Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

What makes a good citizen? A multidimensional framework for measuring citizenship in contemporary societies

Fu Rui
Hubei Engineering University
Fadhlur Rahim Azmi
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
Mohammad Annas
Agung Putra University Indonesia
Veera Pandiyan Kaliani Sundram
veera692@uitm.edu.my

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)

Article

Keywords: good citizenship, responsible agency, citizenship measurement, democratic responsibility, digital citizenship, environmental citizenship, global citizenship

Posted Date: November 23rd, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11647183/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

What makes a good citizen? A multidimensional framework for measuring citizenship in contemporary societies

Fu Rui
Hubei Engineering University, Xiaogan City, Hubei Province, PRC
18871287691@163.com

Fadhlur Rahim Azmi
Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM),
Cawangan Melaka, Kampus Bandaraya, Melaka, Malaysia
fadhlur@uitm.edu.my

Mohammad Annas
Faculty of Social Sciences, Agung Putra University Indonesia,
Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia
mohammadannas@apu.ac.id

Veera Pandiyan Kaliani Sundram (corresponding author)
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, Malaysia
Malaysia Institute of Transport, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia
veera692@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

What makes a good citizen is contested as citizenship is exercised across political, social, digital, environmental and global domains. Established traditions offer substantial accounts of rights, participation and responsibility, but translating their connections into an integrated measurement architecture remains difficult. This study develops a framework through an integrative conceptual synthesis of citizenship theory and interdisciplinary scholarship. It proposes seven interrelated domains: civic responsibility, democratic responsibility, social responsibility, ethical responsibility, digital citizenship, environmental citizenship and global citizenship. Good citizenship is conceptualised as responsible agency involving rights, responsibilities, critical judgment and ethical action across these domains. The framework distinguishes the quantity of participation from its democratic and ethical quality and recognises that criticism and principled dissent can express civic responsibility. A proposed pathway towards a Good Citizenship Index specifies content validation, alternative measurement models, cross-context testing and evaluation of weighting and aggregation. The conceptual hierarchy does not establish a reflective higher-order factor, equal weights or universal behavioural indicators. Domain profiles are proposed as the initial form of reporting, with any combined score dependent on further normative justification and empirical validation. The framework offers an agenda for citizenship research, education and diagnostic policy assessment while locating individual practices within unequal opportunities to participate. It provides a foundation for measurement rather than a validated index or a basis for classifying individuals as good or bad citizens.

Keywords: good citizenship; responsible agency; citizenship measurement; democratic responsibility; digital citizenship; environmental citizenship; global citizenship

1. Introduction

Citizenship connects individuals to political institutions and communities through rights, responsibilities and practices of membership. Marshall's account of civil, political and social rights remains a foundational account of this relationship (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). Later scholarship foregrounds participation, identity, belonging and agency, showing why legal status alone cannot explain how citizenship is exercised (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Isin and Turner, 2002; Lister, 2003). The question of what makes a good citizen concerns these practices and their normative quality, rather than eligibility for nationality or entitlement to rights.

Answers remain contested. Conventional expectations emphasise voting, law compliance, civic knowledge and contribution to community life. Westheimer and Kahne (2004), however, distinguish personally responsible, participatory and justice-oriented citizenship, demonstrating that different educational ideals embody different political commitments. Dalton (2008) distinguishes duty-based from engaged citizenship, while Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) show how active citizenship can encompass political participation, civil society and democratic values. These approaches establish a substantial foundation for multidimensional measurement; they also leave open how to connect established civic domains with responsibilities emerging in other settings.

Contemporary citizenship operates across overlapping environments. Cultural diversity raises questions about recognition and unequal opportunities to participate (Banks, 2008, 2017). Digital platforms mediate information, mobilisation and public discussion; their democratic implications vary across outcomes and contexts rather than following a uniformly beneficial or harmful pattern (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). Ecological interdependence links everyday choices and collective action to environmental justice (Dobson, 2007). Global citizenship scholarship extends concern beyond national membership while recognising contested interpretations of global responsibility (Schattle, 2008; Bosio, 2021). These developments make an integrated account useful without rendering national institutions or established citizenship theories obsolete.

Integration is also a measurement problem. Contemporary assessment frameworks already distinguish civic knowledge, attitudes, engagement and contextual conditions. The ICCS 2022 assessment framework, for example, incorporates diversity, sustainability and digital engagement within a substantial programme of citizenship assessment (Schulz et al., 2023). The contribution proposed here is therefore not the discovery that citizenship has multiple dimensions. It is an explicit architecture connecting seven domains, clarifying the boundaries between them and identifying the assumptions that must be tested before combining their measures.

The normative qualifier "good" requires particular care. Participation can promote exclusion, intimidation or deception, while criticism and dissent can defend rights. Responsible citizenship consequently cannot be inferred from activity levels, institutional loyalty or trust in government. Recent work on democratic norms and resistance further demonstrates the tension between sustaining democratic constraints and challenging injustice (Chapman, 2024). A defensible framework must permit principled disagreement and distinguish evaluation of civic practices from judgment of a person's moral worth.

This study develops a conceptual framework comprising civic responsibility, democratic responsibility, social responsibility, ethical responsibility, digital citizenship, environmental citizenship and global citizenship. It asks which responsibilities these domains capture, how they relate, and what would be required to translate them into a future Good Citizenship Index (GCI). The synthesis treats good citizenship as responsible agency across domains: the exercise of rights, responsibilities and critical judgment in actions affecting shared life. Its contributions are to connect relevant theoretical traditions, distinguish participation from its democratic and ethical quality, and specify a measurement agenda that preserves contextual variation. The seven-domain structure is proposed for investigation; neither a universal factor structure nor an operational index is claimed.

2. The changing meaning of good citizenship

Citizenship scholarship has broadened the questions asked about membership rather than replaced one settled meaning with another. Marshall's rights-based account remains essential because social and political participation depend on substantive entitlements (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). Attention to practice nevertheless reveals variation among people sharing the same formal status. Lister (2003) shows why agency and inclusion matter to substantive citizenship, while Isin and Turner (2002) situate citizenship within a wider field of identities, institutions and social relationships.

