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Article

Open classroom in a closed society: Effects of patriotism and ideological diversity in the Russian school

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Keywords: open classroom climate, political attitudes, patriotism, polarisation, secondary students

Purpose: This study investigates the relationship between political discussions and ideological composition in the classroom.

Design: The effects of class patriotism and within-class differences in it are analysed using the Russian data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study.

Findings: Students in more patriotic and like-minded classes perceive the classroom climate as more open, but it does not change its effect on knowledge. There is a negative relationship between ideological diversity and civic knowledge. These effects in Russia are neither unique nor the strongest among the ICCS participants. The reality of an open classroom might be far from the idealised notion of balanced deliberation, and its diversity remains a challenge rather than an opportunity.

Research limitations and implications: The study makes no claims about the directionality of the relationships due to their correlational nature. More research is needed on the quality of reasoning in social studies classrooms in times of polarisation and political turmoil.


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1 INTRODUCTION

Open classroom climate for political discussions holds a central place in civic education literature. In such a classroom, ‘students are exposed to the enlivening discussion of political and social issues, are encouraged to share their own opinions, and have their opinions respected by their teacher’ (Campbell, 2019, p. 37). First, open classroom aligns strongly with multiple approaches in democratic education, especially with deliberative theory, which emphasises its authenticity and role in fostering tolerance towards other viewpoints (Gutman, 1987; Hess, 2009; Maurissen, Claes & Barber, 2018). Democratic education considers students as already having a political existence in the form of being together in a community, which includes classroom discussions (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Second, there is robust evidence of its benefits for a range of civic outcomes, including civic knowledge, attitudes, and anticipated political participation (Knowles, Torney–Purta & Barber, 2018; Persson, 2015). Special interest has been paid to the so-called ‘compensation effect’ – mixed, but mounting evidence that open climate can be even more important for individuals from less affluent backgrounds (Campbell, 2008; Neundorf, Niemi & Smets, 2016; Weinberg, 2022) and with less democratic experience (Finkel & Smith, 2011).

As with any deliberative space, an open classroom is embedded in a social and political context. Teachers have to navigate sociocultural norms and parents’ expectations (Geller, 2020; Misco, 2013; Tan, 2017), biased curricula (Goldberg, Wagner & Petrović, 2019), and political constraints in classroom discussions (Chong et al., 2022; Ersoy, 2010; Ho, Alviar–Martin & Leviste, 2014). Most political socialisation happens outside civics education (Jennings, Stoker & Bowers, 2009; Quintelier, 2015), and students in the first grade already have political differences linked to their background (Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017). Political issues and divides they evoke can burst into the classroom with the news cycle (Sondel, Baggett & Dunn, 2018; Wansink, de Graaf & Berghuis, 2021) or be deliberately addressed by the teacher (Beck, 2013; Journell, 2017). Students’ pre-existing beliefs and political exposure regularly manifest themselves in classroom discussions. Teachers consider classroom composition in their professional decision-making (Chong et al., 2022; Engebretson, 2018; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Kello, 2016), and some evidence suggests that an open climate is less likely to occur in more “complicated” ideologically and socioeconomically diverse classrooms (Campbell, 2007; Cohen & Bekerman, 2022; Knowles, 2019;).

The lack of discussion opportunities for already marginalised students is not the only potential problem here. Although the open climate in quantitative literature seems to be often reduced to the procedure – what students discuss matters less than how they do it – it is clear that the meaning is as important, if not more important, than the form (Nelsen, 2020; Persson et al., 2020). Classroom situation is likely to be affected by political context not only through formal curriculum and textbooks but also through students’ and teachers’ background beliefs and political exposure. If political discussions systematically happen in classrooms dominated by certain sets of political beliefs, it challenges the notion of an open classroom as an exercise in democracy. This idea has been discussed in previous research, mostly in relation to inequality and exclusions promoted by the deliberative

ideal of classroom practice (e.g., Gibson, 2020; Knowles & Clark, 2018; Young, 2000).

This study focuses on Russia as a case to explore the role of classroom ideological composition in open climate perception and civic learning by secondary analysis of the ICCS data. The context of Russia is characterised by the absence of free public debate, criminalisation of dissent, and the radical expansion of a patriotic agenda in media and education, which escalated after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Rooted in state patriotism, educational policies (Goode, 2017; Sanina, 2017), textbooks' content (Okolskaya, 2012; Tsyrlina-Spady & Lovorn, 2015), and teachers' attitudes (Sanina, 2021) diverge from democratic ideals. Against this context, this article uses patriotism – its mean level in the classroom and within-class differences in it – to operationalise ideological composition. The findings implicate that classes that are closer to the 'imagined majority' and are more like-minded perceive classroom climate as more open. It raises questions about the functioning of an open classroom as a practice of democratic education. This is because the assumption that diversity of opinion will naturally come up in such a classroom probably does not hold.

