



The future in our hands: How citizenship efficacy ensures commitment to the national group facing institutional inefficacy

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ABSTRACT

Literature has shown that citizens' mistrust in national institutions has a negative impact on their involvement with, and commitment to, their national group. We examine the idea that citizenship efficacy beliefs may revert this process. We propose that facing institutional inefficacy to exert social control, beliefs that civic participation is effective, strengthens individuals' commitment to the national group. Participants ($N = 176$) were informed that national institutions were effective (vs. ineffective) in reacting to white-collar crime, and that citizens' civic/political participation had an effective (vs. ineffective) impact on government's decisions, the political system and their nation's future. Results suggest that citizenship efficacy beliefs are crucial to counteract or even revert citizens' disinvestment in the national group caused by the perception that the social control system is ineffective. We discuss the results in light of the theoretical and empirical framework of social psychology of citizenship and subjective group dynamics theory.

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As former Chilean President Patricio Aylwin Azócar (as cited in Wages, 2014, p. 69) put it, ordinary people "often feel unmotivated to exert their citizenship, either because they cannot tell the difference between the (...) alternatives, or because they have lost faith in the political classes, or because they feel that the really important issues are not in their power to decide." Indeed, citizens often abstain from political and civic participation and disengage from their national group as a result of dissatisfaction with, and distrust in, national institutions, along with feelings of collective powerlessness. Associated with this phenomenon are people's perceptions that political institutions disregard their needs and views and/or are unable to secure core social values (cf. Antonini et al., 2015; A. C. Pinto et al., 2013; I. R. Pinto et al., 2016). Thus, individuals' trust or mistrust in the effectiveness of their national institutions' ability to exert social control should impact, respectively, positively or negatively, on their commitment to the society (cf. Dalton, 2004; Eder et al., 2014; Nye, 1997).

Social control and commitment to the national group

In line with the above idea, subjective group dynamics theory (SGDT; e.g., Marques et al., 1998; I. R. Pinto et al., 2010, 2016) proposes that individuals' confidence in the ingroup's ability to exert social control, is crucial to ensure their satisfaction, and commitment, to the group. Indeed, individuals should be motivated to uphold a positive social identity, that is, a satisfactory sense of ingroup membership and a concomitant positive image of the self as an ingroup member (Turner, 1975). As a result, SGDT proponents argue that individuals' perceptions that relevant ingroup members comply with the norms that sustain their belief in ingroup's positive distinctiveness from salient outgroups are paramount to uphold such positive social identity (Marques et al., 1998). Thus, individuals' confidence in the ingroup's

ability to effectively respond to members who violate such norms, should be crucial to ensure their positive social identity and motivation to contribute to the group. In line with this idea, research showed that the perception of an existing effective social control in the ingroup boosts individuals' optimism about the group's future, a positive ingroup emotional climate, and, ultimately, their motivation to actively participate in group life (I. R. Pinto et al., 2016). Conversely, the perception that the ingroup is not capable of effectively defending its core norms from threats coming from inside the group generates feelings of hopelessness, anomie, and weakens individuals' ingroup identification (I. R. Pinto et al., 2016; cf. also Bar-Tal et al., 2007; De Rivera & Páez, 2007; Fischer & Manstead, 2008). In other words, individuals' mistrust and dissatisfaction regarding national institutions may undermine their commitment to the national group.

We believe this negative process toward group disinvestment facing ineffective and untrusting national institutions may be evitable. In this work, we propose that believing in the effectiveness of collective/social action may be an important resource to prevent or to reverse this negative path.

Citizenship efficacy beliefs and commitment to the national group

According to Bandura (2000, p. 75) "unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act." Indeed, when individuals' distrust national institutions, they engage in social action only if they believe such action can lead to the attainment of the desired outcome (Bandura, 1982; Gamson, 1968). People who believe that their collective efforts can be effective and national institutions are trustworthy, should feel motivated to engage in conventional political activities. Conversely, people who believe that their collective initiatives have little impact and feel disaffected with national institutions, should fall into an apathetic state (Bandura, 1997, 2000).