One development concerns the relationship between duty and engagement. Voting, paying taxes and following public affairs remain important expectations in many settings, alongside advocacy, protest and participation through voluntary associations. Dalton (2008) documents different citizenship norms rather than a uniform abandonment of duty. Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology similarly distinguishes helping within existing arrangements, organising collective initiatives and addressing structural causes of injustice. These forms can coexist, but they should not be treated as equivalent indicators of a single civic ideal.

Another development concerns difference and recognition. Cultural pluralism challenges interpretations that equate citizenship with assimilation to a dominant identity. Banks (2008) connects democratic membership with opportunities to sustain cultural identities and participate in shared institutions; transformative citizenship additionally concerns action against exclusion (Banks, 2017). Good citizenship therefore requires a defensible account of coexistence across differences, including the ability of marginalised groups to claim rights and contest the terms of membership.

Digitalisation extends the settings of civic practice. Digital citizenship includes information literacy, ethical engagement and critical agency, beyond access or technical proficiency (Mossberger et al., 2008; Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017). DigComp 2.2 provides a contemporary competence framework addressing safe, critical engagement with digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (Vuorikari et al., 2022). It is a useful source of candidate competencies, although competence alone does not establish responsible civic use.

Environmental and global citizenship extend the reach of responsibility across space and time. Environmental obligations concern ecological systems and future generations as well as immediate communities (Dobson, 2007). Global citizenship concerns interdependence, human dignity and solidarity across national boundaries (Schattle, 2008; UNESCO, 2015). Critical

perspectives caution that global education can reproduce privilege unless it addresses power and inequality (Bosio, 2021). These extensions support a multidomain account in which national membership remains significant while civic practices have consequences elsewhere. They do not imply that all people face identical obligations or possess equal resources to discharge them.

3. Theoretical foundations of good citizenship

Conceptualising good citizenship requires engagement with competing traditions of political and social theory because no single theoretical perspective adequately captures the rights, responsibilities, relationships and forms of agency associated with contemporary citizenship. Liberal, civic republican, communitarian and deliberative-democratic traditions provide different answers to the question of what citizens owe to one another and to political communities. More recent critical, multicultural and transformative perspectives further challenge assumptions of cultural homogeneity, political conformity and equal access to participation. Rather than selecting one tradition as definitive, the present framework treats these perspectives as partly compatible and sometimes conflicting sources for identifying the core dimensions of good citizenship.

3.1 Liberal citizenship and the protection of individual rights

Liberal theories locate individual freedom, equality and rights at the centre of citizenship. Citizens are understood primarily as autonomous persons entitled to civil and political protections that enable them to pursue different conceptions of the good life. Rawls (1993), for example, emphasises political liberty, equality and principles of justice that can be accepted by citizens holding diverse moral and religious doctrines. Liberal citizenship consequently places strong emphasis on constitutional rights, equal political standing, freedom of expression, tolerance and the rule of law.

Nevertheless, liberal citizenship has been criticised for emphasising individual rights more strongly than collective responsibilities and social attachments. Critics contend that individuals are embedded within communities that shape their identities, values and obligations (Sandel, 1982; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994). Rights are therefore necessary but insufficient for explaining why citizens should contribute actively to collective life. The liberal tradition consequently provides the rights-based foundation of good citizenship but requires supplementation by theories emphasising participation, responsibility and the common good.

3.2 Civic republicanism and active participation

Civic republicanism shifts attention from citizenship as possession of rights towards citizenship as active participation in self-government. Republican traditions emphasise civic virtue, public responsibility, political participation and commitment to the common good. Freedom is not understood merely as absence of interference but also as protection against domination and arbitrary power (Pettit, 1997). Citizens consequently play an active role in maintaining institutions capable of protecting collective liberty.

Republicanism also highlights accountability. Because freedom requires protection against domination, good citizens should not be expected to accept authority passively. Monitoring public institutions, questioning arbitrary decisions and demanding transparency can constitute expressions of civic virtue. This reinforces the distinction between responsible citizenship and unquestioning loyalty. However, an excessive emphasis on a singular common good may risk marginalising citizens whose identities or values diverge from dominant norms. Civic participation must therefore be balanced with pluralism and protection of individual difference.

3.3 Communitarianism and social responsibility

Communitarian theory emphasises that individuals develop their identities and moral commitments through social relationships and communities. Sandel (1982) questioned conceptions of individuals as detached from their social attachments, while Etzioni (1993) emphasised the need to balance individual rights with responsibilities towards communities. From this perspective, citizenship entails obligations that arise from membership, reciprocity and concern for collective welfare.

At the same time, communitarian approaches require caution. Strong appeals to shared values may privilege dominant cultural expectations and place pressure on minorities to conform. Community cohesion should therefore not be achieved by suppressing legitimate difference. The contribution of communitarianism to good citizenship is better understood as emphasising solidarity, reciprocity and responsibility rather than cultural uniformity. A contemporary framework must recognise community attachment while retaining liberal commitments to autonomy and equal rights.

3.4 Deliberative democracy and democratic responsibility

Deliberative-democratic theory adds another requirement: citizens should be capable of engaging with disagreement through reasoned communication. Democracy is not limited to aggregating preferences through elections; it also involves processes through which citizens exchange reasons, evaluate competing claims and justify decisions to one another (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). Good citizenship therefore requires capacities such as listening, reason-giving, tolerance, openness to evidence and willingness to engage respectfully with opposing perspectives.

However, deliberative theory has also been criticised for underestimating inequalities affecting whose voices are heard. Young (2000) argues that apparently neutral norms of deliberation may disadvantage groups whose forms of communication or social position differ from dominant expectations. Inclusive citizenship therefore requires attention not only to participation but also to whether citizens possess meaningful opportunities to influence public discussion. This insight connects democratic responsibility with social inclusion and justice.

3.5 Critical, multicultural and transformative citizenship

Critical and multicultural perspectives extend these traditions by asking whether existing institutions distribute rights, recognition and opportunities equitably. Citizenship may formally promise equality while producing exclusion in practice. Banks (2008) argues that

citizenship within diverse societies must enable individuals to maintain cultural identities while participating effectively in shared civic institutions. Transformative citizenship goes further by emphasising citizens' capacity to identify structural inequalities and act to change unjust conditions (Banks, 2017).