2 DIVERSITY AND LIKE-MINDEDNESS IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Although open classroom climate is associated with a range of positive civic outcomes, the picture becomes more complicated when one considers factors behind its perception. Students with lower socioeconomic status seem to have less access to civic learning opportunities at school or can make less use of it (Hoskins, Janmaat & Melis, 2017; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Sampermans, Claes & Janmaat, 2021). Students from more ethnically diverse and less affluent schools experience less deliberation in the classroom (Campbell, 2007; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014; Torney-Purta, Barber & Wilkenfeld, 2007). While middle-class families have more open discussions at home (Bernstein, 2003), which potentially makes them more equipped to participate in the classroom, working-class students might feel that they do not fit in (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Moreover, the content and practices of civic education might not resonate with the political experience of marginalised communities and lead to their further exclusion (Knowles & Clark, 2018; Nelsen, 2020). There is a paucity of research so far focusing on ideological differences in the classroom. Using ICCS-2016 data, Knowles (2019) has shown that polarisation between low-status and high-status students on gender equality and ethnic rights is a significant predictor of open climate perception in some countries, and it might even accelerate the differences between low- and high-status students.

This result puts into question some preconceived ideas about the benefits of classroom controversy. Indeed, one might expect diverse classrooms to have a richer "argument pool", which would lead to more discussions, and less risk of "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), which would result in more students ready to voice their opinion without fear of social repercussions. Within-classroom differences might work as a resource and an opportunity for teachers, who use controversy and extreme statements by students as educational friction that creates an authentic learning situation (Parra, Wansink, Bakker & van Liere, 2022). Research informed by contact theory has demonstrated that inter-

group contact leads to less prejudice (Paluck, Green & Green, 2019), more trust (Österman, 2021), and depolarisation (Fishkin, Siu, Diamond & Bradburn, 2021; Mutz, 2006). Like-mindedness, in contrast, could be a problem, as it creates an additional challenge for teachers who strive towards multi-perspectivity and critical thinking to overcome (Beck, 2013; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). It has been shown that deliberation in like-minded groups (also called enclaves deliberation) lead to opinion polarisation when individuals move towards a more extreme point in the direction to which they were originally inclined (Andersen, 2022; Myers & Lamm, 1976; Schkade, Sunstein & Hastie, 2007; Sunstein, 1999).

However, as argued by Knowles (2019), classroom diversity can backfire because of an involuntary form of this contact and teachers' lack of confidence. Indeed, although teachers are generally encouraged to include controversial issues in their lessons, many of them report uncertainty and challenges (Anker & von der Lippe, 2018; Pollak, Segal, Lefstein & Meshulam, 2018). Teachers' professional judgement is shaped by contextual factors, such as policies and their perception, emotional histories behind the issue, and their professional identities and beliefs (Ho, McAvoy, Hess & Gibbs, 2017). They might engage in extensive self-censorship due to perceived pressure for neutrality (Hess & McAvoy, 2015) or political context (Ho, Alviar-Martin & Leviste, 2014). Given that more ideological differences between students create more space for controversy and even conflict, we might expect some teachers to be more hesitant about keeping a classroom open in more diverse classrooms.

Additionally, enclave deliberation in like-minded groups can promote the development of positions that would otherwise be not visible or not heard, and add to the 'social argument pool' (Karpowitz, Raphael & Hammond, 2009; Sunstein, 2018). Such groups can reach a consensus more easily, which, in turn, can lay the necessary foundation for the future action (Thomas et al., 2019; Yang, 2020). Following explicit rules of deliberation has also been shown to alleviate the negative effects of a like-minded group (Abdullah, Karpowitz & Raphael, 2016; Grönlund, Herne & Setälä, 2015; Strandberg, Himmelroos & Grönlund, 2019).

In sum, both diverse and like-minded classrooms have a potential for more open climate for political discussions, as well as for positive effects of such discussions when they happen. Realisation of this potential seems to depend on teaching strategies and political context.

3 POLITICAL CLIMATE AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN RUSSIA

Russia's political regime has been described as electoral authoritarianism under personalist rule (Gel'man, 2021) or as an information autocracy (Guriev & Treisman, 2019). It implies the lack of competitive public politics and suppression of free speech, but low levels of mobilisation and violence. Survey-based studies report high levels of popular regime support and conformist, apolitical, and paternalist attitudes among the people (Gudkov, 2015; Gudkov, Dubov & Zorkajya, 2008). However, to explore authoritarianism as co-constructed by elites and the public, recent studies highlight everyday politics, collective

identity, and “bottom-up” politicisation that exists among seemingly apolitical “common people” (Blackburn, 2021; Clément & Zhelnina, 2020; Goode, 2021b; Sharafutdinova, 2023). The dynamics of “top-down” and “bottom-up” regime legitimisation become evident in the case of patriotism.

From the “top-down” perspective, patriotism has been actively promoted by the state as the source of legitimation and social consensus since the beginning of Putin’s rule. His regime relied heavily on nostalgia for the Soviet times, the Orthodox religion, military symbols, and the official historical narrative (Bækken & Enstad, 2020; Goode, 2021a; Malinova, 2018; McGlynn, 2020). This policy intensified after the large protests of 2011–2012 and after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which was followed by public mobilisation around patriotic messages and record-high state investment in patriotic initiatives. State patriotism, considered synonymous with regime support and anti-Westernism, became the fact of daily life and “the only game in town”, functioning as the tool of elite competition for regime patronage (Blackburn, 2021; Goode, 2017; Goode, 2021b). Although the focus has shifted from commemoration to different forms of mobilisation activities after 2014, political participation is still not encouraged, overshadowed by the themes of unity and heroism.

