cultural and historical awareness. This understanding may sometimes contrast with the concept of universal rights (Sartori, 2012; Touraine, 2000). f the citizen participates actively, they become involved in the formation of democracy and the fulfillment of obligations; otherwise, democracy can be reduced to a system of political organization where a minority holds power over the majority.

According to Salazar and Woldenberg (2020), the principles governing democracy in Mexico are: a) popular sovereignty, a way of organizing political power where the people are both the object and subject of government; b) majority rule and the protection of minority rights, where, through mechanisms such as voting, leaders are elected to represent the majority, but to be democratically legitimate, they must also include and guarantee the rights and participation of minorities; and c) democratic political representation, in which the representatives elected by the people are responsible for making political decisions, or alternatively, a plebiscite may be used to seek the direct opinion of the citizens.

Toro (2000) adds further principles of democracy, including secularity, as a constructed social order; self-foundation, in which laws and norms are determined by society and for society, aiding in living, complying, and protecting rights; uncertainty, since there is no single ideal model and citizens of each state must determine it themselves; ethics, aiming to preserve and strengthen human dignity through rights; complexity, as it includes all interests; and The public sphere, which is built from society. Democracy is also embedded in values understood as norms to be shared by the entire population and institutions (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2020; Sartori, 2012; Touraine, 2000). The three core values on which democracy in Mexico rests are liberty, equality, and fraternity (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2020).

A fundamental axis in building a democratic nation is the school, as it is responsible for shaping future citizens and preparing them to actively participate in decisions that concern society as a whole. School enrollment implies institutional integration, which entails adapting to a broad normative culture through knowledge of rules (which are mandatory within the school community). Students internalize these through attitudes they adopt and ultimately apply in specific actions that allow them to function within the school environment (Bolívar, 2016).

This integration process represents an exercise in participating in collective decisions and actions that contribute to civic formation (Taddei, 2019). This preparation must aim to equip students with knowledge that enables them to better understand their environment, while also promoting critical and reflective thinking, as well as encouraging students to take part in decision-making processes.

Participation is a concept that synthetically expresses a way of being and acting in response to diverse worldviews. In this formative process, media and digital social networks play a fundamental role in shaping the content and how young people access information—information that shapes their thinking and, above all, determines whether they act or remain passiveAmong the studies on youth and democracy, the work by Caro, Pivatto, Quinteros, Sema, and Torrejón (2012) stands out. They note that

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young people's level of understanding of democracy directly affects their participation. Likewise, youth apathy and disaffection toward political issues have been addressed by Ávila and Díaz (2017), Gómez, Tejera, Aguilar, Ramírez, and Díaz (2012), Olivera (2009), Saldierna, Marañón, and Muñiz (2015), and institutions such as the IFE (2013), IMJUVE (2012), and INE (2016).

In this regard, youth are immersed in and constantly negotiating various sociopolitical phenomena, which contributes to shaping and reshaping their understanding of democracy and citizenship. Education—particularly formal educational programs—is a tool the state can use to counter negative sociocultural influences and the impacts of capitalism, to develop an ideal model of citizenship and democracy.

In this sense, there are formally established educational programs that serve as the basis for teaching in the public education system from preschool to upper secondary level. These programs achieve a certain level of impact, depending on the context in which individuals are being educated.

1.2 Rule of law and the culture of legality

The rule of law, in its simplest sense, refers to the set of laws and rules that encompass the various rights intended to maintain order. Meanwhile, the culture of legality focuses on the citizens' understanding of their rights, their efforts to comply with the rules or laws that govern them, and the tangible effects that either the exercise or lack thereof can have on society (Laveaga, 2000). The author argues that both the rule of law and the culture of legality entail the necessity for individuals to understand the construction of the political system in their country of residence, as well as the governmental institutions, power structures, and hierarchies that form the state. On a broader level, this also includes understanding the functions of each institution and of the state itself, along with knowledge of socio-economic, ethical, and social integration.

Given the status of some study subjects as pre-citizens, they have limited access to government agencies, which does not exempt them from understanding the functions of different organizations and how they can influence them. For example, they can request legal advice or, if necessary, initiate proceedings with the Procuraduría de la Defensa del Menor y la Familia.