In parallel, evidence also shows similar results regarding the association between perceived collective/social action (in)efficacy toward social change and individuals' commitment to the group. Existent literature shows that perception of group efficacy promotes a prosocial orientation (cooperation, help, and sharing; e.g., Bandura, 1997, 2000), predicts engagement in collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren et al., 2012, 2004), and strengthens ingroup identification, by increasing the tendency to engage in collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2010). Thus, citizenship efficacy (beliefs that through collective efforts, individuals can influence the political system, bring about social change, and contribute to social justice; see Bandura, 1995, 1997; De Groot et al., 2014) is a crucial determinant of civic participation and commitment with the national group. Civic participation can take many forms, ranging from enrolling in community service (e.g., volunteer activities that aim to strengthen the community and its members) to engaging in collective actions aimed to improve the community/national group or to achieve social change (Adler & Goggin, 2005). These actions can often be viewed as means to achieve social justice and intergroup equality or to improve ingroup status in an unfair social context (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this vein, they are forms of pro-group action. In addition, the motivation to participate and be involved in group life, occurs especially with highly identified members, suggesting that confidence in the effectiveness of civic participation toward social change (directed to improve ingroup conditions) should be a relevant factor in the maintenance or the increase of individuals' identification and commitment to the group.

The present study

We propose that when individuals believe that civic participation is susceptible to improve the national group, they may engage in it as a means to compensate for the negative effects of the perceived inefficacy of national institutions, therefore decreasing individuals' disengagement from the group as a result of such inefficacy. Thus, citizens' commitment to, as opposed to disengagement from, their national group, should be reflected on an increased, as opposed to a decreased, involvement in collective efforts, on national identification, and engagement in both formal/traditional (e.g.,

voting) and informal (e.g., solidarity, pro-social behavior, normative protesting behavior) group activities. Specifically, we propose that facing ineffective national institutions (i.e., national institutions do not deploy the necessary mechanisms to ensure ingroup's norms and standards), the belief that civic participation is effective in defending group values and interests, may counteract the path toward pessimistic emotional climate and anomie (I. R. Pinto et al., 2016), and maintain the citizens' commitment to the national group (national identity, and attitudes pro-engagement in traditional and informal pro-group activities).

Overview and hypotheses

We experimentally tested the above idea. Participants learned that their country either had (High Institutional Efficacy) or had not (Low Institutional Efficacy) effectively responded to a series of white-collar crimes. Participants were subdivided into two further conditions, depending on whether they were informed either that citizens' civic/political participation had (High Citizenship Efficacy) or had not (Low Citizenship Efficacy) an impact on government decisions, and a positive effect on society as well as on the lives of all citizens.

We reasoned that, if citizenship efficacy is indeed a compensatory mechanism, as we mentioned before, participants should attribute higher impact to citizens' participation (i.e., belief that civic participation produces positive changes in the national group), and express stronger commitment to the national group, in the Low Institutional Efficacy/High Citizenship Efficacy condition than in the remaining conditions. Conversely, participants in the Low Institutional Efficacy/Low Citizenship Efficacy condition should ascribe lower impact (and lower relevance) to citizens' participation and express lower commitment to the national group, than participants in the remaining conditions. Finally, we expected impact attributed to citizens' participation to mediate the effect of Institutional Efficacy and Citizenship Efficacy on commitment to the national group, such that participants who believe that national institutions are ineffective but that civic involvement is effective, should assign higher impact to citizens' participation and show increased commitment to the national group. In turn, participants who perceive both national institutions and civic involvement to be ineffective, should express weaker beliefs in the impact of civic participation and a decreased commitment to the national group.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 96 female and 80 male Portuguese nationals ($N = 176$)¹ aged between 18 and 75 years old ($M = 26.19$, $SD = 7.88$), with completed secondary education (15%) and higher education (85%), who volunteered to fill in an on-line questionnaire. Regarding the left-right political spectrum, the average score on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = *Left*, 7 = *Right*), was around the scale midpoint of 4 ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.46$; min = 1, max = 7).

Participants by condition ranged between $n = 40$ and $n = 48$. Participants' sex, age, and political orientation did not significantly differ across conditions, respectively, $\chi^2(3) = .20$, $p = .978$, $F(3, 172) = 1.74$, $p = .160$, and $F(3, 172) = 1.15$, $p = .329$.

The design was a 2 (Institutional Efficacy: High vs Low) X 2 (Citizenship Efficacy: High vs. Low) full between-participants factorial.