From the “bottom-up” perspective, this state patriotism is not particularly widespread among Russian citizens (Lassila & Sanina, 2022). It is mostly endorsed by pensioners and state employees (Goode, 2021b), while young, urban, female, and higher educated are more sceptical towards the expansion of militaristic policies (Bækken, 2021). What people practice instead is so-called “everyday patriotism” – much more intimate, focused on family, hometown, language, and culture (Goode, 2017). Unlike state patriotism, “contaminated” by its connection to politics and thus considered inauthentic and hypocritical, everyday understandings are explicitly private and emphasise personal responsibility, such as being a good worker and family member. It is tied not to the state or the regime, but to the idea of a motherland that manifests itself in the nearby surroundings and spans historically beyond Putin’s regime or contemporary Russia as a state.

However, these two patriotisms are not parallel realities. While some argue that the vagueness of state patriotism limits its popular appeal (Bækken, 2021), others consider it to be the key to success: as an empty signifier, patriotism remains relatively open to multiple interpretations and practices from below (Le Huérou, 2015). Local movements and organisations, as well as individual participants, gathered under the umbrella of state patriotism, demonstrate diverse understandings of patriotism, identities, and ideological standpoints (Daucé et al., 2015; Hemment, 2015). The state also effectively appropriates elements of everyday patriotism for social mobilisation, as it happened with initially grass-root “Immortal regiment”, dedicated to family bonds, and overtly apolitical campaigns surrounding constitutional amendments in 2020 (Goode, 2021b). In turn, some of the state messages and symbols resonate with society and are reproduced as a hegemonic discourse shared by elites and the public. One of them is the myth of Russia as a uniquely harmonious multi-ethnic state devoid of any conflicts the polarised West (Blackburn, 2021).

Finally, people consider state patriotism to be an essential part of governance and a social norm, attributed to the ‘imagined majority’, even if they personally believe it to be ‘superficial and insincere’ (Goode, 2021b). This notion of a “patriotic majority” is especially consequential among those without a pro–Putin stance. Moved to engage in internal orientalism, they see themselves as a tiny and powerless ‘cultured minority’ among a ‘brain-washed majority with the slave–like mentality’ (Blackburn, 2020).

Public education has been one of the key institutions responsible for the patriotic agenda. Compared to other countries, the national framework of patriotic education in Russia is dominated by the themes of military training and affective ties to the country with no cognitive engagement (Sanina, 2017). The very first outcome listed in the Federal State Educational Standard (key curriculum document) relates to patriotism:

upbringing of Russian civic identity: patriotism, respect for the Fatherland, past and present of the multinational people of Russia; awareness of their ethnicity, knowledge of the history, language, culture of their people, their region, the foundations of the cultural heritage of the peoples of Russia and mankind; assimilation of humanistic, democratic and traditional values of the multinational Russian society; fostering a sense of responsibility and duty to the Motherland... (Minobrnauki, 2010)

Implementation, however, is not an automatic top–down process in education (Goodlad, 1979; Nygren, 2011), and no policy documents would have a real effect without social structures to support them. It is argued that the school system preserved its Soviet foundations of ‘ideological upbringing’, which made its recent restoration easy (Sanina, 2021). Many teachers, school administrators, and civil servants were shaped as professionals in the Soviet school and maintained their beliefs until the modern day. Their professional networks routinely reproduce a shared set of conservative values, such as tradition, stability, loyalty, and hard work (Sanina, 2021). In line with the theory of compensatory control, those dependent on the system are more likely to justify it (Shepherd & Kay, 2012), which makes public educators, as low–paid state employees, additionally inclined to endorse state patriotism. These conservative and patriotic foundations of the school system are reflected in the commemoration practices that culminate on Victory Day. Inspired by a mix of state and everyday patriotism, its collective activities emphasise conformity and social order (Linchenko & Golovashina, 2019).

The same framework is found in school textbooks. History is mandatory in all secondary grades; after a brief period of experimentation in the 1990s, state–sanctioned textbooks returned to the late Soviet narratives of national identity and glorious military past (Tsyrlina–Spady & Lovorn, 2015). Social studies are a separate subject taught in grades 6–11 (12–17–year–old students), comprising economics, law, sociology, political science, and philosophy. Its curriculum prioritises both disciplinary knowledge and skills and civic outcomes. The majority of schools have access to only one and the same textbook (Kosaretsky et al., 2019), first published at the beginning of the 1990s and well–aligned with the

national examination. This textbook has been criticised for the poor quality of disciplinary content (Velmoga, 2010), lack of connection to real social issues and reproductive assignments (Chernobay & Tuchkova, 2019; Kosaretsky et al., 2019), conservative bias prioritising security and conformity and representation of citizens as deprived of agency (Okolskaya, 2012), and endorsement of gender stereotypes (Agafonova, 2019).

