

The chicken or egg question of adolescents' political involvement: Longitudinal analysis of the relation between adolescents' political participation, political efficacy, and interest in politics

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Abstract

Research on political behavior of young people often approaches psychological factors such as political efficacy or interest as antecedents of political participation. This study examines whether efficacy and interest are also outcomes of participation and if this effect differs across three types of political participation. Data from a two-wave longitudinal survey of 768 Czech adolescents (aged 14-17 at T1, 54% females) was used. Findings supported the proposition that psychological factors are affected by participatory experiences. Cross-lagged models showed longitudinal effects from participation to changes in psychological factors, but not effects in the opposite direction. Protest participation predicted higher interest and internal political efficacy, but lower external political efficacy; volunteering predicted higher external political efficacy; and representational participation had no effects on psychological factors. Overall, our findings point out the formative role of participatory experiences in adolescence and the diverse effects of different types of political participation on political development.

Keywords: Political participation; internal political efficacy; external political efficacy; political interest; adolescence.

Introduction

Political participation is an integral part of democratic society. Through past decades, research on political socialization has identified numerous psychological factors, such as political interest or political efficacy that are related to young people's involvement in political activities (e.g., Barrett, 2015; Cicognani & Zani, 2015). The prevailing approach is to treat these factors as precursors or predispositions of political behavior. Consequently, analytical strategies conceptualize political beliefs and attitudes as predictors and political behavior as outcome variables. However, it has been pointed out that the relation between psychological variables and participatory behavior is not necessarily unidirectional: not only do these characteristics increase active participation but also the participation itself could be a factor that enhances these characteristics (Finkel, 1985; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014). The effect of political participation on psychological variables is particularly important for young people whose political beliefs and attitudes are still being formed. Hence, focusing on youth, our study aims to re-examine and further explore the causal relations between political beliefs or attitudes and political behavior to provide more knowledge related to political development in adolescence. Such knowledge might bring, for instance, useful hints for the efforts to stimulate political participation among young people.

Although many studies are not explicit about their theoretical understanding of the link from political beliefs and attitudes to political behavior, the causal effects of psychological factors on behavior are elaborated by several well-established psychological approaches (e.g., drive theories or the theory of planned behavior). For instance, the theory of planned behavior assumes that person's positive attitude toward the behavior, perceived approval of the behavior by significant others, and perceived ease of performing the behavior result in higher behavioral intentions, which, in turn, increase the likelihood of performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Applying this theory in the context of political socialization, it has

been shown that young people's positive attitudes toward political behavior and their political efficacy beliefs positively predict their political participation (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2013; Jugert, Eckstein, Noack, Kuhn, & Benbow, 2013).

Despite its intuitive appeal, the causal effect from psychological factors to political behavior is not the only explanation for the well documented correlations between political beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. The theory of cognitive dissonance states that people seek to maintain cognitive consistency between their attitudes or between their attitudes and behaviors in order to avoid unpleasant mental states (Festinger, 1962). Hence, performing a behavior can *cause* changes in one's beliefs and attitudes in order to make them more consistent with the behavior (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Olson & Stone, 2005). Similarly, the self-perception theory postulates that people sometimes infer their attitudes or beliefs by observing their own behaviors. In other words, people might use their own behaviors as a source of evidence for their beliefs and attitudes that are formed after the behavior is performed (Bem, 1972). Therefore, in the domain of politics, it is possible that political participation shapes young people's political beliefs and attitudes, such as political interest or efficacy. However, it should be stressed that both views on the relation between psychological factors and political participation are not in contradiction. Specifically, the relation can be understood as bidirectional and recursive in the sense that political beliefs and attitudes motivate political participation and participation, in turn, shapes relevant psychological factors (Quintelier & van Deth, 2014).

Further, the directionality of the effects might differ across different life domains and developmental stages. As implied by the self-perception theory, the inference of beliefs and attitudes from one's behavior occurs predominantly if the internal cues on these beliefs and attitudes are weak or unclear (Bem, 1972). From the perspective of political socialization, adolescents and young adults typically do not have stable political orientations yet (Alwin &

Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Alwin, 1989) and their psychological commitments in the political domain are often not well articulated compared to other life domains, such as occupation or romantic relationships (McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016; Solomontos-Kountouri & Hurry, 2008). Hence, even though it seems adequate to assume generally bidirectional relations between psychological factors and participation, the causal link from participation to political beliefs and attitudes might be particularly pronounced in adolescents.