3.6 Towards an integrative theoretical position

The traditions reviewed above disagree about what a citizen owes to a community when its expectations conflict with individual rights. Communitarian accounts help explain why people assume obligations to one another. Liberal accounts give citizens grounds to challenge those obligations when they infringe on individual autonomy. Both insights matter when a community asks its members to act in the name of solidarity.

The same tension arises in public decisions. Republican theory gives citizens a role in scrutinising authority, and deliberative theory asks how they justify decisions to one another. Critical and multicultural accounts raise a further question. Whose objections can actually influence the decision? An invitation to participate may count for little when those most affected have limited opportunities to speak or be heard.

We take equal standing, dignity and accountability as grounds for judging civic conduct. On these terms, a citizen who challenges an exclusionary practice may be exercising responsibility towards the community. This judgment informs our choice of domains and leaves room for disagreement about how a responsibility should be exercised in a particular setting.

4. Conceptual approach and framework development

4.1 Conceptual research design

The study uses an integrative conceptual synthesis rather than analysis of newly collected data. Such work can generate a contribution by connecting theories, clarifying boundaries and organising dispersed concepts (Torraco, 2005; Snyder, 2019). Following Jaakkola’s (2020) account of theory synthesis, the purpose is to construct a defensible relationship among citizenship traditions and contemporary domains. The resulting framework is a normative and analytical proposal, not the outcome of a systematic review or a statistically derived classification.

4.2 Scope and selection of conceptual sources

Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to citizenship rights, participation, responsibility, inclusion, deliberation and measurement. The foundational literature spans political and social theory, active citizenship, and digital, environmental and global citizenship. Contemporary scholarship and institutional frameworks published within 2021–2026 were considered where they clarified democratic participation, information environments, artificial intelligence, sustainability, global responsibility or assessment. Institutional frameworks are used as policy and curriculum resources; they are not treated as empirical validation of the proposed seven dimensions.

Selection prioritised conceptual relevance, substantive influence and a clear relationship to the framework's boundaries. This approach does not establish exhaustive coverage, a reproducible database search or consensus across cultures. No search-flow counts or claims of systematic evidence aggregation are made. The reference base should be understood as a reasoned foundation for theory development whose exclusions remain open to criticism.

4.3 Analytical logic and inclusion criteria

The synthesis connects four analytical tasks. First, it identifies contributions from liberal, republican, communitarian, deliberative and critical citizenship traditions. These concern rights and autonomy, participation and non-domination, solidarity, reasoned disagreement, and recognition and institutional change. Second, it compares the responsibilities implied by these contributions and distinguishes domains by the object or setting of responsibility. Participation in public affairs is separated from the principles governing political coexistence; interpersonal solidarity is separated from integrity in public conduct.

Third, candidate domains are assessed against four criteria: a defensible theoretical basis, a distinguishable contribution, contemporary relevance and potential operationalisation. Digital, environmental and global citizenship are retained because technological mediation, ecological interdependence and responsibility beyond national boundaries introduce specific objects of judgment and action. These are not exclusive spaces: a digital environmental campaign can implicate several domains simultaneously. Social cohesion is treated as a possible societal outcome, while patriotism is not retained because attachment to country does not by itself establish democratic or ethical conduct.

Fourth, the seven domains are organised around responsible agency. This integration is interpretive: the same literature could support a smaller set of cross-cutting capacities or a different domain structure. The framework makes its selection explicit so that alternatives can be evaluated rather than presenting seven dimensions as the only logically possible solution.

4.4 Status of the proposed framework

The hierarchy is conceptual, not a commitment to a reflective higher-order factor. Four dimensions concern recurring responsibilities in shared life, whereas digital, environmental and global citizenship specify settings or extensions of responsibility. This deliberate asymmetry preserves contemporary content but creates a potential overlap that empirical work must investigate. Ethical responsibility, for example, is both a proposed domain of public integrity and a principle relevant to every other domain. Separate scores would be defensible only if indicators capture distinguishable content. No items, numerical weights, thresholds or measured relationships are asserted in this study.

5. The multidimensional good citizenship framework

We propose seven related dimensions of good citizenship. Four concern recurring responsibilities in public life: civic participation, democratic coexistence, social solidarity and ethical conduct. The other three concern responsibilities that arise through digital communication, ecological interdependence and relationships across national borders.

Consider a citizen who takes an active part in public affairs but seeks to silence political opponents. Participation gives us evidence about civic engagement. How that person treats opponents bears on democratic responsibility. Keeping the two questions separate allows the framework to register both features of the same action.

5.1 Civic responsibility

Civic responsibility concerns a person's willingness and capacity to take part constructively in community and public affairs and to fulfil legitimate civic obligations. Voting, following public affairs, volunteering and organising a community initiative are possible indicators.

Participation has long occupied a central position in citizenship scholarship. Civic republican perspectives view participation as essential to maintaining collective self-government, while empirical research on citizenship norms demonstrates that contemporary participation increasingly extends beyond conventional electoral activities to voluntary associations, advocacy and issue-oriented engagement (Dalton, 2008). Hoskins and Mascherini (2009) similarly conceptualise active citizenship through multiple forms of participation encompassing political life, civil society and community activity.

Counts of activities reveal little about what participants seek to achieve. A campaign can draw large numbers while pursuing exclusionary aims. Assessing its democratic and ethical character requires evidence about its aims and how participants treat others.

Opportunities must be distinguished from willingness. Non-voting can reflect age, citizenship status, disability or exclusion, while limited volunteering can reflect unpaid care and insecure work. Candidate items should record eligibility, access and available alternatives. Civic responsibility should not reward the resources needed for visible participation as though they were personal virtue.

5.2 Democratic responsibility

Democratic responsibility concerns how people exercise political rights alongside others who may hold opposing views. It entails respect for equal rights and pluralism, a willingness to engage in peaceful disagreement and a commitment to holding institutions accountable.

This dimension is intentionally distinguished from civic participation. Individuals may participate intensely in politics while displaying intolerance towards opposing groups or rejecting democratic constraints. Conversely, democratic citizenship requires more than periodically casting a vote. Deliberative approaches emphasise the importance of reason-giving, reciprocal respect and willingness to engage with disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) further show that responsible citizenship can involve questioning existing structures rather than simply functioning within them.