Procedure

Participants were contacted via online platforms (participation invitations with a link to the online questionnaire, were shared through Facebook, and sent, through the University mailing list,² to students, alumni, and staff), to fill a survey about civic and political participation. Participation was completely voluntary and not monetarily compensated. After giving informed consent, participants provided demographic information (e.g., age, sex, education, political orientation). We also included

nationality in the demographic questions to ensure that our sample was composed by Portuguese nationals only.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants read an excerpt stressing that according to a (fictitious) “European evaluation report on the procedures employed in fighting corruption, fraud, and economic crime, Portugal has already (High Institutional Efficacy) [vs. has not yet (Low Institutional Efficacy)] consolidated a strategy for detecting and punishing such practices.” Participants were subdivided into two further conditions according to whether they were informed that citizens’ actions had (High Citizenship Efficacy) or had not (Low Citizenship Efficacy) a clear impact on government decisions, important effects on the improvement of their nation, and constituting a social force able to stop deviant economic practices (see supplementary online material for further details, available at <https://osf.io/jbzne/>).

Dependent measures

Following the two manipulations, participants responded to a measure designed to evaluate the impact assigned to civic participation, and to measures designed to assess their commitment to the national group.

Perceived impact of civic participation

First, participants responded to an eight-item scale that measured the degree to which they believe that civic participation actually generates positive changes in the national group (1 = *I totally disagree*; 7 = *I totally agree*): “Civic participation is ... (1) a way to change something in our society.”; (2) a way to develop our country.”; (3) a way to defend Portugal’s interests.”; (4) a way to give support to the Portuguese people.”; (5) a way to strengthen our identity as a nation.”; (6) important because we must help each other.”; (7) a way to support and promote the national values.”; (8) a way to reinforce the standards that should be upheld in our country.” A principal components factorial analysis conducted on these items extracted one factor accounting for 71% of the total variance. We averaged the scores of all items to a measure of *Impact of civic participation* (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$).

Ingroup commitment

Second, participants answered four sets of questions designed to measure Ingroup commitment (i.e., citizens’ motivation to participate and be involved in the national group life and levels of group identification): (1) motivation to vote, (2) motivation to get involved in civic participation, (3) recognized importance of promoting and carrying out different types of civic activities, and (4) identification with the national group.

We checked for participants’ motivation to vote in the near future, by asking them: “To what extent do you feel motivated to vote?” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*) and “How likely are you to vote in the next elections?” (1 = *Unlikely*, 7 = *Very likely*). In order to assess participants’ motivation and likelihood to get involved in civic activities in general (e.g., in youth associations; religious groups; sports, cultural, and recreational groups; social movements; protest; volunteering), we asked them: “To what extent do you feel motivated to get involved (or stay involved) in any of the actions mentioned above?” (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very much*) and “How likely are you to get involved (or stay involved) in any of the actions mentioned above?” (1 = *Unlikely*, 7 = *Very likely*). Participants then evaluated the importance of promoting and carrying out nine types of civic activities (e.g., youth associations, protest, volunteering), “for the benefit of society, for the future of the country and as a means to defend and promote the national values and standards” (1 = *Not important*; 7 = *Very important*). Finally, participants answered to five questions aimed to measuring their identification with the national group (e.g., “I identify myself with the Portuguese society.”; “It is important for me to be a Portuguese.”; 1 = *I totally disagree*; 7 = *I totally agree*; I. R. Pinto et al., 2016). We conducted a principal components factorial analysis with varimax rotation on all the items of Ingroup commitment.³ The analysis yielded six factors accounting for

Table 1. Principal components factor analysis on ingroup commitment.