This study focuses on three well-established psychological correlates of political participation: political interest, internal political efficacy (or political self-efficacy), and external political efficacy (or perceived system responsiveness). Political interest can be defined as the degree to which politics arouses people's curiosity or, more simply, as the degree to which people pay attention to politics (Martín & van Deth, 2007). Internal political efficacy indicates a "personal belief regarding the ability to achieve desired results in the political domain through personal engagement and an efficient use of one's own capacities and resources" (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, 2009; p. 1002). Thus, higher internal efficacy captures ones' feelings of own competences within politics, particularly one's ability to actively participate in and achieve goals within this domain. Finally, external political efficacy captures perceived responsiveness of the political system to citizens' demands, a belief that politicians and political institutions listen to and react on citizens' political participation (Caprara et al., 2009; Morrell, 2005; Niemi, Craig, Mattei, 1991). Internal and external efficacy are not necessarily correlated: e.g., even if people perceive low responsiveness from government, they still can feel personally efficient to actively participate (and vice versa).

Both political interest and internal political efficacy are positively linked to political participation in adult and adolescent populations (Finkel, 1985; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady,

1995; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). If we conceptualize these variables as psychological precursors of participation, the most straightforward explanation of their effects would be that both of them provide pro-participatory cognitions (e.g., political knowledge enhanced by political interest) and regulate people's motivation to participate in politics (Bandura, 1997; Barrett, 2015; Cicognani & Zani, 2015). The effect of external political efficacy on political participation is less straightforward as the lack of external political efficacy might lead to political passivity as well as looking for alternative ways of participation. Therefore, the effects of external efficacy are sometimes believed to be different for participation within traditional political institutions, targeting elected political representatives, and non-institutionalized protest participation (Gamson, 1968; Pollock, 1983).

Although "political interest and political efficacy, for example, certainly facilitate political activity, but activity presumably enhances interest and efficacy as well" (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; p. 271), a relatively small number of studies have actually tested the directionality of their mutual effects. Using adult samples, a longitudinal study by Finkel (1985) showed that both internal and external political efficacy predicted electoral and campaign participation and, at the same time, both types of participation positively predicted external (but not internal) political efficacy. Another study by Gastil & Xenos (2010) found that political participation focused on political representatives (e.g., attending political meetings or activity in political groups) was predicted by internal but not external political efficacy. However, this type of participation had no reciprocal effect on internal efficacy, while it negatively predicted external political efficacy. At the same time, there were no relations between both types of efficacy and community-oriented volunteering. Further, Stenner-Day & Fischle (1992) showed that community-oriented volunteering had a reciprocal positive association with political interest, a reciprocal negative association with external

efficacy, and a unidirectional positive effect on internal efficacy. In the same study, representation-oriented activism had a positive reciprocal association with political interest and a positive unidirectional effect on internal efficacy. Finally, Christens, Peterson & Speer (2011) employed a broader construct of psychological empowerment, defined as individuals' control over their lives, participation in democratic decision-making, and critical awareness of their sociopolitical environments. They found that changes in psychological empowerment were predicted by community participation, but psychological empowerment did not predict changes in community participation. Overall, these results suggest that particularly external efficacy and political interest are affected by citizen's political participation, while the results are less consistent for internal political efficacy.

As noted above, adolescents, compared to adults, have less clear and less stable psychological orientations related to politics. Therefore, if we generalize the findings from adult samples to adolescents, we might underestimate the actual impact of participation on political beliefs and attitudes. Unfortunately, studies on the directionality between adolescents' political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are still lacking. An exception is a three-wave study on Belgian adolescents (ages 16, 18 and 21) by Quintelier and van Deth (2014). Results from this study clearly showed that despite common reciprocal effect, the effects from political participation to political interest and efficacy were stronger than the effects of interest and efficacy on participation. Two types of participation were considered in this study: general political participation, including activities such as signing petitions, participating in protest marches or attending political meetings, and political consumerism (i.e. boycotting or buying products for political reasons). The effects of political interest and political efficacy were more pronounced in the case of participation than consumerism.