However, they are protected under the Ley General de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes, which establishes that they have the right to: life, survival, and development; priority; identity; family life; substantive equality; non-discrimination; living in conditions of well-being and healthy integral development; a life free of violence and access to social security; inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities; education; rest and recreation; freedom of ethical convictions, thought, conscience, religion, and culture; freedom of expression and access to information; participation; association and assembly; privacy; legal security and due process; the right to migrate; and access to information and communication technologies, including broadcasting and telecommunications services, such as broadband and the Internet (SEGOB, 2014). The right to education is also enshrined in Article 3 of the Constitución Política Mexicana, and extends beyond the age of majority, including access to higher education, which is the responsibility of each state.

Other rights that contribute to achieving a state of well-being (Aragón, 2015) and must therefore be known by citizens include the right to work, education, and health (Marshall, 1950). Article 123 of the Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos stipulates every individual's right to dignified and socially useful work. Additional aspects are addressed in the Ley Federal del Trabajo. Meanwhile, Article 4 of the Constitución establishes the right to health protection.

As full citizens, Cortina (1997) argues that it is necessary to exercise citizenship by participating in public discourse, staying informed, and engaging in dialogue. If dialogue fails, individuals must be aware of other mechanisms, such as civil society organizations, which can influence, impact, or persuade government institutions through advocacy (Canto, 2002). Citizens must also be aware of the various institutions where they can claim the guarantees of their rights and those of others (Aragón, 2015). Among the studies on the culture of legality conducted in Mexico, a noteworthy one is by Arango, Leyva, Marañón, and Lozano (2017) in Monterrey, Nuevo León. It examined cultural and legal knowledge and citizen participation. The study found a general "approving" knowledge of the rule of law and justice but identified low engagement and interest in community life and public social issues.

1.3 *Values*

The Mexican educational system has incorporated various types of values throughout different educational stages, including ethical, religious, moral, human, and political values, depending on the historical context (Latapí, 2003). Citizenship education tends to focus on human values, especially those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1948), which remain relevant to the current sociohistorical moment as they have yet to be fully established in practice or legislation in many countries. In Mexico, Article 3 of the Constitution, which addresses the right to education, highlights the values of freedom, justice, and respect. From a political perspective, the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2020), drawing on Article 1 of the DUDH, emphasizes the core democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The value of freedom, which appears in both educational and democratic contexts, has two meanings: the first is the capacity for self-regulation; the second refers to acting without the interference of other individuals, bodies, or organizations, as long as such actions are within the bounds of the law, respecting the rule of law responsibly and without endangering popular sovereignty (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2020; Touraine, 2000). Equality refers to the idea that all citizens have the same rights and obligations under the law, with no distinctions in political terms or social status (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2020). The same authors note that fraternity is linked to behaviors and coexistence among citizens characterized by cooperation in the face of conflict. Differences and contradictions should be resolved through peaceful and legal means, and, if necessary, through tolerance and acceptance of others' differences.

The challenge of promoting values within the education system was analyzed by Latapí (2003), who explains that teaching values is complex: from identifying and defining them, understanding their etymology, to ensuring that students live them. In this regard, Moreno and Peniche (2020) argue that teaching values in high school is challenging due to adverse contexts, but it is possible through collaboration with parents and society. They emphasize the importance of fostering the value of solidarity.

Although there are theoretical frameworks that help define different values, these are abstract constructs established socially and culturally, and they reflect individual interests (Garay et al., 2008). As such, they may vary depending on how each student has internalized and applied them. Similarly, their definition depends—due to the principle of curricular autonomy—on the designers of the core programs and later on those who shape the materials provided to students, whether in the form of learning modules or textbooks.

2. Methodological design of the research

The study was structured based on Stake's (2004) standards-based educational evaluation research proposal. To understand the integration of citizenship competencies in general high school programs, a surface or manifest content analysis of the curriculum was conducted, starting with the national base programs (DGB, 2017) and extending to the learning modules used by the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora. Based on the findings and various theoretical contributions, the knowledge, attitudes, values, and actions framed within the dimensions of democracy and the rule of law were identified (Table 1).