Item	Components						h ²
	<i>National identification</i>	<i>Associativism importance</i>	<i>Participation tendencies</i>	<i>Protest importance</i>	<i>Volunteering importance</i>	<i>Voting motivation</i>	
It is important for me to be a Portuguese.	.89	.08	-.02	-.01	.04	.05	.81
I am proud to be a Portuguese.	.88	.20	.09	.01	.03	.03	.82
I prefer to be a Portuguese than to have any other nationality.	.88	.03	.05	.03	.13	.08	.81
I have a strong bond with Portugal.	.87	.06	.04	.07	-.07	-.03	.76
I identify with the Portuguese society.	.64	.36	.04	.01	-.08	.11	.56
Youth organizations (e.g., Scouts, student associations)	.17	.88	.09	.13	.12	.02	.85
Sports, cultural and recreative groups	.12	.82	.10	.06	.17	.08	.74
Religious groups (e.g., parochial social action groups)	.24	.65	.11	.13	.29	-.05	.60
To what extent do you feel motivated to get (or to stay) involved in any of the actions mentioned above?	.09	.13	.95	.09	.07	.10	.94
How likely are you to get (or to stay) involved in any of the actions mentioned above?	.04	.13	.92	.12	.07	.20	.93
Petitions and protest (e.g., online petitions, complaints)	.10	.09	.10	.84	.14	.05	.76
Social movements (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, protest against government measures; adherence to trade unions; pro-environment or anti-racism movements or human rights groups)	.02	.10	.07	.77	-.06	-.10	.63
Discussions and debates on social issues (e.g., in social networks, discussion forums, blogs)	-.05	.07	.03	.68	.16	.27	.57
Volunteering (e.g., civil associations, solidarity institutions)	-.03	.20	.12	.06	.90	.03	.88
Adherence to social solidarity campaigns (e.g., collect food, clothing)	.06	.24	.01	.16	.89	.04	.88
How likely are you to vote in the next elections?	.01	.12	.08	.06	.01	.88	.79
To what extent do you feel motivated to vote?	.16	-.07	.21	.08	.04	.84	.78
% of the variance	22%	13%	11%	11%	11%	10%	
Cronbach's α	.90	.81	.93	.69	.87	.73	

77% of the total variance. As can be seen in [Table 1](#), consistent with our expectations, we found a factor loading the items correspondent to motivation to vote – we averaged these items to a *Voting motivation* index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$). Another factor loaded items correspondent to motivation to get involved in civic participation – we averaged these items into a *Participation tendencies* index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$). Then, the different civic activities evaluated (regarding the importance of carrying out each of them) were grouped in three different scores: we computed an *Associativism importance* score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$); *Protest importance* score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$); and a *Volunteering importance* score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$), corresponding to the average of items that loaded in each factor. Finally, we averaged the five items that measured identification with the national group, to a *National identification* score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). We, thus, obtained six distinct dimensions of Ingroup commitment (see [Table 2](#) for summary of means and standard deviations of all dependent measures by condition).

On completion, participants were thanked and fully debriefed about the deceptions involved in the study.

Table 2. Means and standard deviation of all dependent variables by experimental condition.

	Institutional efficacy				Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
	High		Low		
	Citizenship efficacy		Citizenship efficacy		
	High	Low	High	Low	
Impact of civic participation	5.56 (1.21)	5.91 (1.09)	6.08 (0.82)	5.47 (0.97)	5.74 (1.06)
Ingroup commitment (each six dimensions)					
<i>Voting motivation</i>	5.68 (1.69)	5.82 (1.72)	5.86 (1.29)	5.72 (1.60)	5.72 (1.60)
<i>Participation tendencies</i>	4.64 (1.88)	4.71 (1.94)	4.83 (1.45)	4.43 (1.84)	4.64 (1.84)
<i>Associativism importance</i>	4.71 (1.50)	4.35 (1.77)	4.92 (1.34)	4.57 (1.45)	4.63 (1.52)
<i>Protest importance</i>	4.88 (5.18)	5.18 (1.55)	5.33 (1.20)	5.09 (1.22)	5.11 (1.28)
<i>Volunteering importance</i>	5.60 (1.47)	5.84 (1.45)	5.98 (1.09)	5.81 (1.26)	5.80 (1.33)
<i>National identification</i>	5.13 (1.44)	4.85 (1.44)	5.46 (1.31)	4.67 (1.54)	5.03 (1.48)

Results

Moderation analysis

We started our data analysis by conducting seven moderation analyzes (Model 1 with 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2018) to test the moderating effect of Citizenship Efficacy on the association (1) between Institution Efficacy and Impact of civic participation and (2) between Institution Efficacy and Ingroup commitment (i.e., one moderation analysis for each of the Ingroup commitment dimensions: Voting motivation, Participation tendencies, Associativism importance, Protest importance, Volunteering importance, and National identification).

Impact of civic participation

We expected participants to assign the highest impact to citizens' participation when they learn that national institutions are ineffective but that citizenship is effective, and, on the contrary, to assign the lowest impact to citizens' participation when they perceive both national institutions and citizenship to be ineffective. Thus, to test our predictions, we conducted a moderation analysis (Model 1 with 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2018) considering Institution Efficacy (1 = High Institution Efficacy, 2 = Low Institution Efficacy) as the predictor, Citizenship Efficacy (1 = Low Citizenship Efficacy, 2 = High Citizenship Efficacy) as the moderator, and Impact of civic participation as the dependent measure.