Despite its contribution, a possible limitation of the study by Quintelier and van Deth is that it did not distinguish between the types of participation that appeared to be relevant in

the previous studies on adults (Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Stenner-Day & Fischle, 1992). The varying effects connected to the diverse types of political participation (as described above) emphasize the importance of differentiating between participatory activities such as representational participation or community-oriented volunteering. Hence, the aim of this study is to elaborate on the findings by Quintelier and van Deth (2014) by distinguishing between three types of participation: protest participation, participation oriented on political representatives, and volunteering. The protest participation can be characterized as extra-representational, which means that it does not primarily target representative officials (e.g., elected politicians) but it can be directed toward mass media, public opinion or companies. Addressing specific socio-political issues and causes, it can have a form of attending demonstrations or signing petitions. On the other hand, representational participation aims to influence politics through the formal channels of representative democracy, e.g. by working for political candidates or attending political meetings (e.g., Teorell, Torcal, Montero, 2007). Especially in youth, the protest activities can be more approachable than the representational activities, which can have both formal (e.g., young people not having full political rights) and psychological reasons (e.g., young people's detachment from formal politics, Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2016). Finally, community-oriented volunteering, sometimes labeled as civic engagement, represents activities aiming at achieving a public good through direct cooperative work with others. These activities are typically situated in non-governmental organizations, are not linked to formal representative channels (Janoski, Musick, & Wilson, 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006), and are often viewed by youth as a more appealing and meaningful alternative to representative politics (Galston, 2004).

To conclude, the goal of our study is to test the directionality of the effects between three psychological variables (political interest, internal political efficacy, and external

political efficacy), and three types of participation (protest, representational, and volunteering) in adolescence. We aim to show that pro-participatory psychological orientations not only predict participation but also are predicted by it. Moreover, we aim to explore whether these effects are similar for all forms of participation, or whether different participatory activities produce different effects on political beliefs and attitudes.

Method

Participants and procedure

Our longitudinal sample comprised 768 high school students from four (out of 14) regions in the Czech Republic. In May and June 2014 (Time 1), 1,137 high school students aged 14 to 17 were sampled using random cluster sampling of schools (based on an official register of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports). All ninth and tenth grade classrooms available at the time were included. About two thirds of students ($N = 768$) were present for a follow-up survey after one and half year (Time 2). Statistical analyses showed that students who participated at both times did not differ from those who did not participate at T2 in terms of their gender ($\chi^2_1 = 1.73, p = .19$), parental university/college education ($\chi^2_1 = 1.88, p = .17$), or school track ($\chi^2_1 = 0.34, p = .56$).

Mean age of the sample at T1 was 15.97 ($SD = 0.56$) and 54% were females. One third (34%) of students studied at academically oriented high schools, others at vocationally oriented high schools. One third (32%) had at least one parent with university/college education. Almost 22% came from small villages (less than 3,000 inhabitants), 37% from smaller towns (population between 3,000 and 15,000), 28% from bigger towns (population between 15,000 and 50,000), and 14% from cities (population over 50,000).

Both T1 and T2 data were collected at schools under the supervision of trained administrators. Based on the preferences of schools, students completed either paper or online questionnaires.

Measures

Political participation. We asked our participants whether they participated, in the past 12 months, in activities linked to some social, local, environmental, or political issues. Three items represented *protest participation*: signing printed petition (P1), signing online petition (P2), and taking part in a demonstration or other public protest (P3). Three other items captured *representational participation*: taking part in a rally of some political party or candidate (P4), helping for free in a political campaign of some political party or candidate (P5), and contacting a politician to communicate my ideas (P6). Three final items measured *volunteering*: working for free to improve the place where I live (P7), helping people in need (P8), and helping for free in an organization focused on social, local or environmental issues (P9). Irrespective of the type of political participation, the same response scale was used. The response scale ranged from “never”, “once”, “twice” to “more than twice”.