Democratic responsibility also includes critical agency. Respect for democratic institutions should not be interpreted as unconditional institutional loyalty. Peaceful protest, criticism of government, demands for transparency and challenges to injustice may represent particularly important forms of democratic citizenship. The essential boundary is therefore between critical engagement and destructive rejection of democratic coexistence.

Possible indicators include willingness to hear an opponent's argument, support for civil liberties and rejection of political intimidation.

The framework's rejection of political violence concerns coercion and intimidation in civic coexistence; it does not reduce the ethics of resistance to a checklist of lawful acts. Chapman (2024) shows why an ethic of citizenship must address both democratic norms and constructive transgression. Scenario-based indicators should distinguish reasoned challenges to injustice from attempts to deny others equal standing.

5.3 Social responsibility

Social responsibility concerns the willingness to support others as members of a shared community. It includes solidarity with people facing exclusion, respect for cultural differences and practical concern for others' welfare.

Communitarian perspectives emphasise that individuals are embedded within social relationships and therefore possess responsibilities arising from interdependence and membership (Etzioni, 1993). Multicultural citizenship scholarship adds that social belonging must accommodate diversity rather than require cultural uniformity (Kymlicka, 1995; Banks, 2008). Accordingly, a socially responsible citizen recognises both common membership and legitimate difference.

A measure of this domain should distinguish civic solidarity from general agreeableness or private generosity. Helping someone challenge discrimination, for example, bears directly on that person's standing in the community. The relevant question is what the action means for inclusion.

5.4 Ethical responsibility

Ethical responsibility concerns the integrity of decisions that affect others in public life. It includes honesty, fairness, accountability and willingness to answer for the consequences of one's actions.

This distinction is important because technically lawful or politically active behaviour is not necessarily ethical. Corruption, deliberate deception, exploitation or manipulation can occur within formally legal or participatory settings. Citizenship therefore requires some basis for evaluating whether individuals exercise their rights and influence responsibly.

Critical-democratic approaches to citizenship education have similarly stressed the integration of democratic participation with moral development and concern for humanity (Veugelers, 2007). Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) distinction between personal responsibility and justice-oriented citizenship also illustrates that moral responsibility can extend from individual conduct to consideration of structural consequences.

Ethical responsibility should not be interpreted as adherence to a single religious or cultural moral code. For a cross-contextual Good Citizenship Index, indicators should instead concentrate on broadly defensible principles concerning harm, integrity, fairness and accountability.

To avoid duplicating the other dimensions, items within this domain should focus on public integrity: acknowledging errors, disclosing relevant conflicts and rejecting misuse of entrusted

resources. General empathy belongs primarily to social responsibility, while respect for opponents' political rights belongs primarily to democratic responsibility. These boundaries are provisional hypotheses for content validation.

5.5 Digital citizenship

People use digital platforms to follow the news, debate public issues, organise collective action and contact public institutions. In these settings, citizenship involves judging both the information one receives and the consequences of passing it on.

Digital citizenship is inherently multidimensional. Choi (2016) identifies ethics, media and information literacy, participation and engagement, and critical resistance as central components, demonstrating that responsible digital citizenship extends far beyond technical proficiency. Digital citizenship scales likewise include online participation, critical perspectives and forms of networked civic agency (Choi et al., 2017).

Motivated reasoning can shape judgments of political information, making evaluation of evidence a civic learning concern rather than simply a question of technical access (Kahne and Bowyer, 2017).

Jones and Mitchell (2016) distinguish online respect from online civic engagement, reinforcing the need to separate how people interact from how extensively they participate. These distinctions inform item boundaries rather than establish equivalence between youth digital citizenship scales and the broader GCI.

We use digital citizenship to mean the capacity and willingness to participate critically, safely and ethically online. This includes checking the credibility of a claim, protecting others' privacy and recognising the consequences of sharing unreliable material. The same obligations apply when a claim or image has been generated by artificial intelligence.

Recent evidence gives this domain greater specificity. Accuracy prompts can improve the quality of sharing decisions (Pennycook et al., 2021), and brief inoculation interventions can improve recognition of manipulative techniques (Roozenbeek et al., 2022). These findings support assessing verification and manipulation recognition through tasks, rather than asking only whether respondents consider themselves responsible. They do not establish a general citizenship trait. Miao et al. (2024) additionally foreground human agency, accountability and ethical judgment in AI education, supporting attention to the verification and responsible disclosure of AI-assisted civic content.

Other candidate indicators include online civility and responsible content sharing. Together with verification tasks, these reflect the combination of ethics, literacy and participation identified by Choi (2016).

5.6 Environmental citizenship

Environmental citizenship concerns how people recognise and act on obligations towards ecological systems, people affected by environmental harm and future generations. Decisions about transport, consumption and energy use can have consequences well beyond the communities in which they are made.

Dobson (2007) distinguishes environmental citizenship from approaches that seek behavioural change primarily through incentives. Environmental citizenship instead emphasises underlying attitudes, justice and responsibility, suggesting that environmentally responsible action should arise from recognition of obligations rather than solely from personal benefit.

The present framework treats environmental citizenship as broader than individual lifestyle choices such as recycling. It includes ecological awareness, sustainable behaviour, environmental stewardship and willingness to support collective responses to environmental problems. Importantly, environmental citizenship connects personal behaviour with questions of justice because environmental harms and benefits are distributed unevenly across populations and generations.

Evidence on climate mitigation interventions also cautions against inferring responsibility from intentions alone: behavioural effects vary across interventions and settings (Bergquist et al., 2023). Environmental indicators should therefore distinguish knowledge, commitments, feasible practices and collective engagement. Low consumption imposed by poverty and high consumption enabled by infrastructure require contextual interpretation; neither can be read straightforwardly as evidence of civic virtue or deficiency.

Potential indicators include conservation practices, support for collective environmental action and attention to who bears the long-term costs of present decisions.

5.7 Global citizenship

Global citizenship concerns people's ability to recognise interdependence across national borders and their willingness to act with regard for human dignity and cultural difference. Trade, migration and climate change connect people whose decisions affect one another even when they never meet.