The moderation analysis showed a significant Institution Efficacy X Citizenship Efficacy interaction on Impact of civic participation ($b = .97$, $SE = 31$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.35,1.59], $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F(1, 172) = 9.52$, $p = .002$; see Table 3 and Figure 1). No significant direct effects emerged neither for Institution Efficacy ($b = .04$, $SE = 16$, $p = .810$, 95% CI [-0.27,0.35]) nor for Citizenship Efficacy ($b = .13$, $SE = 16$, $p = .410$, 95% CI [-0.18,0.44]). By examining the conditional indirect effects of Institution Efficacy (1 = High Institution Efficacy, 2 = Low Institution Efficacy) on Impact of civic participation at the two levels of Citizenship Efficacy (1 = Low Citizenship Efficacy, 2 = High Citizenship Efficacy), results revealed that at a low level of Citizenship Efficacy, the effect of Institution Efficacy on Impact of civic participation was significant and negative, reaching its lowest level ($b = -.45$, $SE = 22$, $p = .046$, 95% CI [-0.88,-0.01]; see Figure 1). Conversely, at a high level of Citizenship Efficacy, Institution Efficacy significantly and positively predicted Impact of civic participation, reaching its highest level ($b = .52$, $SE = 22$, $p = .020$, 95% CI [0.08,0.96]; see Figure 1). Thus, the effects of Institution Inefficacy on Impact of civic participation depend on Citizenship Efficacy: When beliefs in Citizenship Efficacy are weak, perception that

Table 3. (Continued).

R^2		.12		
$F(df)$		$F(2, 173) = 12.00^{***}$		
		Conditional indirect effects		95% CI
Levels of citizenship efficacy		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Low		-.18	.10	-0.38 -0.01
High		.22	.10	0.04 0.44
		National identification		
		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Constant		2.77***	.59	
Institutional efficacy		.02	.21	
Impact of civic participation		.39***	.10	
R^2		.08		
$F(df)$		$F(2, 173) = 7.59^{***}$		
		Conditional indirect effects		95% CI
Levels of citizenship efficacy		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	
Low		-.17	.11	-0.42 -0.00
High		.20	.10	0.03 0.43

CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

† $p \leq .10$; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

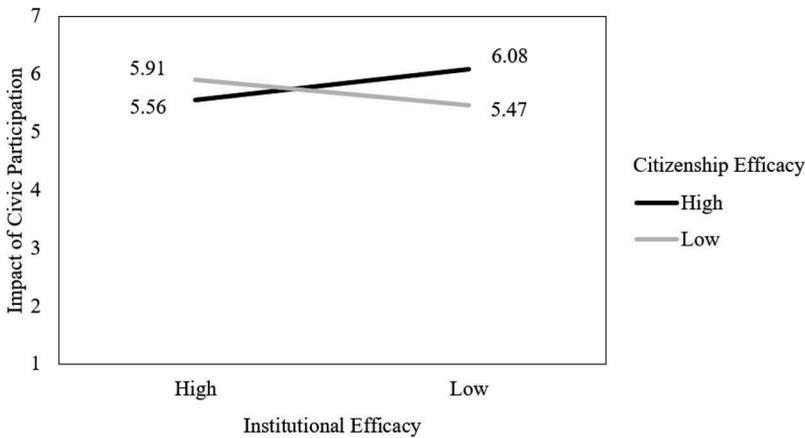


Figure 1. Moderation effect of citizenship efficacy on the association of institutional efficacy and impact of civic participation (Model 1 of PROCESS with 10,000 bootstraps; $N = 176$).

national institutions are ineffective decreases the perceived Impact of civic participation (i.e., beliefs that civic participation produces positive changes in the national group); in turn, when beliefs in Citizenship Efficacy are strong, perception that national institutions are ineffective increases the perceived Impact of civic participation. These effects are consistent with our predictions.

As a direct test of our predictions regarding Impact of civic participation, we conducted two planned-contrast analyzes. We assigned the value +3 to the Low Institutional Efficacy/High Citizenship Efficacy condition and the value -1 to the remaining conditions (contrast 1), and the value -3 to the Low Institutional Efficacy/Low Citizenship Efficacy condition and the value +1 to the remaining conditions (contrast 2). In further support of our prediction, both contrasts are significant, $t(172) = 2.35, p = .020$ and $t(172) = 2.19, p = .030$, respectively.