Based on this structure, the research instrument was developed: a questionnaire designed specifically for this study. It consists of 45 questions divided into four sections: the first section addresses knowledge, the second covers behavior, the third examines attitudes and values, and the fourth gathers information on socioeconomic level (AMAI, 2018). Each section includes questions related to democracy and the rule of law. The instrument underwent two pilot tests at institutions within the same high school subsystem and with a population similar in terms of sex, age, and socioeconomic status. The reliability analysis for all questions in the instrument resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.875, and a standardized Cronbach's Alpha of 0.878.

Data collection took place in October 2019, within the classrooms of the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Villa de Seris campus, during class hours. This institution holds a valid certification in the Padrón de Calidad del Sistema Nacional de Educación Media Superior (COPEEMS, 2019), which indicates that it applies current federal programs, has qualified staff, and offers appropriate

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Table 1. Citizenship competencias and the four components that compose them

| Competency aspect / Dimension	Knowledge	Behavior	Attitudes	Values
Democracy	Definition Separation of powers Principles Civil duties	Participation	Perception of democracy in the country	Value system
Rule of law	General law on the rights of children and adolescents Right to education Right to health Right to work	Culture of legality	Acceptance of illegal activities	

Source: Own elaboration.

facilities to promote a proper learning environment.

Students enrolled in the fifth semester were selected, considering that by this stage they had already completed most of the subjects related to the axis of citizenship education. Out of a population of 541 enrolled students across both morning and evening shifts, 477 questionnaires were collected. Among the study participants, 51.6% were female and 48.4% male. Respondents reported being between 16 and 19 years old, with the highest concentration at 17 years old (76.2%). Nearly half of the sample belonged to a high socioeconomic level (43.8%), meaning that heads of household had professional or postgraduate education, fixed Internet access at home, and invested part of their income in education. A smaller percentage belonged to the upper-middle level (28.9%) and

the middle level (15.9%); these households also had Internet access and made educational investments, though to a lesser extent, according to AMAI's (2018) classification criteria. Throughout the study, participant anonymity was preserved with respect to names and any other identifying information, and participation was voluntary.

The data collected were entered into the SPSS statistical software, where frequency and measures of central tendency analyses were performed. Open-ended question responses were exported and subjected to qualitative and quantitative discourse analysis, from which primary and secondary analytical categories were developed.

Figure 1. Diagram showing the terms related to democracy
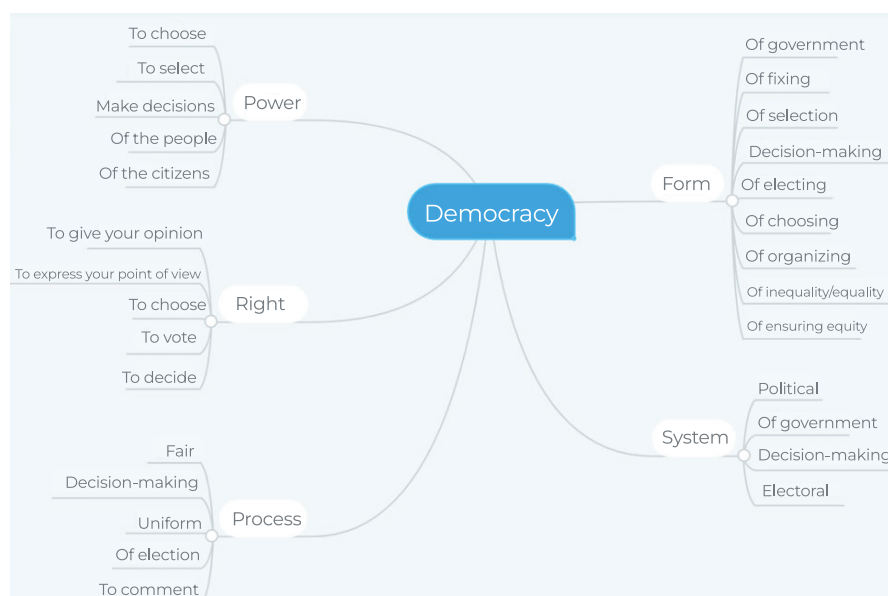
Source: Own elaboration.