Global citizenship remains conceptually contested. Schattle (2008) demonstrates that the concept encompasses several ideological traditions, including cosmopolitan, multicultural and environmental perspectives, rather than a single universally accepted interpretation. This plurality suggests that global citizenship should not require rejection of national identity. Individuals can maintain national attachments while simultaneously recognising universal human dignity and transnational interdependence.

The framework therefore emphasises human rights, intercultural understanding, global awareness, solidarity and recognition of shared humanity. Global citizenship also involves the ability to understand how local actions can generate consequences elsewhere. UNESCO similarly characterises global citizenship around knowledge, skills, values and attitudes supporting more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and sustainable societies.

UNESCO's 2023 Recommendation links peace, human rights, global citizenship and sustainable development within education (UNESCO, 2023). This provides a contemporary normative reference rather than proof of a universal psychological construct. Global citizenship indicators should assess understanding of interdependence and reasoned concern for others without rewarding travel, foreign-language fluency or elite cosmopolitan lifestyles as substitutes for responsibility.

A candidate task might ask respondents to explain how a local decision could affect people in another country and whose interests they would consider. Such a task would examine awareness of consequences and the reasons respondents give for taking others' interests into account.

5.8 Integrating the seven dimensions

The seven dimensions can overlap within a single act. In a digital campaign about an environmental issue, checking a claim before sharing it bears on digital citizenship. Weighing the ecological consequences of the proposed action bears on environmental citizenship. A measure needs to specify which judgment it is assessing.

The relative importance of the domains and the ways people express them may vary across settings. The framework proposes a common set of questions while leaving their interpretation open to local evidence.

Figure 1 summarises the architecture. Its connecting lines indicate conceptual inclusion, not causal effects or established factor loadings. The cross-cutting principles explain why an action can express several responsibilities; they do not authorise scoring the same response repeatedly. A seven-domain profile is therefore the primary proposed representation until evidence supports a defensible summary measure.



Figure 1. Multidimensional framework of good citizenship in contemporary societies.

6. From the framework to the Good Citizenship Index

The framework provides a basis for developing a Good Citizenship Index (GCI), but conceptual specification and empirical measurement are distinct. At present, the GCI denotes a future measurement programme, not a validated instrument. Its relationships can be expressed provisionally as GCI = f(CR, DR, SR, ER, DC, EC, GC), where the terms denote

the seven domains. The function remains unspecified because aggregation, weighting and compensation among domains require both normative justification and empirical investigation.

6.1 Measurement architecture and unit of analysis

The proposed unit is the individual's citizenship-related capacities, dispositions and practices within specified contexts. Initial validation should define a target population, such as adults in a particular setting, rather than immediately pool schoolchildren, non-citizen residents and electorally eligible adults. Rights to membership and public services must remain independent of any assessment. Table 1 provides illustrative measurement domains and boundary rules; its examples are not validated questionnaire items.

Table 1. Measurement domains and boundary rules

Domain	Detail content	Boundary and context rule
Civic responsibility	Public-affairs knowledge, community contribution and participation	Record eligibility and opportunity; distinguish engagement from democratic quality.
Democratic responsibility	Political tolerance, equal rights, deliberation and non-coercive disagreement	Distinguish principled dissent from denial of others' equal standing.
Social responsibility	Solidarity, inclusion, helping and recognition of diversity	Distinguish public solidarity from general agreeableness or private generosity.
Ethical responsibility	Honesty, public integrity, conflicts of interest and accountability	Focus on integrity in civic conduct; avoid duplicating empathy and tolerance items.
Digital citizenship	Verification tasks, privacy judgment, manipulation recognition and responsible AI use	Separate access and technical skill from critical and ethical participation.
Environmental citizenship	Ecological knowledge, feasible sustainable practices and collective action	Record material constraints; distinguish intentions, opportunities and action.
Global citizenship	Human rights, interdependence, intercultural respect and transnational solidarity	Avoid using travel, wealth or elite cosmopolitan experience as proxies.

Each domain should contain measures appropriate to its content. Knowledge and judgment can be assessed with tasks or vignettes, dispositions through carefully worded responses, and practices through bounded recall periods. These should initially be reported separately. A respondent who endorses tolerance but fails a judgment task presents a meaningful profile rather than a discrepancy to be concealed by averaging. The ICCS 2022 framework provides a useful precedent for separating cognitive and affective-behavioural content while recording

contextual conditions (Schulz et al., 2023); adaptation to other populations still requires validation.

The conceptual hierarchy leaves open whether domains are reflective latent variables, formative composites or a mixture. Factor analysis is appropriate for testing reflective hypotheses, but high covariance cannot establish that all theoretically necessary domains belong to one latent trait. If domains jointly define a composite, low correlation is not sufficient reason to delete one. Competing specifications should therefore be evaluated against construct meaning, content coverage and intended use, not fit statistics alone.

6.2 Item generation and content validation

Development should begin with a content map linking definitions to candidate measures and explicitly flagging overlap. Active and digital citizenship instruments provide useful precedents (Hoskins and Mascherini, 2009; Choi et al., 2017), but combining their scores would not validate this broader construct. Expert review should include political theorists, measurement specialists, educators and people from communities whose practices are being assessed. A structured panel or Delphi process can identify omissions and contested assumptions without treating expert agreement as universal legitimacy.

Cognitive interviews should examine how respondents interpret responsibility, dissent, community and global obligation. Translation requires cultural adaptation and testing of meaning, beyond literal equivalence. Pilots should check comprehension, response burden, ceiling effects and socially desirable answers. Eligibility and opportunity questions should accompany behavioural items, with “not applicable” kept distinct from absence of responsible agency. Figure 2 outlines the proposed sequence and the points at which revision may be needed.