Confirmatory factor analysis employing a matrix of polychoric correlations (weighted least squares estimator with adjusted means and variances in Mplus 7.4 software) was used to test whether the nine activities represented three distinct participatory dimensions. A three-factor model assuming no correlations between residuals or loadings on multiple factors gave an acceptable fit both at T1 ($\chi^2_{24} = 51.24$; CFI = .96; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .04; standardized factor loadings from .57 to .84; inter-factor correlations from .22 to .48) and T2 ($\chi^2_{24} = 102.48$; CFI = .94; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .07; standardized factor loadings from .59 to .87; inter-factor correlations from .35 to .70). In contrast, the fit of a model assuming that all nine items represented single participatory dimension was considerably worse both at T1 ($\chi^2_{27} = 275.71$; CFI = .65; TLI = .54; RMSEA = .11) and T2 ($\chi^2_{27} = 309.29$; CFI = .78; TLI = .70; RMSEA = .12).

Political interest. Political interest was measured using a two-item scale created for the purposes this study ($r_{T1} = .75$; $r_{T2} = .79$): “I am interested in politics (I1)” and “I try to

keep up with what is happening in politics (I2)". The response scale ranged from "absolutely disagree" (=1) to "absolutely agree" (=4).

Internal political efficacy. The scale was created based on general guidelines for self-efficacy scales (Bandura, 2006) and other measures of political self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2009; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015). Using four items ($\alpha_{T1} = .86$; $\alpha_{T2} = .86$), participants assessed whether they believed they were able to carry out four local political activities: "If I wanted, I think I would be able to organize a local demonstration (IE1)", "negotiate with local politicians (IE2)", "organize a petition (IE3)", and "lead a group of people that stands up for some local cause (IE4)". The response scale ranged from "absolutely disagree" (=1) to "absolutely agree" (=4).

External political efficacy. Participants assessed whether they believed that local political authorities were responsive to citizens. Three items ($\alpha_{T1} = .66$; $\alpha_{T2} = .65$) were adapted from a broader political efficacy scale (Šerek, 2012): "When people in my town try to enforce certain cause, they are usually turned down by local authorities (EE1)", "In my town, there are set ways of how things work and it is pointless to try to make a difference (EE2)", and "People have no opportunity to influence the decision of local politicians (EE3)". The response scale ranged from "absolutely disagree" (=4) to "absolutely agree" (=1). The higher values indicated higher external efficacy.

Analysis

To collect our data, we used cluster sampling of schools. This could result in biased estimates of standard errors if there were considerable between-cluster differences and thus the observations were not independent. Therefore, as a first step, we checked that there was no substantial between-school variation in political attitudes. Specifically, we were looking for non-significant school-level variances (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), low intra-class

correlations, and design effects lower than two (Heck & Thomas, 2015; Muthén & Satorra, 1995) that would have indicated that the independence of observations was retained.

The main analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling in the Mplus 7.4 software (weighted least squares estimator with adjusted means and variances; pairwise deletion of missing data). For each political attitude, we estimated a cross-lagged structural model that included predictions of this variable at T2 from all three types of participation at T1, predictions of all three types of participation at T2 from a political attitude at T1, and autoregressive paths for all variables. All inter-correlations between these variables at T1 and all inter-correlations between their residuals at T2 were allowed.

In all models, nine indicators of participation (P1-P9) were treated as ordinal and the links between them and corresponding latent variables were estimated using probit regressions. Indicators of attitudes were treated as continuous. Measurement invariance over time was established by fixing all unstandardized factor loadings and (for attitudes) intercepts of particular items to be the same from T1 to T2. Residuals of the same item at T1 and T2 could freely correlate. At the same time, no correlations between residuals of different items were allowed.

All models controlled for the effects of gender (0= males, 1= females) and school track (0= vocational, 1= academic). These manifest variables were allowed to correlate with participation and attitudes at T1 and predict them at T2.

Results

Initial analyses

Descriptive statistics. Overall, the absolute levels of participation were similar from T1 to T2. Helping people in need was the most frequent and working for or contacting politicians were the least frequent forms of participation (Table 1). While there was certain

increase in political interest over time, absolute levels of internal and external political efficacy remained practically the same (Table 2).

Independence of observations. The observations seemed to be relatively independent. School-level variances in political attitudes were not significantly different from zero. Intra-class correlations were low (7% or less). With an exception of political interest at T2, all design effects were lower than two (Table 2). Although the design effect for political interest at T2 was still small and close to two, significance tests of its predictions should be interpreted with caution.