3. Analysis of the results obtained

3.1 Democracy

To explore how young people define democracy, they were asked to write down their own definition of the term. At the first level of analysis, five core concepts were categorized based on their frequency of appearance in the responses, listed from most to least frequent: form, system, power, right, and process. At a second level, these concepts were associated with other semantic elements. These associations reflect certain features of democracy described by Sartori (2012), such as rationality, political freedom, and diversity. They also align with the principles of democracy in Mexico outlined by Salazar & Woldenberg (2020), which include popular sovereignty, electoral mechanisms, and political representation. Figure 1 shows the associative relationships for each concept.
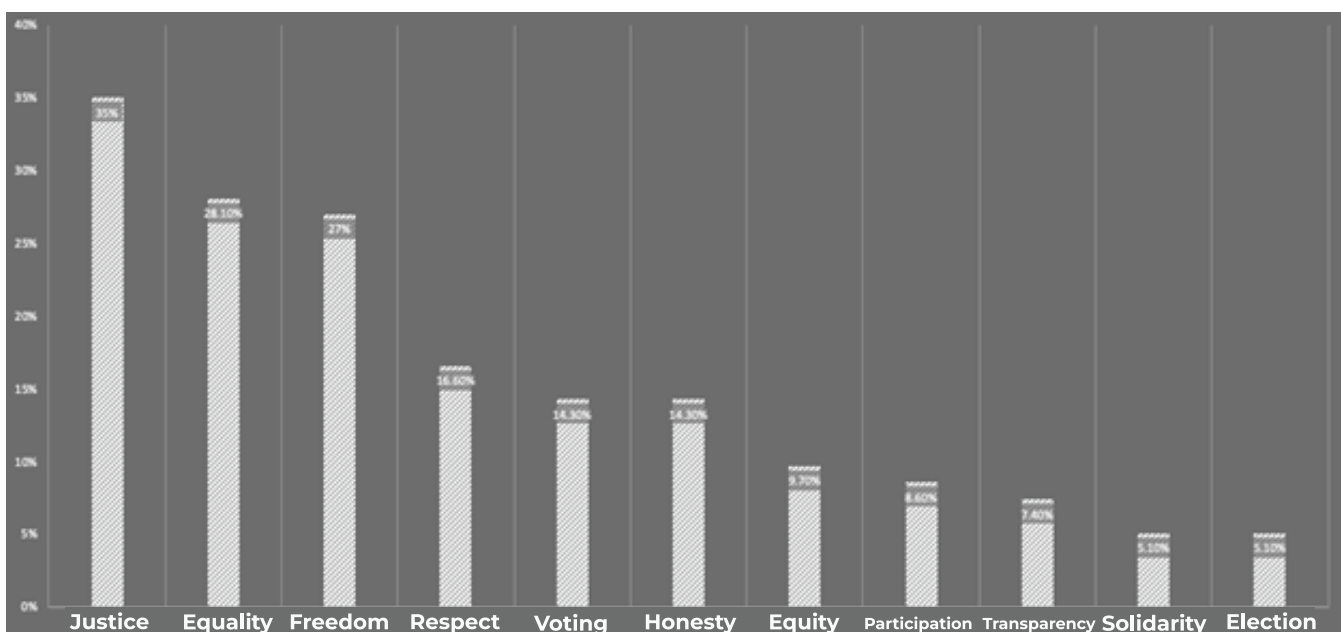
From the collected discourses, two student responses stand out, even though they do not directly relate to any of the categorized concepts, as they convey a strong emotional sentiment: "It is something that makes all of us participate", stated participant 506241; while participant 502223 wrote that it is "something that divides us. Additionally, agents involved in decision-making were identified. Based on the number of mentions, four categories emerged in descending order: everyone (indicating broad participation), the people (to choose, give voice and power), individuals, and the majority. This suggests that, within young people's construct of democracy, the community is prioritized as a collective interest over individual concerns, consistent with definitions reviewed by Touraine (2000).