Patriotism in Russia is an explicit educational goal reflected in the attitudes and practices of many educators and learning materials. It also functions as political identification and constitutes the ideological context in the society at large and in the school as a community, in which social studies classroom exists. It makes it reasonable to explore the role of students' patriotic views as a background factor in classroom political discussions.

Research questions

RQ1: What is the relationship between a perceived open climate and classroom ideological composition (mean level of patriotism and within-class differences in it)?

Given that patriotism in Russia has become 'the only game in town' – an idea shared by the 'imagined majority', actively promoted by the state in the media and the school system (Blackburn, 2020; Goode, 2017), it might contribute to the background, which makes open classroom climate more or less likely to emerge. First, we might expect more patriotic classes to perceive the classroom climate as more open because their discussions are more likely to be dominated by opinions considered uncontroversial in the context of the Russian school. Patriotic students are probably more likely to have a positive experience voicing their opinions in public and be politically closer to their teachers, which could create favourable conditions for classroom political discussions. Second, a separate effect could be attributed to within-classroom differences in patriotism. A like-minded classroom might function as an enclave, making students more likely to share their views and providing teachers with confidence in being able to manage the discussion without any serious conflict.

RQ2: How does a classroom's ideological composition moderate the effect of open climate on civic knowledge?

While it is known that an open climate leads to higher civic knowledge (Campbell, 2019; Persson, 2015), it is unclear whether its effect varies based on the classroom's ideological composition. Civic knowledge as measured by the ICCS is not a politically neutral construct, as it is designed to capture democratically relevant knowledge and thus has a strong normative orientation. Although it has been criticized for not being democratic enough in its civic ideal (Joris & Agirdag, 2019), it still reflects at least a minimalist conception of democracy and does not really align with authoritarian and state-patriotic policies. Hence, it is reasonable to suspect that 'political leaning' of the classroom might intervene in the development of democracy-related knowledge. On the one hand, we might expect an alternative of 'compensation effect' – the effect of ideological composition could be

more pronounced in a less open climate, or an open climate having more effect in a classroom with less favourable ideological composition. On the other hand, an alternative to the ‘acceleration effect’ is also possible: open climate and ideological composition could mutually reinforce each other. For example, given the normative framework of ICCS, we might expect a patriotic and like-minded, open climate to be less beneficial for civic achievement (measured by the ICCS test) than a more moderate and diverse open climate.

4 METHODOLOGY

This study employs data from the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2016). It is an international, large-scale assessment of 14-year-olds, administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). While the cognitive test targets civic understanding of democratic society, the student, teacher, and school questionnaires collect data on the context of learning both in and outside school (Schulz et al., 2016). Each school is represented by one intact class.

This analysis is based upon results from 7,040 students in 352 schools from the Russian sample of ICCS–2016 data. The rate of missing values was low for all the variables. Observations with missing values were excluded from the sample.

The data were analysed in R using mixed model linear and logistic regressions with design weights to account for the hierarchical structure of the data and the sampling procedure with the help of the “WeMix” package (Bailey, Kelley, Nguyen & Huo, 2022). Interaction terms are added to test the hypotheses about moderation. Some variables of interest are used both on the individual level and on the class level as aggregated scores, which could become complicated as individual scores are correlated with aggregated ones. To mitigate possible risks and ease the interpretation, in such cases, the student-level variable was centred around the group and the class-level variable was centred around the grand mean. By doing so, we decompose the relationship between the variable in the within-class and between-class components. Variables used only on one level were grand-mean centred.

All independent variables in the models are scaled from 0 to 10, and both continuous dependent variables are scaled from 1 to 100. This allows for interpreting model coefficients as percentage points change corresponding to a 10% change in the dependent variable. The section below describes the variables and measures in the study.

Ideological position and composition

Although ICCS does not have an explicit patriotism scale, it has a construct labelled ‘positive attitudes towards the country of residence’, which is measured by five statements: (1) ‘The flag of Russia is important to me’, (2) ‘I have great respect for Russia’, (3) ‘In Russia, we should be proud of what we have achieved’, (4) ‘I am proud to live in Russia’, and (5) ‘Generally speaking, Russia is a better country to live in than most other countries’. Given the key idea of patriotism is ‘a sense of positive identification with and feelings of affective

attachment to one's country' (Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999), this scale might work well to operationalize *individual patriotism*. In the Russian context, this scale theatrically resonates with both state patriotism, tied to state symbols, and everyday patriotism, emphasising culture and locality. To capture *class patriotism*, the same variable was aggregated at the class level. As mentioned above, patriotism on the student level was group-mean centred, so it no longer reflects students' absolute levels of patriotism, but rather their position relative to their classmates.

Class ideological diversity is another dimension of classroom composition, which is included in the models on the class level. It represents how far this class is from a consensus when it comes to patriotism and is measured as mean absolute deviation:

$$\text{Ideological diversity} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^N |\bar{P} - P_k|}{N},$$

where \bar{P} denotes the group mean of patriotism, P_k is the individual patriotism of student k , and N is the size of the class.