Main analysis

All models showed that protest, representational participation and volunteering represented three correlated but clearly distinguishable dimensions of participation. The correlation between protest and representational participation was strong but the correlations between the two and volunteering were only moderate (Figures 1-3). The levels of participation in all three types of activities were relatively stable over time.

Political interest. The structural cross-lagged model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{212} = 394.82$; CFI = .94; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .03). Political interest had a large stability over time and did not predict changes in protest, representational participation, or volunteering. However, protest positively predicted changes in political interest. Representational participation and volunteering had no effects on political interest (see Figure 1).

Internal political efficacy. A fit between the model and the data was acceptable ($\chi^2_{312} = 587.39$; CFI = .93; TLI = .91 RMSEA = .03). Internal efficacy had a medium stability over time and it did not predict changes in any form of participation. On the contrary, protest participation predicted positive changes in internal efficacy. Representational participation and volunteering had no effects on internal efficacy (see Figure 2).

External political efficacy. Again, our model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{260} = 467.38$; CFI = .93; TLI = .91 RMSEA = .03). External efficacy had a medium stability over time and predicted no changes in participation. In contrast, protest predicted negative changes, while volunteering predicted positive changes in external efficacy. The effect of representational participation on external efficacy was not significant (see Figure 3).

Discussion

Our study examined the mutual effects between psychological orientations related to politics and political participation in youth. Our investigation brought up two main findings and implications. First, we found support for the claims emphasizing that in youth, active participation has effects on political beliefs and attitudes, while effects in the opposite direction are less pronounced (Quintelier & van Deth, 2014). Specifically, our examination revealed that political participation affected the development of internal and external political efficacy and political interest. However, effects in the opposite direction were not found: when controlling for the level of prior participation, psychological characteristics of adolescents did not affect changes in their political participation. Second, our findings emphasized the need to differentiate between diverse types of political participation. Our data showed that while protest participation had its effects on the development of all studied psychological characteristics, volunteering contributed only to changes in external political efficacy, and representational participation had no consequences for political beliefs or attitudes.

Although the assumption that political participation shapes political beliefs and attitudes is still not common in the research on youth political behavior, it corresponds well with the propositions formulated within the cognitive dissonance theory and the self-perception theory (Bem, 1972; Festinger, 1962). These theories presume that people are motivated to change their beliefs and attitudes in order to make them consistent with the

previous behavior. In our study, adolescents' political participation was associated with subsequent changes in their political efficacy and interest. Moreover, the assumption that political participation shapes ones' beliefs and attitudes matches with current views on the development of adolescents' internal political efficacy, which emphasize the positive effects of mastery experiences (i.e. political participation) on adolescents' sense of confidence and competence in politics (Bandura, 1997; Beaumont, 2010; 2011). It seems that through their own political participation, young people form and clarify their political beliefs and attitudes. In particular, they build the confidence to be actively involved in politics and become more attentive towards this domain. Besides, through participation, adolescent form their opinions about the responsiveness of the political system and modify their expectations towards political representatives and institutions.

Nevertheless, two cautions must be made with regard to these conclusions. First, while supporting the link from participation to psychological factors, our results do not suggest that the effects from political interest or political efficacy to participation are completely absent. The data used in this study captured only a relatively short period (one and half year), and it is possible that the effects of psychological factors on participation manifest only slowly and within a broader time frame. Moreover, some political activities (e.g., taking part in a demonstration or helping in a political campaign) cannot be done instantly, but they depend on the opportunities present in one's surroundings. These might be the reasons why bidirectional effects between psychological variables and participation were not observed in our study. Second, we focused on youth in middle and late adolescence, which is a period characterized by relatively unstable and less crystalized political beliefs and attitudes (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991). Thus, it is possible that the effects from psychological factors to political participation become stronger later in life when the individual levels of political interest and efficacy stabilize. Consistent with this expectation, the effects from beliefs and attitudes to

participation tend to be more evident in studies on adult populations (Finkel, 1985; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Stenner-Day & Fischle, 1992) than in studies on adolescents (Quintelier & van Deth, 2014; and this study).