Students were asked to write down the three branches of government. Of the 305 written responses, 236 corresponded to the correct answer in different orders: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial, which accounts for 49% of correct responses. In another open-ended question, students were asked to write three principles of democracy. In order from most to least mentioned, they answered: justice, equality, freedom, respect, voting, honesty, equity, participation, transparency, solidarity, and election. The corresponding percentages can be seen in Figure 2.

Regarding the civic duties included in the constitution, participants mostly identified registering in the electoral roll (96.5%), followed by voting in elections and popular consultations (85.9%), performing military service (62.3%), and registering in the municipal cadastre (58.2%). Meanwhile, less than one-third mentioned holding elected office at the federal or state level (29.1%). The fact that the majority of respondents did not identify this duty indicates an emphasis on rights but neglects the responsibilities and/or obligations that citizens have to hold public office and engage in political matters, a situation that can cause

Figure 2. Principle of democracy mentioned by students with their respective response percentages

Source: Own elaboration.

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imbalance and promote passive citizenship (Aragón, 2015; Heater, 2007).

The type of participation that young people choose includes, first, signing petitions, collecting signatures, or sending a written request to an authority (60.5%); second, requesting support from a guardian or representative (58.5%); and third, collecting donations to support disaster victims (51.8%). The least selected option was painting walls (3.2%).

Students are motivated to participate in political activities when it serves as a protest against an injustice (68.6%). A total of 59.1% stated that they are motivated when some benefit is obtained, 54.1% are motivated when asked by their parents, 48.3% would be encouraged if their friends were involved, and 43.8% if they consider it an obligation. There is a certain degree of involvement with socially relevant issues. This suggests that they are aware of these mechanisms and are willing to use them if necessary.

A citizen interested in what happens in their community — young students reported that they stay informed about what is happening in the country mainly through Facebook, Twitter, and/ or Instagram (94.7%), television (70.2%), and by accessing digital reports (58%). The remaining information sources used are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Percentage of students who reported using various media outlets
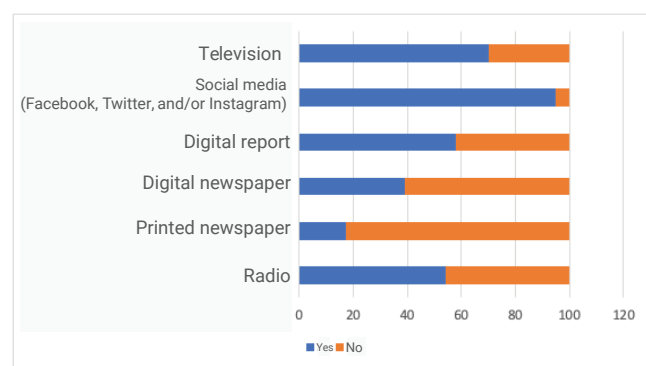
Note: N=480
Source: Own elaboration.

Studies such as those by Saldierna, Marañón, and Muñoz (2015) agree that the primary source of information consumption among youth is through digital social networks, a characteristic aspect of new generations and their ubiquitous integration of Internet use. However, television is still present

before digital reports or newspapers are accessed. Television serves as a tool of media control and a source of anti-values (Latapí, 2003), which is why it is essential that these pre-citizens develop critical thinking and question the information they consume.

Attitudes were gathered from situations based on students' opinions about democracy in the country. Through the statement: "I am disenchanted with democracy in Mexico," students chose the response that best expressed their opinion from four options. The highest percentage selected "partially agree" (40.3%), followed by "totally agree" (33.3%). The other two options — "partially disagree" and "totally disagree"— received the same percentage (13.2% each). These results show that the majority (73.6%) perceive a discouraging situation regarding how democracy is conducted in Mexico. In contrast, the statement "I'm not interested in politics" showed a similar distribution among "totally agree" (21.6%), "partially agree" (29.6%), "partially disagree" (23.9%), and "totally disagree" (24.9%). Regarding politics, students' stance is polarized in terms of interest.

When combining a cognitive aspect based on a construct of what democracy is and how it functions with a negative sentiment toward it—and even toward politics—, it appears that students do not internalize political participation as an obligation for building democracy. This suggests that, in terms of democratic political culture, their attitude resembles a culture of subordination, which is undesirable in citizenship education.