To account for both the absolute mean level of patriotism and within-class differences in it, the first principal component of these two variables was included in the first model as an alternative measure (*patriotic enclave*). Weighted principle component analysis was run on class patriotism and class ideological diversity, which showed that the first principal component explains 72,47% of variance. Both class patriotism has positive and class ideological diversity has negative loadings with this component, meaning that higher values of it indicate that a classroom is simultaneously more patriotic and more like-minded.

Open classroom climate

Open classroom climate is one of the most researched constructs in ICCS secondary analyses (Knowles, Torney-Purta & Barber, 2018). It is measured by seven statements in the student questionnaire (see Appendix), such as 'Teachers encourage students to express their opinion', 'Students bring up current political events for discussion in class', 'Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students'.

This study uses open climate variables on both individual (*individual perception of open climate*) and classroom level (*class mean perception of open climate*), which makes the latter a more objective measure of classroom environment, while the former captures individual "biases" in perception.

Civic knowledge

ICCS cognitive test assesses students' understanding of the concepts and principles underlying democratic governance and the functioning of political systems. This includes their knowledge of basic rights and responsibilities, as well as the role of citizens in the political

process. It consists of multiple-choice and short-answer questions, as well as tasks that require students to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios (Schulz et al., 2016).

For example, here is one of the multiple-choice items: ‘What is the best reason for the club to elect the leader by a vote rather than choosing a person who offers to be the leader? (1) Voting enables people to hold a second vote if they disagree with the outcome. (2) Voting is the fastest way to decide who should be the leader. (3) Voting enables every member of the club to participate in choosing the leader. (4) Voting ensures that every member of the club will be happy with the choice of leader’. The following prompt was used among constructed-response items: ‘In a democracy, what can be done to prevent political leaders misusing their power? Write two different things that can be done’.

Other variables

It has been shown that *student-teacher relationships* play a role in the perception of open climate (Maurissen, Claes & Barber, 2018). Having positive relationships with teachers can help students feel more comfortable and confident in the classroom. When students feel supported and encouraged by their teachers, they are more likely to take risks and ask questions. This variable is measured using the ICCS scale derived from five items (in Appendix), such as ‘Most of my teachers treat me fairly’ ‘Students get along well with most teachers’, and ‘Most teachers are interested in students’ wellbeing’.

To capture the student’s background, students’ *gender* and *home language* were included in the analysis, as well as family *socioeconomic status* derived from parents’ education and occupation. The mean of students’ socioeconomic status was also used on the classroom level to account for possible peer effects. Finally, the analysis controlled for political socialisation outside school by including students’ engagement in political *discussions outside of school*.

5 RESULTS

In this section, we examine the relationship between ideological composition, open climate perception, and civic knowledge in Russia, based on ICCS-2016. Table 2 reports weighted correlations between class-level variables. Class patriotism and ideological diversity are moderately negatively related, meaning that more patriotic classes also tended to be more like-minded. Classes with higher mean student socioeconomic status are less patriotic and more diverse. There is an exceptionally strong negative correlation between ideological diversity and open climate at the class level; however, it probably stems from the specificity of the school sample. This relationship is further explored in the following section.

Table 1: Weighted correlation between class-level variables

	Class mean perception of open climate	Class patriotism	Class ideological diversity
Class patriotism	0.197		
Class ideological diversity	-0.872	-0.303	
Class socioeconomic status	-0.073	-0.246	0.276

Open climate perception

The null model in Table 2 shows that 14% of the variance in open climate perception can be attributed to between-school differences, which justifies the use of a hierarchical model.

Table 2: Effects of patriotism and ideological diversity on open climate perception

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Student level				
Constant	51.342*** (0.548)	47.506*** (0.936)	47.070*** (0.923)	47.080*** (0.925)
Socioeconomic status		0.023 (0.120)	0.023 (0.120)	0.023 (0.120)
Female		5.963*** (0.456)	5.993*** (0.455)	5.993*** (0.454)
Russian as home language		1.042 (0.804)	1.324 (0.812)	1.278 (0.815)
Discussions outside school		2.079*** (0.131)	2.066*** (0.131)	2.065*** (0.130)
Student-teacher relationships		2.217*** (0.140)	2.162*** (0.140)	2.158*** (0.140)
Individual patriotism		0.179 (0.109)	0.193 (0.109)	0.194 (0.109)
Class level				
Class socioeconomic status			0.243 (0.265)	0.262 (0.272)
Class patriotism			0.798* (0.312)	
Class ideological diversity			-1.389** (0.472)	
Patriotic enclave				1.919*** (0.368)
ICC	0.14	0.11	0.10	0.09

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Unstandardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Sample includes 7,040 students from 352 schools.

When controlled for teacher–student relationships and background variables, individual patriotism is insignificant. Class–level patriotism is significant, but only at p -value=0.05, which should be interpreted with caution given the large sample size that might be producing significant results (Model 3). Strength of the effect is also weak: a 10% increase in class patriotism corresponds to 0.8 percentage points higher perceived open climate. Ideological diversity is significant at 0.01 level and has a stronger effect: a 10% change in ideological diversity leads to 1.4 percentage points lower perceived open climate (Model 3).