In brief, our results indicate that the perceived Impact of civic participation is determined both by Institutional Efficacy and Citizenship Efficacy. Specifically, and consistent with our predictions, when the social control system is ineffective and individuals learn that citizenship can be effective, their

beliefs in the potential impact of civic participation become stronger. Conversely, when Citizenship Efficacy was low, the impact assigned to civic participation lost its strength and relevance.

Ingroup commitment

To test the effects of Institution Efficacy and Citizenship Efficacy on each dimension of Ingroup commitment, we conducted six moderation analyzes (Model 1 with 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2018), considering Institution Efficacy (1 = High Institution Efficacy, 2 = Low Institution Efficacy) as the predictor, Citizenship Efficacy (1 = Low Citizenship Efficacy, 2 = High Citizenship Efficacy) as the moderator, and Voting motivation, Participation tendencies, Associativism importance, Protest importance, Volunteering importance, and National identification, as the dependent measure of each model.

We found no significant direct effects or significant interactions, except on National Identification in which we only found a significant direct effect of Citizenship Efficacy ($b = .53$, $SE = .22$, $p = .016$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.96]), showing that the High Citizenship Efficacy condition triggered stronger National identification ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.38$) than the Low Citizenship Efficacy condition ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.49$), $t(174) = 2.42$, $p = .016$. These results suggest that Institution Efficacy had no direct effect on Ingroup commitment, and that Citizenship Efficacy did not moderate this relation.

Moderated mediation analysis

In sum, the results from the moderation analysis revealed that (1) the effect of Institution Efficacy on Impact of civic participation depends on Citizenship Efficacy; (2) Institution Efficacy had no direct effect on Ingroup commitment; (3) and Citizenship Efficacy did not moderate this relation. Thus, the next stage of data analysis focused on testing the effect of Institution Efficacy on Ingroup commitment through belief in the Impact of civic participation (mediation model) and how this mediation pathway depends on Citizenship Efficacy (conditional process). In order to test this idea we conducted six moderated mediation analyzes (Model 7 with 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2018) considering Institution Efficacy (1 = High Institution Efficacy, 2 = Low Institution Efficacy) as the predictor, Citizenship Efficacy (1 = Low Citizenship Efficacy, 2 = High Citizenship Efficacy) as the moderator, Impact of civic participation as the mediator, and each of the six dimensions of Ingroup commitment (Voting Motivation, Participation Tendencies, Associativism Importance, Protest Importance, Volunteering Importance, and National Identification), as the dependent measure of each model (see Figure 2). Table 3 summarizes the results of the moderated mediation analyzes conducted for the six dimensions of Ingroup commitment.

The first stage of the moderated mediation model corresponds to the analysis of the moderating effect of Citizenship Efficacy on the association between Institution Efficacy and Impact of civic participation (i.e., the first model explained above; cf. Table 3 and Figure 2), and showed a significant Institution Efficacy X Citizenship Efficacy effect on Impact of civic participation. In order to check for the proposed moderated mediation, we examined the index of moderated mediation. This index serves

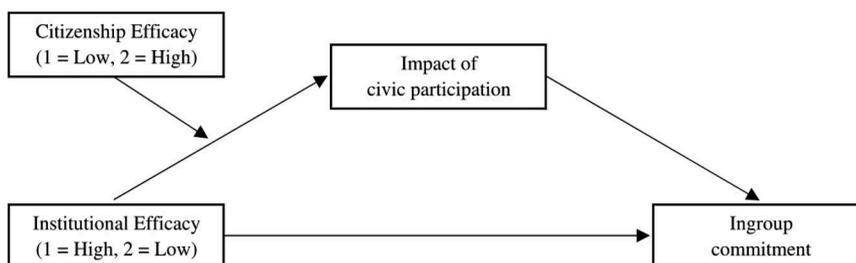


Figure 2. Moderated mediation model (Model 7 of PROCESS with 10,000 bootstraps; $N = 176$).

as a formal test of moderated mediation and represents the direct quantification of the association between an indirect effect and the moderator (Hayes, 2015, 2018). In other words, it allows verification of whether the indirect effect is conditional (i.e., depends) on levels of the moderator.