The values identified during the review of learning modules or textbooks used by the students in the sample are: friendship, fraternity, honesty, equality, justice, liberty, respect, responsibility, solidarity, and tolerance. This list was provided to the students, and they were asked to select the three most relevant ones and rank them by importance.

Respect ranked first (44.4%), followed by honesty (15.9%), and liberty in third place (15.7%). The latter aligns with democratic and human rights values but is considered less relevant by the students. Other values related to collective well-being, such as equality and fraternity (the latter receiving no mentions), were less prominent. However, their choices reflect the prevalence of the formal discourse found in educational materials, which prominently

highlight respect, making it difficult to determine whether it is genuinely practiced in daily life or simply a reproduction of school discourse. Students' individual constructs regarding the selected values were not explored—this remains a pending topic.

Democracy is concretely enacted through citizenship. For this to happen, a structure of social organization must exist, and, as students expressed, the collective should prevail over the individual. Additionally, rights must be respected and aligned with current laws (Touraine, 2000). These aspects tie into the rule of law.

3.2 Rule of law

Regarding the rule of law and knowledge of the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents—relevant given the average age of the surveyed population—, it is notable that two rights were not widely recognized: being a priority due to being minors and the right to migrate, as responses were divided.

Table 2 shows all the results obtained. The shifting trends highlight items that are not rights but were included for control purposes: being discriminated against, skipping school, being forced to follow a religion, and having belongings searched by authorities.

In terms of knowledge of Mexican legislation regarding the rights to education, health, and work, 70.2% identified Article 3, which refers to education. In contrast, only 41% identified Article 4, which addresses the right to health. Article 123, which covers the right to dignified work, was recognized by 70.4%. In this case, it is important to build on the knowledge students already have and incorporate into educational policies the relevant articles, institutions, and means by which young people can access these rights—either to enforce or demand them.

On the other hand, the students also identified the rights to be acquired as Mexican citizens. They were able to recognize having a birth certificate (71.4%), obtaining information about what is happening in the social context through various media (78.1%), analyzing the information obtained and requesting clarification or further details (81.5%), respecting people living in conditions of social inequality or who have different religious beliefs, sexual orientations, political ideologies, or customs (84.5%), and

Table 2. Percentage of students who identified rights included in the general law on the rights of children and adolescents

Name of the right	Is a right	Not a right
Life, survival, and development	94.5	5.5
Being a priority	30.3	69.7
Having an identity	96.4	3.6
Living in a family	86.9	13.2
Exercising and defending my universal rights	96.9	3.1
Living in well-being and integral healthy development	97.7	2.3
Living a life free of violence and having personal integrity protected	97.3	2.7
Protection of health and social security	99.0	1.0
Inclusion of children with diasbilities	86.5	13.5
Rest and recreation	75.2	24.8
Freedom of expression and access to information	97.7	2.3
Participation	93.1	6.9
Association and assembly	84.8	15.2
Privacy	78.7	21.3
Migration	50.6	49.4
Access to Information and Communication Technologies	90.6	9.4

Note: Valid percentages reported. N=480.
Source: Own elaboration.

having a fair and impartial trial (87.7%). However, only 49.1% identified serving as an election booth representative as a citizen right. When individuals behave within the limits of the rule of law, we refer to a culture of legality. Regarding this, participants were asked about legal or illegal activities in the State of Sonora, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Most young people were able to differentiate legal activities. It is important to point out that the only item with a high rate of incorrect responses was same-sex marriage, which is currently illegal according to the legislation of the state of Sonora, even though other states have legalized it. From a generational perspective, Twenge (2017) notes that young people tend to accept and view same-sex marriage as something common and as a right for sexually diverse minorities. In this case, the response reflects a tension and a possible lack of awareness between what is legally established and what students believe should be protected by law.