Model 4 uses the first principal component of class patriotism and ideological diversity as an alternative measure of classroom composition (labelled patriotic enclave in the table). This variable reflects a simultaneous change in class patriotism and like–mindedness, and a 10% increase thereof corresponds to a 2 percentage point higher perceived open climate. This effect is highly significant (p -value<0.001).

Discussions with friends and family and teacher–student relationships are found to be strong predictors of open climate perception. Girls report 6 percentage points higher open climate. Socioeconomic background characteristics on both levels and home language are insignificant, which means that these characteristics do not limit student’s access to this learning environment directly. Open classroom climate might be even negatively related indirectly through ideological composition, as more affluent schools demonstrate lower levels of patriotism and higher ideological diversity, while less affluent but more like–minded patriotic schools have the highest levels of perceived open climate.

Civic knowledge

Table 3 presents the results of multi–level regression on civic knowledge.

Table 3: Effects of patriotism and ideological diversity on civic knowledge

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Student level			
Constant	59.857*** (0.650)	56.576*** (0.946)	64.880*** (2.736)
Socioeconomic status		1.496*** (0.085)	1.501*** (0.085)
Female		1.066*** (0.321)	1.049*** (0.318)
Russian as home language		2.944*** (0.706)	2.843*** (0.695)
Discussions outside school		0.373*** (0.085)	0.337*** (0.085)
Student–teacher relationships		0.287** (0.105)	0.295** (0.104)
Individual patriotism		–0.632***	–0.632***

	(1)	(2)	(3)
		(0.086)	(0.086)
Individual perception of open climate		1.095*** (0.110)	1.105*** (0.110)
Class level			
Class socioeconomic status			3.114*** (0.251)
Class patriotism			0.030 (0.273)
Class ideological diversity			-0.955* (0.462)
Class mean perception of open climate			1.373* (0.563)
ICC	0.32	0.33	0.19

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Unstandardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Sample includes 7,040 students from 352 schools.

Specifically, 32% of the variance in civic knowledge in the Russian sample is produced by between-school differences; unlike the case of open climate perception, student background plays an important role in civic achievement on both individual and school levels. Moreover, a 10% higher individual socioeconomic status results in 1.5 percentage points higher knowledge, and the same increase in class socioeconomic status leads to a 3 percentage point change. Furthermore, students with Russian as their home language score almost 3 percentage points higher than other students.

There is a significant negative relationship between civic knowledge and individual patriotism, but not with class patriotism. Unexpectedly, there is also a significant effect of class like-mindedness: a 10% increase in like-mindedness corresponds to 1 percentage point lower civic knowledge. However, this effect is only significant at 0.05 level and should be interpreted with caution.

Open classroom climate is significant on both the student and class levels, which implies that both within and between-class differences partly explain variation in civic knowledge. However, no significant interaction was found between open climate and patriotism and like-mindedness measures. It appears that the effect of an open climate on civic knowledge is independent of ideological composition in the classroom.

Additional tests

To provide some comparative perspective for these results, two models (Model 3 from Table 2 and Model 3 from Table 3) are replicated on the Russian sub-sample of ICCS-2009 data and other countries' samples of ICCS-2016.

Table 4: Replication on the Russian sample from ICCS–2009

	(1) Open climate	(2) Civic knowledge
Student level		
Constant	49.106*** (1.004)	45.625*** (1.110)
Socioeconomic status	0.187 (0.174)	1.944*** (0.156)
Female	6.375*** (0.470)	1.257* (0.504)
Russian as home language	0.834 (0.972)	3.681*** (1.018)
Discussions outside school	1.696*** (0.131)	0.356*** (0.107)
Student–teacher relationships	1.853*** (0.175)	0.005 (0.155)
Individual patriotism	–0.240 (0.165)	–1.393*** (0.140)
Individual perception of open climate		1.849*** (0.161)
Class level		
Class socioeconomic status	0.960*** (0.279)	2.342*** (0.425)
Class patriotism	1.082** (0.340)	–0.586 (0.529)
Class ideological diversity	–1.297** (0.399)	–1.252* (0.536)
Class mean perception of open climate		2.949*** (0.572)
ICC	0.08	0.25

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Unstandardised coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Sample includes 4,165 students from 210 schools.

As demonstrated in Table 4, results from Russia are consistent between 2016 and 2009. Both class patriotism and diversity are significant predictors of open climate perception, while individual group–mean–centred patriotism is not. There is still a significant negative relationship between civic knowledge and ideological diversity in the classroom, as well as between knowledge and individual patriotism. It is worth noting that, unlike in 2016, in 2009, class patriotism and ideological diversity were weakly positively related: the weighted correlation is 0.126 in 2009 and –0.303 in 2016. In 2016, being a diverse classroom meant having relatively fewer patriots, but it was not the case in 2009. Despite this, the effect of ideological diversity in the classroom is similar.