The second goal of this study was to identify if and how different types of participatory activities (protest, representational participation and volunteering) vary in their effects. Political interest and internal political efficacy turned out to be positively affected only by the involvement in protest activities but not representational participation or volunteering. This finding is in line with the idea that young people prefer the extra-representational activities, which go beyond traditional political institutions and are focused on specific social issues and causes, over representational activities such as working for political parties or contacting politicians (e.g., Cammaerts et al., 2016; Zukin et al., 2006). According to our data, the representational participation is not only very rare in adolescents, but it also has negligible effects on their political beliefs and attitudes. Compared to political protest, young people probably tend to perceive the representational activities as dull, which limits their potential to ignite political interest or to boost internal political efficacy. Further, our findings suggest that participatory experiences in more prototypical political activities, such as demonstrations, are more effective in boosting political beliefs and attitudes. Although volunteering is known to have numerous beneficial effects on the formation of adolescents' confidence and competences (Lerner et al., 2005), its impact on adolescents' perceptions of politics seems to be rather limited.

Additionally, protest participation was found to have negative consequences for external political self-efficacy, while the effect of volunteering on this variable was positive. A decline in external efficacy, resulting from the participation in political protests, can be due to disappointing outcomes, in which the demands of the protesting citizens were not fulfilled. Hence, although it seems that protest participation helps adolescents to develop beliefs in their

own capabilities to effectively participate in politics, many young people perceive, simultaneously, a growing skepticism towards the state and its institutions. In contrast, the positive effect of volunteering on external efficacy suggests that community-based voluntary activities might serve as a “safer” venue for gaining positive experiences regarding the system responsiveness. Because these activities are typically not confrontational and have less controversial goals, young people might get a stronger impression that the political change is feasible based on volunteering compared to protest participation.

Our data were collected in May/June 2014 (T1) and November/December 2015 (T2). In that period, the political context of the Czech Republic provided several incentives for young people to participate in both representative and protest political activities. Three types of election (European, local, and Senate) were prominent political issues in 2014. Similar to other European countries, the so-called immigration or refugee crisis became an important part of political debate in 2015. For instance, several anti-immigration protests and counter-protests, widely covered by the media, took part across the country. Considering that protest activities appeared to have the greatest impact on the formation of adolescents' psychological orientations in our study, it would be extremely beneficial to find out to what extent and in what way the content of protest activities matter. For instance, further research should address the question whether adolescents' participation in protests promoting intolerance has the same impact on political efficacy and interest as their participation in protests with the opposite political goals. Furthermore, it would be important to study the extent to which youth participation in activities promoting intolerance further reinforces their intolerant and extremely conservative attitudes.

Before we describe more general implications of our study, we should mention several limitations. First, although the study employs longitudinal data, both participation and psychological factors were measured at only two time points and it is possible that some long-

term effects were not captured. Second, we measured only the frequency of political participation but not its “quality” in terms of the level of adolescents’ personal involvement or perceived personal importance. Such information could provide better insights into the processes through which political participation affects political beliefs and attitudes. Third, our measures of political efficacy focused mainly on local politics (all items in the external efficacy scale and most items in the internal efficacy scale), while our measures of representative and protest participation were formulated in a more general way. Although we believe that young people are greatly concerned with local politics, it is possible that some effects between political efficacy and participation were underestimated in our study. Finally, only a limited set of psychological variables and types of political participation was considered. Future studies should assess variables such as support for democracy or social trust and also illegal political activities in order to get a more complex picture of the mutual effects between attitudes and participation. Moreover, further research should consider participation through social media because a substantial part of young people’s civic lives takes place in this environment (Bennett, 2008; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Despite these limitations, our findings can be beneficial for the efforts to increase political participation among youth. While these efforts (performed for example by parents or school) are often aimed at the change of attitudes towards politics, based on our findings, we would also recommend to encourage and support youths’ own engagement in participatory activities. A positive message for parents and civic educators is that adolescents’ political participation is not contingent on their political interest or political efficacy. Instead, it seems to be political participation that fosters political development in youth: in the political domain, experiences from participation seem to have an impact on adolescents’ beliefs concerning their own capabilities to participate in politics as well as on their interest in public affairs. Later in adulthood, both political efficacy and political interest, strengthened by participation

in adolescence, might, in turn, increase one's political participation (Finkel, 1985; Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Stenner-Day & Fischle, 1992). However, these efforts should also consider that the effects might differ across different types of participation. Parents and civic educators should be aware that some political activities are beneficial, reinforcing beliefs in own competencies, while some do not impact youth substantially, or even reinforce negative views on the political system.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Frequency of participation (%).