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Table 3. Percentage of students who identified legal and illegal activities in the state of Sonora

Legal and illegal activities	Legal	Illegal
Drinking in public spaces	8.9	**91.1**
Bribery	3.4	**96.6**
Abortion	9.3	**90.7**
Graffiti	5.6	**94.4**
Same-sex marriage	45.0	55.0
Paying property taxes	**90.4**	9.6
Buying stolen goods	10.1	**89.9**
Corporal punishment by parents	36.1	**63.9**
Smoking marijuana	8.8	**91.2**
Using hard drugs	2.1	**97.9**
Littering	19.1	**80.9**
Buying antibiotics with a prescription	**91.9**	8.1
Driving under the influence	1.7	**98.3**
Speeding	1.5	**98.5**
Electricity theft	2.3	**97.7**
Internet/cable theft	13.0	**87.0**
Driving with a license	**97.1**	2.9

Note: Bold text indicates the correct response.
Source: Own elaboration.

The rule of law in a community does not always match what is desired or considered correct (Díaz, 1998). A similar situation is seen with corporal punishment by parents. Although violence and physical punishment are illegal, more than one-third of the respondents believe it is legal, indicating potential cultural acceptance.

In the list of legal and illegal behaviors students admitted to engaging in, the most reported were *drinking alcohol at home, driving a motor vehicle without a license,* and *participating in physical fights.* On the contrary, the top three activities they denied engaging in were *selling stolen or suspicious items, using drugs other than marijuana,* and *buying stolen goods.* The rest of the data is shown in Table 4.

Choosing to engage in legal or illegal behavior is an exercise of freedom; however, when engaging in illegal activities, this conflicts with democratic values, where freedom must align with the rule of law (Salazar & Woldenberg, 2012; Sartori, 2012). An important aspect of attitudes is the willingness to

Table 4. Percentages of students reporting having engaged in improper and/or illegal behavior

Behavior	Yes	No
Drank alcoholic beverages at home.	41.5	**58.5**
Drank alcohol in public places.	29.6	**70.4**
Smoked weed.	10.6	**89.4**
Used other drugs.	6.7	**93.3**
Took money from parents without permission.	24.6	**75.4**
Used a fake ID	9.4	**90.6**
Gave money to a public official in exchange for a favor.	8.4	**91.6**
Ate food in a store without paying.	9.2	**90.6**
Drove without a driver's license	40.4	**59.6**
Verbally threatened someone.	42.9	**57.1**
Participated in a physical fight.	33	**67**
Shared images/videos of others without consent.	25.8	**74.2**
Bought a stolen item.	8.2	**91.8**
Sold a stolen or suspicious item.	3.4	**96.6**
Hit a younger person.	23.7	**76.3**
Mocked someone for physical differences or language.	28.2	**71.8**

Note: N=480.
Source: Own elaboration.

report an illegal act. Students were presented with the following scenario: if a student is with friends at a store and one of them steals something, what would they do? Most said they would ask the friend to pay for it, but if ignored, they would do nothing and move on (58.7%). About 28.9% said they would both ask and report the behavior to an authority, 10.3% would ignore it completely, and 2.1% would report it without saying anything to the friend.

These findings suggest a weak civic commitment to the rule of law, either by demanding compliance with the law or defending the rights of those affected. Although students are aware that driving without a license is illegal, many still do it. These illegal behaviors point to self-regulation issues, which are crucial for peaceful coexistence (Marco,

2003; Chaux, 2005). Still, it is unclear whether these behaviors are socially tolerated (Laveaga, 2000) or whether they represent attempts at social inclusion or peer acceptance (Bauman & Leoncini, 2018), or even part of adolescent development where they challenge authority.

3.3 Proposal for a democratic school

The responses provided by the students when asked to suggest ways to promote a democratic school can be categorized into the following: a) Formal aspects, referring to curricular, power, or hierarchical changes and evaluation tools; b) school dynamics, proposing and organizing activities, campaigns, and initiatives; and c) agents, referring to actors in the school community and changes they wish to influence.

Some responses reflect the need to be heard or acknowledged, for example, by asking for spaces where they can express themselves freely or be considered in decision-making processes. One student shared: "I would like them to take us more into account when it comes to our safety; some people have trouble arriving because of the rain, etc "(Respondent 501228).