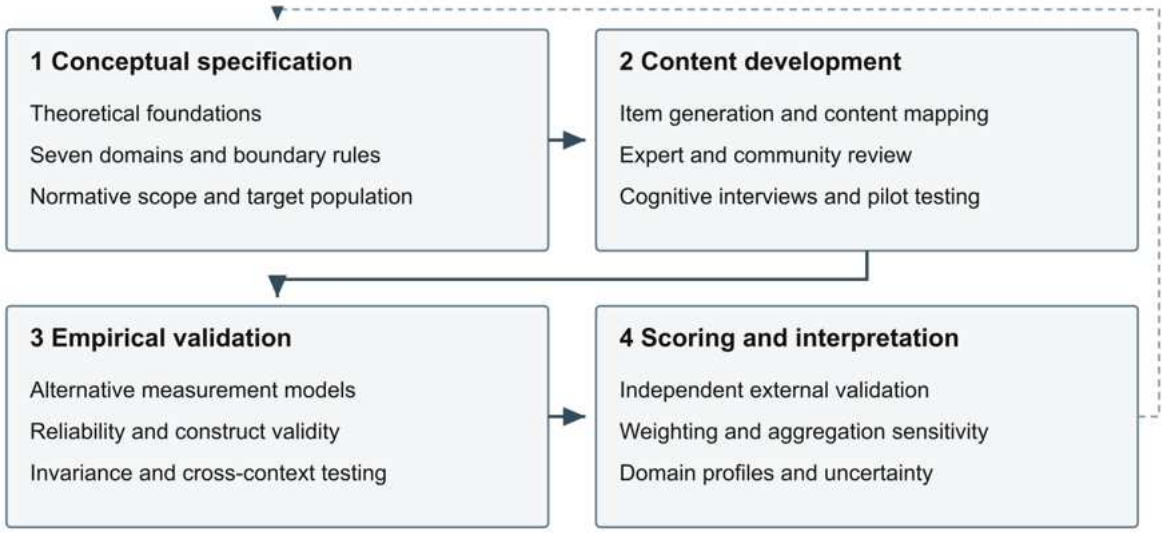


Figure 2. Proposed pathway towards development of the Good Citizenship Index.

6.3 Structural and cross-context validation

For reflective subscales, exploratory analysis should be followed by confirmatory tests in independent data. Correlated-domain and higher-order models should be compared with

plausible alternatives, including fewer domains and models that permit justified overlap. Reliability, temporal stability and convergent and discriminant validity require assessment at the level at which scores will be interpreted. Evidence of internal consistency alone is insufficient.

Cross-group comparisons require tests of measurement invariance and differential item functioning. Equivalent loadings may support comparison of relationships, whereas latent mean comparisons generally require equivalent intercepts or thresholds, or a justified partial-invariance strategy. Where equivalence fails, reporting should remain context-specific. An absence of comparable electoral opportunities, for example, should not be converted into a deficit in citizenship.

External validation should use outcomes and methods that are sufficiently independent of the scored indicators. Self-reported volunteering cannot validate a score that already contains the same response. Institutional trust is also not an unqualified positive criterion: distrust may be warranted under corruption or exclusion. Behavioural tasks, longitudinal evidence and independently assessed civic outcomes can test whether scores contribute information beyond education, income, political interest and response style. Such associations would not by themselves establish causal effects.

6.4 Weighting, interpretation and use

Domain profiles should precede any headline index. Equal weighting is transparent but normative; factor-based weights describe covariance rather than moral importance. Expert-derived weights make value judgments explicit but require scrutiny of whose judgments count. Candidate aggregation rules should be compared through sensitivity analyses covering weights, missingness, correlated content and opportunities to participate. Any imputation or rescaling must be documented, with uncertainty reported where it affects interpretation.

An additive score allows high performance in one domain to offset low performance elsewhere, creating tension with the claim that dimensions are non-interchangeable. Non-compensatory rules, minimum standards or profile-only reporting should therefore be considered alongside additive alternatives. No threshold for “good” citizenship is proposed. Population comparisons would be warranted only after adequate validation and with protections against re-identification and punitive use. The index’s intended purpose is to identify educational and civic-development needs, never to determine legal rights, access to services or individual moral worth.

7. Discussion

The proposed framework reconceptualises good citizenship as responsible agency exercised across interconnected civic, democratic, social, ethical, digital, environmental and global domains. Its central implication is that citizenship quality cannot be inferred from a single behaviour such as voting, law compliance or volunteering. Contemporary citizenship instead requires individuals to navigate multiple responsibilities. This extends established distinctions between duty-based and engaged citizenship by arguing that the relevant question is not only whether citizens participate, but how and with what consequences they participate (Dalton, 2008; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004).

7.1 From obedience to responsible agency

The first theoretical shift is from obedience towards responsible agency. Conventional understandings can inadvertently treat conformity, institutional loyalty and compliance as indicators of good citizenship. The present framework rejects that equation. Democratic responsibility requires respect for rights, legitimate procedures and peaceful coexistence, but it also permits criticism, protest and resistance where institutions fail to meet democratic or ethical standards. Recent scholarship similarly emphasises that healthy democracies require both adherence to democratic norms and forms of activism capable of challenging injustice (Chapman, 2024). Responsible citizenship therefore involves judgment about when cooperation advances collective welfare and when principled challenge is warranted.

This distinction clarifies an important normative problem. A politically active individual is not necessarily a good citizen if participation promotes intimidation, exclusion or violence. Conversely, dissent should not automatically be interpreted as civic deficiency. The framework therefore evaluates not only participation itself but also the democratic, social and ethical qualities through which participation is exercised.

7.2 From national citizenship to multidomain citizenship

The second shift concerns the domain in which citizenship operates. Traditional theories were largely organised around relations between individuals and the nation-state. Although this relationship remains fundamental, contemporary citizenship is increasingly enacted across territorial and institutional boundaries. Digital platforms create civic environments in which individuals consume information, deliberate and mobilise. Environmental problems connect everyday behaviour with consequences affecting distant communities and future generations, while global interdependence creates responsibilities beyond national borders.

The resulting conception is multidomain rather than post-national. The same person can simultaneously exercise responsibilities as a member of a political community, a participant in digital networks, an environmental actor and a member of an interconnected global society. Digital citizenship research supports this broadening by showing that responsible online participation involves ethics, literacy, critical judgment and civic engagement rather than technical access alone (Choi, 2016; Choi et al., 2017).