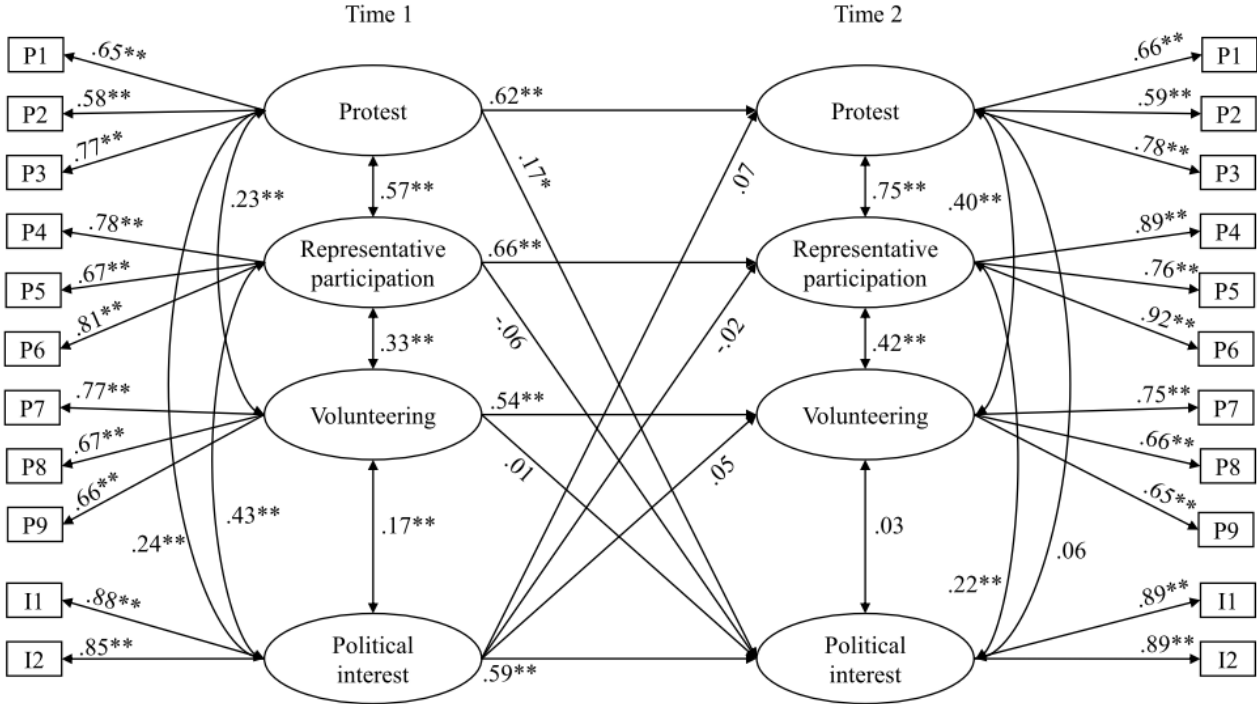
	Time 1				Time 2			
	never	once	twice	> twice	never	once	twice	> twice
Signing printed petition (P1)	69	22	6	3	69	22	6	3
Signing online petition (P2)	70	18	5	8	67	18	7	8
Taking part in demonstration (P3)	89	7	2	2	90	7	2	1
Taking part in political rally (P4)	92	6	2	1	92	6	2	1
Working in political campaign (P5)	96	3	1	0	96	4	1	0
Contacting a politician (P6)	96	3	1	1	94	3	2	1
Working for the place of living (P7)	58	18	6	19	62	16	8	14
Helping people in need (P8)	40	26	9	25	43	23	13	22
Helping an organization (P9)	80	12	3	4	79	14	3	4

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the summary scores.