Replication of the same two models on other country samples from ICCS–2016 does not show such consistency (Figures 1 and 2). Class patriotism is significantly positively related to open climate perception in Latvia, Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Italy, and Peru, while

Columbia and Hong Kong are countries with negative relationship between these two variables. Class ideological diversity is significantly negatively related to open climate perception in Estonia, Chile, Hong Kong, Malta, Mexico, Korea, Croatia, and the Netherlands. Both “old” and “new” democracies are represented in these countries, and results from Russia do not differ from them. It suggests that observed effects are not explained by the political regime alone. The same is true for the effect of class ideological diversity on civic knowledge: a significant negative relationship is also found in Estonia, Mexico, Hong Kong, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Dominican Republic, and Denmark. Once again, these countries represent vastly different political contexts.

The effect of patriotism-related variables in Russia is neither unique nor the strongest among the ICCS participants. It appears that more patriotic students within a classroom tend to have less civic knowledge and perceive (or report) a more open classroom climate. Class-level patriotism can have negative, positive, and no relationship to both open climate and civic knowledge in different national contexts. Ideological diversity is negatively related to open climate perception and civic knowledge in some of the countries, with no obvious grouping factor behind them.

Figure 1: Regression coefficients of patriotism and ideological diversity open climate perception (ICCS–2016), significant at $p=0.05$ in red

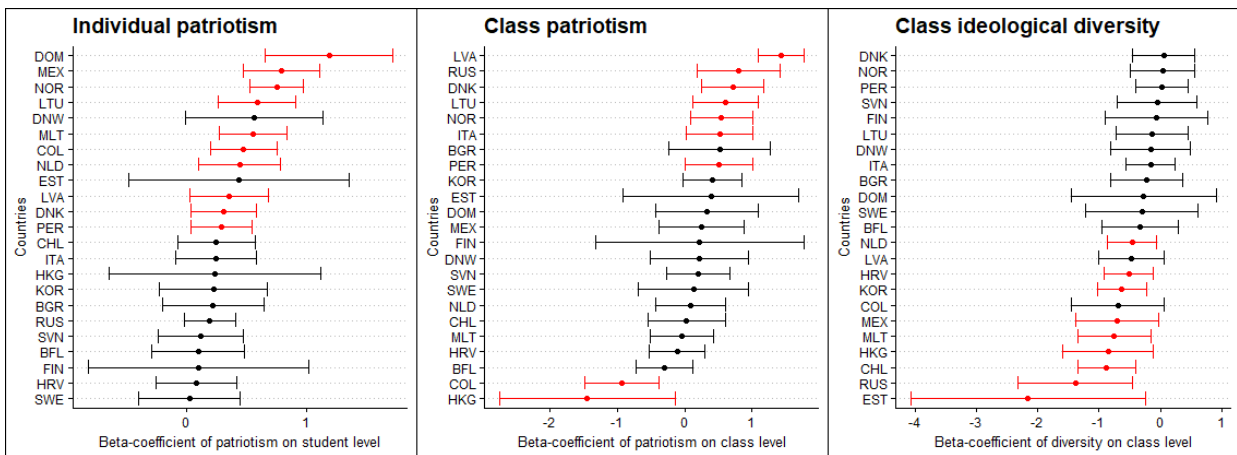
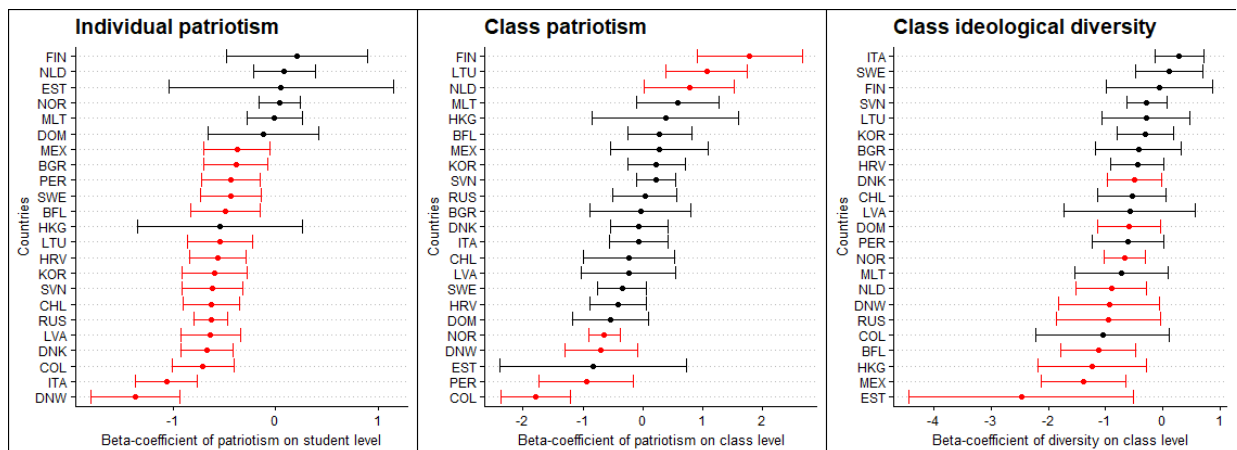


Figure 2: Regression coefficients of patriotism and ideological diversity on civic knowledge (ICCS–2016), significant at $p=0.05$ in red



6 DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effect of classroom ideological composition on perceived open climate and on civic knowledge in Russia. It demonstrated that students in more patriotic and like-minded classes perceive the classroom climate as more open. However, the ideological composition does not moderate the effect of an open climate on knowledge. Additionally, there is a negative relationship between ideological diversity and civic knowledge among the Russian 14-year-olds. Although this study focuses on Russia, its results are partly replicated for some of the other ICCS participants.