7.3 From participation to the quality of participation

A third implication is the distinction between the quantity and quality of civic action. Many conventional indicators reward visible participation, yet participation carries no automatic democratic value. Citizens may participate intensively while spreading misinformation, dehumanising opponents or supporting exclusionary practices. Digital environments make this distinction especially important. Research on misinformation also cautions against simplistic assumptions about its effects, reinforcing the importance of critical evaluation rather than treating information exposure alone as the central civic problem (Budak et al., 2024).

Information responsibility must also account for psychological and institutional conditions. Misinformation belief can reflect cognitive, social and affective processes, and correction can face persistent barriers (Ecker et al., 2022). Low performance on an information task should

therefore guide education and investigation, rather than be treated as a complete assessment of a person's citizenship.

The framework therefore treats civic responsibility as only one component of good citizenship. Democratic responsibility evaluates tolerance and peaceful disagreement; ethical responsibility evaluates integrity and fairness; and digital citizenship evaluates responsible information behaviour. Together, these dimensions permit a more demanding assessment of participation.

7.4 Universal core and contextual expression

Finally, the framework must avoid turning one cultural interpretation of citizenship into a universal standard. Conceptions of civic duty, community obligation, political participation and individual autonomy differ across societies (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994; Banks, 2008). Yet complete cultural relativism would make comparative measurement impossible. The framework therefore distinguishes between a common conceptual core and context-sensitive expression. Principles such as dignity, non-violence, accountability, fairness and responsibility can provide broad normative anchors, while their behavioural manifestations vary across political and cultural settings. This balance is central to the future Good Citizenship Index. Its value lies not in defining a universal model citizen, but in providing a coherent structure for examining how responsible citizenship is expressed, balanced and contested across contemporary societies.

8. Implications

8.1 Theoretical implications

The framework connects civic, democratic, social, ethical, digital, environmental and global responsibilities within an explicit architecture. Its contribution is the relationship among domains and the boundaries required for measurement, rather than a claim that previous scholarship ignored multidimensionality. Established distinctions between personal responsibility, participation and justice orientation remain central (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). The proposed structure extends these debates by asking how responsibilities operate across contemporary settings and how overlap should be evaluated.

The distinction between participation and its quality also changes what counts as evidence. Frequent engagement may coexist with intolerance or deception; limited visible activity may reflect exclusion. Context is therefore part of the explanation of citizenship practices, not merely a background variable. Empirical studies should examine whether opportunities condition relationships among knowledge, dispositions and action before treating score differences as individual attributes.

8.2 Policy implications

Subject to validation, domain profiles could help identify needs for civic learning, access to participation, inclusive deliberation and information literacy. Their usefulness would depend on triangulating survey findings with local knowledge and institutional conditions. Low

engagement in a community could warrant better access to transport, childcare or public consultation rather than a campaign to change residents' attitudes.

Policy use must also preserve the possibility of justified dissent. Neither support for government nor willingness to comply with every official request should function as a summary measure of citizenship. Aggregate findings should inform opportunities for civic development, with transparent interpretation and meaningful participation by affected communities. The proposed framework does not justify individual surveillance, punitive classifications or allocation of civic rights.

8.3 Educational implications

Curricula could connect civic knowledge with deliberation, ethical reasoning, intercultural understanding, information verification and environmental action. UNESCO's Recommendation offers a contemporary policy reference for integrating peace, human rights, global citizenship and sustainability (UNESCO, 2023). The AI competency framework provides additional guidance on human agency and ethical judgment in technology use (Miao et al., 2024). These resources complement transformative and multicultural approaches rather than replace their concern with power and inclusion (Banks, 2008, 2017).

Assessment should distinguish learning opportunities from achieved competencies, and competencies from civic practices. Vignettes, discussion and community projects can reveal different aspects of development; a single total score may obscure them. Programmes should be evaluated for whether they expand students' capacity to reason and act responsibly, including their ability to question the framework itself. Educational usefulness remains a proposition to test, not an established consequence of adopting seven domains.

9. Limitations and future research

The proposed framework is conceptual and therefore subject to several limitations. First, the seven dimensions were derived through integrative theoretical synthesis rather than empirical validation. Although each dimension is supported by established citizenship scholarship, their dimensional distinctiveness, relative importance and proposed relationships remain to be tested empirically. Future studies should assess content coverage and compare alternative reflective and composite specifications, using factor analysis where its assumptions are appropriate.

Second, the framework assumes that a common conceptual core of good citizenship can be identified across societies, while acknowledging that its behavioural expression may vary by political, cultural and institutional context. This assumption requires careful empirical examination. Future research should test measurement invariance across countries, age groups, educational backgrounds and cultural settings before using GCI scores for direct comparisons. Particular attention should be given to whether concepts such as civic duty, political dissent, social responsibility and global citizenship carry equivalent meanings across contexts.

Third, the framework does not specify numerical weights for the seven dimensions. Equal weighting may offer simplicity and transparency, whereas empirically derived weighting may

better reflect observed relationships among dimensions. Future research should compare alternative weighting strategies and examine their consequences for index interpretation.

Fourth, the proposed GCI may be vulnerable to social-desirability bias because respondents may overreport behaviours associated with responsible citizenship. Future studies should therefore combine self-report measures with behavioural indicators, scenario-based assessments or external validation measures where feasible.

Further research should also examine whether additional dimensions are required as societies change. In particular, emerging developments in artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance, platform power and digital political participation may require refinement of the digital citizenship domain. Longitudinal and cross-national research would be especially valuable in determining whether good citizenship is stable or evolves in response to institutional, technological and social transformation.

The source selection is purposive and substantially grounded in influential English-language traditions. Indigenous, non-Western, disability and other marginalised perspectives may challenge the proposed boundaries and normative priorities. Participatory reconstruction of the framework across settings is therefore needed alongside statistical validation; satisfactory model fit would not resolve these questions of representation.

10. Conclusion

How people participate matters as much as whether they participate. Someone who challenges an unjust decision may show democratic responsibility even when that challenge is uncomfortable for public officials. Someone who cannot attend a public meeting because of work or care commitments may have had little opportunity to participate. A count of civic activities would miss both distinctions.

The seven domains proposed here give researchers a way to examine such differences. They connect participation to the rights of others, the integrity of public conduct and the consequences of action across communities and generations. Their boundaries remain open to challenge, especially where a single act expresses several responsibilities.