	Time 1				Time 2			
	M	SD	ICC	Deff	M	SD	ICC	Deff
Political interest	1.85	0.84	2%	1.30	2.12	0.86	6%	2.08
Internal efficacy	2.30	0.75	1%	1.15	2.29	0.73	0%	1.06
External efficacy	2.60	0.60	0%	1.02	2.64	0.56	4%	1.80

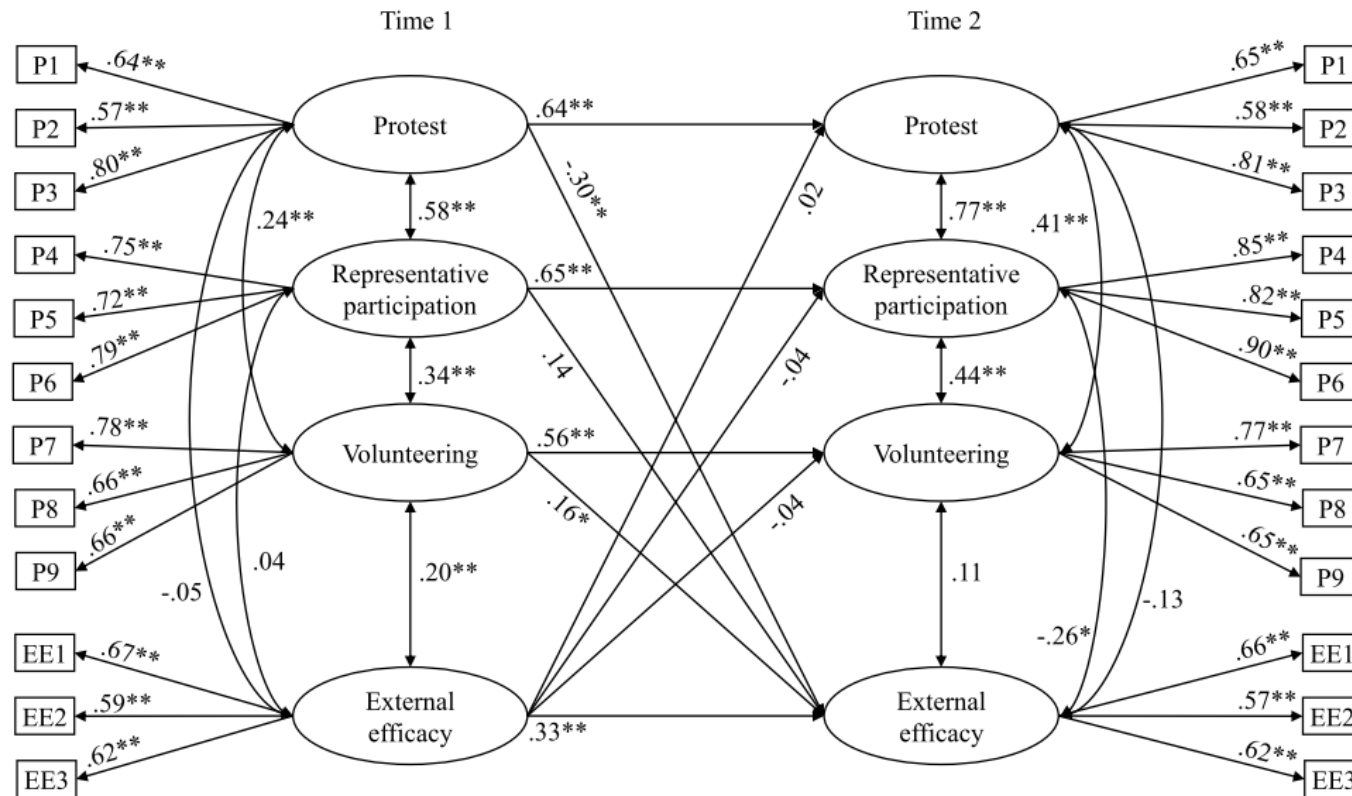
Note. Summary scores were created by averaging the items. M = mean. SD = standard deviation. ICC = intra-class correlation (school). Deff = design effect (school).

Figure 1. Structural cross-lagged model of the relations between political interest and participation.



Note. Standardized coefficients are presented. Correlations between latent variables at T2 are residual correlations. For the sake of clarity, we do not display cross-time residual correlations of the items and the effects of control variables. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Figure 3. Structural cross-lagged model of the relations between external political efficacy and participation.



Note. Standardized coefficients are presented. Correlations between latent variables at T2 are residual correlations. For the sake of clarity, we do not display cross-time residual correlations of the items and the effects of control variables. *p < .05. **p < .01.