Others mentioned wanting to participate in defining school rules, planning events, improving cleanliness and surveillance, and expressed that current activities are imposed by adults. Students also questioned uniform rules, the ability to wear long hair (especially for boys), and wanted inclusion campaigns. This suggests elements of authoritarianism at school that restrict students' freedom of expression. One respondent wrote: "that students' opinions are truly considered, and our identity is respected" (Respondent 502103).

Few comments addressed academic improvement, but some students requested to choose their teachers, to have quality instruction, greater inclusion of the entire school community (including administrative staff and parents), to provide feedback on teachers, and to have a complaints box.

Students also criticized the behavior of some peers, "first, students need to be better people. We should start by improving them morally, then encourage their participation." (Respondent 501201), respondent 502145 added: I believe we would have greater influence if we changed the mindset that students have the power to change their situation".

These responses overwhelmingly indicate that high school environments are authoritarian, with decisions made by directors or teachers without considering students' freedom, identity, or representative organization. These observations align with Ortiz (2014) and the OEI report (2017). Similarly, Ravelo-Medina and Radovic-Sendra (2016) state that although students are willing to participate, school structures do not allow them to. These findings are supported by Razo (2018). Such school experiences may foster either active or passive citizenship (Dehdar, Sayegani, Arbab, Arzhandeh, Roshanray, Raeisi & Kuhi, 2019). To promote active citizenship, as proposed by the goals of upper secondary education, it is necessary to enable student participation and decision-making in ways that help them fully practice their rights (Martínez, 2005).

Educational institutions are evaluated by national and international bodies and are expected to meet specific learning outcomes. Budget allocations often depend on these achievements. This pressure results in a short-term vision among teachers and administrators, who focus on delivering and assessing curricular content. However, civic education is a long-term objective that may not yield immediate results, such as passing grades or access to scholarships, but it contributes to rebuilding the social fabric, reducing violence, fostering a culture of peace, and strengthening democracy through informed, critical, and engaged citizens.

Conclusions and implications for youth citizenship education

Socially, students exhibit democratic civic competencies aligned with the rule of law and collective well-being. However, the school environment restricts their intent to participate and limits their freedom of expression, decision-making, and self-identification. Rather than serving as a space for public participation, the school replicates hierarchical and restrictive models that foster passive citizenship.

Some social and economic implications are tied to a lack of knowledge of rights such as health, work, and migration. This may place them in vulnerable positions when entering the workforce, as they may not demand their rights. Strengthening self-regulation is essential to support legal

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decision-making and prevent actions that harm individuals and society, such as bribery or petty theft. Civic competencies can also enhance youth employability.

Civic engagement requires citizens to hold political representatives and institutions accountable. Following the pandemic, most public agencies have official accounts that students can use to make inquiries, complaints, or even legal claims.

While young people prefer digital social interaction due to the ubiquity of technology, civic education can also be extended into those spaces by promoting participation in forums, debates, or other platforms. They should be equipped with media and information literacy and critical thinking skills to identify cyberbullying and stay safe online. They can also demand that such spaces for interaction exist offline.

This research should be extended to teachers and school administrators to determine if they are adequately prepared to create democratic learning environments. While federal regulations set many constraints, some degree of pedagogical and administrative freedom remains that could be leveraged for this purpose.

Building on Heater's (2007) idea that citizenship education must address current dilemmas, it is crucial to outline a clear direction for education in preparing youth to become active citizens. For example, they should be informed about rights-protecting institutions like the Human Rights Commission and the Mexican Youth Institute, where they can participate in projects, access training, and learn about employment, health, and civic participation. In addition, they must develop behaviors, attitudes, and values that go beyond emotional responses and instead act consciously for the common good.

Empathy and tolerance should be reinforced, including discussions on inclusive language, such as the use of the neutral suffix -e in Spanish. A suggested extension of this research is to study non-conventional participation, as described by Contreras-Ibáñez, Correa, García, and Barragán (2005). It is necessary to explore how adolescents exercise democracy outside of school and to give them the opportunity to engage in democratic practices. Therefore, an experimental study is recommended to implement an active democratic citizenship education program and measure its effects on students' behaviors and attitudes.

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