These results provide more evidence that the reality of an open classroom might be far from the idealised notion of balanced deliberation. It resonates with the findings from Knowles (2019), who reported the negative effect of classroom ideological polarisation on perceived open climate in some ICCS countries (with Russia not being one of them). This study found a similar effect in Russia using a different country-appropriate measure of ideological composition. In the case of Russia, an open classroom relates to patriotism and like-mindedness – positions actively promoted by the regime through media and education in opposition to democratic ideals (Goode, 2017). The effect of like-mindedness might be strengthened by its function as an enclave, providing a safe space with a mutual trust for students and teachers in the context of silenced public debate (Karpowitz, Raphael & Hammond, 2009), or the effect of the “spiral of silence”, which pressures individuals to side with the “imagined majority” or to stay silent (Blackburn, 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Patriotic and like-minded classes might also be seen as easier to handle by teachers, making them more likely to use “riskier” teaching approaches necessary for an open climate (Campbell, 2007; Cohen & Bekerman, 2022). It contrasts with the expectation that more diverse classrooms are particularly favourable for authentic political discussions (Hess & McAvoy, 2015).

This study also found a direct negative relationship between ideological diversity and civic knowledge, independent of an open climate in the classroom. While multi-perspectivity and diversity are highly valued in education for democracy (Gutman, 1987; Sandahl, 2020), working with them might become a professional challenge for a teacher. In a polarised classroom, motivated information processing might be activated, making students vulnerable to confirmation bias (Hart et al., 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006). They might become more likely to perform identity rather than engage in nuanced reasoning (Crocco, Segall, Halvorsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Hogg, 2014; Sandahl, 2019), while like-minded groups might face a value trade-off, which is linked to more complex thinking (Tetlock, 1986). Although this effect is replicated on both 2009 data from Russia and 2016 data from a many other countries, it is not highly significant, which is concerning in the context of the large sample size. It is however an interesting question to look into in further research.

Another obvious limitation of the study is the endogeneity problem, which stems from the fact that the relationship between classroom ideological composition, open climate, and civic knowledge is likely to be reciprocal. There are plausible alternative explanations of the link between these variables. Given that patriotism has long been an explicit

ideological framework of civic education in Russia, it is probably not just a background factor, but also an outcome of an open climate. The effect of class like-mindedness might be the evidence of regressing towards the mean – students becoming less extreme in their attitudes following civic education (Slomczynski & Shabad, 1998), which could be even more pronounced in the case of the open classroom if it is oriented towards consensus (implicitly or explicitly endorsed by the teacher). It also resonates with the discussion of homogenisation and moderation as a result of deliberation (Luskin, Sood, Fishkin & Hahn, 2022). Although an open classroom is very different from deliberative forums and even for the latter, evidence remains mixed, it is possible that a similar effect could occur there. Finally, it is possible that effective teaching resulting in higher civic knowledge also leads to even more acceptance of ‘companion meanings’ in the form of higher or lower patriotic attitudes. These alternative interpretations, however, problematise the notion of classroom climate even more.

Quality classroom discussions are a necessary part of social studies education, but it is easy to confuse them with other forms of classroom talk. This study shows that the open classroom, featured in the ICCS, is unlikely to be a diverse place and might even function as an echo chamber of mainstream political attitudes. If the social studies classroom is indeed meant to be a space where student subjectification might happen, it asks for more than just an open climate to discuss politics. For classroom discussions to be genuinely educative, more focus should probably be on the quality of reasoning than on the mere opportunity to talk (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Lo & Adams, 2018; Tväråna, 2019); otherwise, they risk leaving students with the same unchanged understandings and beliefs that they brought into the classroom (Beck, 2013; Crocco, Segall, Halvorsen & Jacobsen, 2018) and reproduce harmful stereotypes (Kittelman Flensner, 2015).

In the context of political polarisation and negative media effects, it constitutes an important challenge that teachers have to face. More research is needed on discussion-based strategies that account for the fact that students already have some attitudes, beliefs, and political identities, which potentially make them susceptible to motivated reasoning and group-thinking. While meaning-making in a classroom discussion can help students deepen their knowledge and advance their argumentation (Rudsberg, Öhman & Östman, 2013), such changes require teacher leadership and approaches that prioritise the quality of reasoning.

APPENDIX

Questions in the ICCS used to operationalize open classroom climate and the student-teacher relationships.

Open classroom climate

When discussing political and social issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen?

- Teachers encourage students to make up their own mind.

- Teachers encourage students to express their opinion.
- Students bring up current political events for discussion in class.
- Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
- Teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions.
- Teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class.

Student–teacher relationships

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and your school?

- Most of my teachers treat me fairly.
- Students get along well with most teachers.
- Most teachers are interested in students' well-being.
- Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say.
- If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers.

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