The next step for the Good Citizenship Index is to test whether its measures distinguish these responsibilities and whether people in different settings understand them in comparable ways. Until that evidence is available, we propose reporting a profile across the seven domains. Combining them into one score would require an explicit justification for the weights and for allowing strength in one domain to offset difficulty in another. The purpose of measurement is to identify opportunities for civic learning and participation. A score should never determine a person’s rights or moral standing.

References

Banks JA (2008) Diversity, group identity, and citizenship education in a global age. Educational Researcher 37(3):129–139. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08317501

Banks JA (2017) Failed citizenship and transformative civic education. Educational Researcher 46(7):366–377. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726741

Bergquist M, Thiel M, Goldberg MH, van der Linden S (2023) Field interventions for climate change mitigation behaviors: A second-order meta-analysis. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 120(13):e2214851120. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2214851120

Bosio E (ed) (2021) Conversations on global citizenship education: Perspectives on research, teaching, and learning in higher education. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429346897

Budak C, Nyhan B, Rothschild DM, Thorson E, Watts DJ (2024) Misunderstanding the harms of online misinformation. Nature 630:45–53. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07417-w

Chapman EB (2024) Democratic norms and the ethics of resistance. Annual Review of Political Science 27:147–164. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041322-025033

Choi M (2016) A concept analysis of digital citizenship for democratic citizenship education in the Internet age. Theory & Research in Social Education 44(4):565–607. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1210549

Choi M, Glassman M, Cristol D (2017) What it means to be a citizen in the Internet age: Development of a reliable and valid digital citizenship scale. Computers & Education 107:100–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.01.002

Dalton RJ (2008) Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. Political Studies 56(1):76–98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x

Dobson A (2007) Environmental citizenship: Towards sustainable development. Sustainable Development 15(5):276–285. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.344

Ecker UKH, Lewandowsky S, Cook J, Schmid P, Fazio LK, Brashier N, Kendeou P, Vraga EK, Amazeen MA (2022) The psychological drivers of misinformation belief and its resistance to correction. Nature Reviews Psychology 1:13–29. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y

Etzioni A (1993) The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities and the communitarian agenda. Simon & Schuster.

Gutmann A, Thompson D (2004) Why deliberative democracy? Princeton University Press.

Hoskins B, Mascherini M (2009) Measuring active citizenship through the development of a composite indicator. Social Indicators Research 90(3):459–488. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-008-9271-2

Isin EF, Turner BS (eds) (2002) Handbook of citizenship studies. Sage.

Jaakkola E (2020) Designing conceptual studys: Four approaches. AMS Review 10:18–26. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0

Jones LM, Mitchell KJ (2016) Defining and measuring youth digital citizenship. New Media & Society 18(9):2063–2079. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815577797

Kahne J, Bowyer B (2017) Educating for democracy in a partisan age: Confronting the challenges of motivated reasoning and misinformation. American Educational Research Journal 54(1):3–34. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216679817

Kymlicka W (1995) Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights. Oxford University Press.

Kymlicka W, Norman W (1994) Return of the citizen: A survey of recent work on citizenship theory. Ethics 104(2):352–381. https://doi.org/10.1086/293605

Lister R (2003) Citizenship: Feminist perspectives (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lorenz-Spreen P, Oswald L, Lewandowsky S, Hertwig R (2023) A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy. Nature Human Behaviour 7:74–101. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01460-1

Marshall TH, Bottomore T (1992) Citizenship and social class. Pluto Press.

Miao F, Shiohira K, Lao N (2024) AI competency framework for students. UNESCO, Paris. https://doi.org/10.54675/JKJB9835

Mossberger K, Tolbert CJ, McNeal RS (2008) Digital citizenship: The Internet, society, and participation. MIT Press.

Pennycook G, Epstein Z, Mosleh M, Arechar AA, Eckles D, Rand DG (2021) Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. Nature 592:590–595. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2

Pettit P (1997) Republicanism: A theory of freedom and government. Oxford University Press.

Rawls J (1993) Political liberalism. Columbia University Press.

Roozenbeek J, van der Linden S, Goldberg B, Rathje S, Lewandowsky S (2022) Psychological inoculation improves resilience against misinformation on social media. Science Advances 8(34):eabo6254. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo6254

Sandel MJ (1982) Liberalism and the limits of justice. Cambridge University Press.

Schattle H (2008) Education for global citizenship: Illustrations of ideological pluralism and adaptation. Journal of Political Ideologies 13(1):73–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822263

Schulz W, Fraillon J, Losito B, Agrusti G, Ainley J, Damiani V, Friedman T (2023) IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 assessment framework. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20113-4

Snyder H (2019) Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. Journal of Business Research 104:333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Torraco RJ (2005) Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. Human Resource Development Review 4(3):356–367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484305278283

UNESCO (2015) Global citizenship education: Topics and learning objectives. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2023) Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development. Adopted 20 November 2023. UNESCO, Paris. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-education-peace-and-human-rights-international-understanding-cooperation-fundamental

Veugelers W (2007) Creating critical-democratic citizenship education: Empowering humanity and democracy in Dutch education. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education 37(1):105–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920601061893

Vuorikari R, Kluzer S, Punie Y (2022) DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens — With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://doi.org/10.2760/115376

Westheimer J, Kahne J (2004) What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal 41(2):237–269. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237

Young IM (2000) Inclusion and democracy. Oxford University Press.

Declarations

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analysed in this conceptual study. All sources supporting the framework are cited in the reference list.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. This conceptual study involved no human participants, primary data collection or identifiable personal data.

Consent for publication

Not applicable. The manuscript contains no identifiable individual participant data, images or personal information.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Use of generative artificial intelligence

OpenAI ChatGPT was used to assist with literature discovery, conceptual drafting, language revision and manuscript preparation. The conceptual diagrams were constructed programmatically from the proposed framework. The authors remain responsible for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the submitted work.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, conceptual interpretation, manuscript preparation and critical revision. Author 1 contributed to manuscript development and conceptual analysis. Author 2 contributed to the conceptual methodology, interpretation and manuscript review. Author 3 contributed to literature development, methodology support and manuscript review. Author 4 contributed to supervision, critical appraisal of the framework, critical revision and corresponding-author responsibilities. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.