The index of moderated mediation was significant for all the Ingroup commitment dimensions, since all bootstrapped 95% CI does not include zero: Voting motivation ($Index = .43$, $SE = 17$, 95% CI [0.14,0.81]), Participation tendencies ($Index = .28$, $SE = 16$, 95% CI [0.01,0.64]), Associativism importance ($Index = .44$, $SE = 17$, 95% CI [0.15,0.80]), Protest importance ($Index = .40$, $SE = 15$, 95% CI [0.13,0.72]), Volunteering importance ($Index = .25$, $SE = 13$, 95% CI [0.03,0.53]), and National identification ($Index = .38$, $SE = 17$, 95% CI [0.10,0.76]). This indicates that the indirect effect of Institution Efficacy on Ingroup commitment through Impact of civic participation (mediation) was dependent on Citizenship Efficacy. The fact that the index of moderated mediation supports the existence of moderated mediation, allow us to inspect the conditional indirect effect within levels of the moderator (Low vs. High Citizenship Efficacy).

Examination of the conditional indirect effects revealed that for the High Citizenship Efficacy condition, the indirect effect of Institutional Efficacy (1 = High Institution Efficacy, 2 = Low Institution Efficacy) on Voting motivation ($b = .23$, $SE = 11$, 95% CI [0.05,0.47]); Associativism importance ($b = .24$, $SE = 17$, 95% CI [0.05,0.48]); Protest importance ($b = .22$, $SE = 10$, 95% CI [0.04,0.44]); Volunteering importance ($b = .14$, $SE = 08$, 95% CI [0.01,0.33]); and National identification ($b = .20$, $SE = 10$, 95% CI [0.03,0.43]), through Impact of civic participation was significant and positive (and marginally significant for Participation tendencies: $b = .15$, $SE = 10$, 95% CI [-0.00,0.37]). In contrast, for the Low Citizenship Efficacy condition, the indirect effect was significant and negative for Voting motivation ($b = -.20$, $SE = 12$, 95% CI [-0.45,-0.01]), Associativism importance ($b = -.20$, $SE = 11$, 95% CI [-0.44,-0.01]), Protest importance ($b = -.18$, $SE = 10$, 95% CI [-0.38,-0.01]), and National identification ($b = -.17$, $SE = 11$, 95% CI [-0.42,-0.00]) (and marginally significant for Participation tendencies, $b = -.13$, $SE = 09$, 95% CI [-0.34,0.01], and Volunteering importance, $b = -.12$, $SE = 07$, 95% CI [-0.27,0.01]).

The direct effect of Institutional Efficacy on Voting motivation ($b = -.05$, $SE = 23$, $p = .822$, 95% CI [-0.51,0.41]), Participation tendencies ($b = -.07$, $SE = 27$, $p = .792$, 95% CI [-0.62,0.47]), Associativism importance ($b = .18$, $SE = 22$, $p = .419$, 95% CI [-0.25,0.61]), Protest importance ($b = .17$, $SE = 18$, $p = .341$, 95% CI [-0.18,0.53]), Volunteering importance ($b = .16$, $SE = 20$, $p = .403$, 95% CI [-0.22,0.55]), and National identification ($b = .02$, $SE = 21$, $p = .910$, 95% CI [-0.39,0.44]) was non-significant. Thus, there is no direct effect of Institution Efficacy on Ingroup commitment, but rather a conditional indirect effect (i.e., moderated mediation).

Overall, Citizenship Efficacy emerged as a moderator in the pathway from Institutional Efficacy to Ingroup commitment through Impact of civic participation (among all the six dimensions): for participants who learned that citizenship is effective, Institutional Inefficacy predicts stronger beliefs in Impact of civic participation, which in turn, predicts higher levels of Ingroup commitment. On the contrary, for participants who learned that citizenship is ineffective, Institutional Inefficacy predicts weaker beliefs in Impact of civic participation, which, in turn, predicts lower levels of Ingroup commitment.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how beliefs in Citizenship Efficacy may counteract the negative effects of the perception of an ineffective social control system on individuals' commitment to the national group. Specifically, we proposed that facing an inefficient social control system, beliefs that citizens' active participation is needed, vital and can be effective, may counteract a tendency toward anomie and group disinvestment, and guarantee individuals' motivation to support and stay involved with the national group.

Previous research has shown that individuals' dissatisfaction with, and distrust in, national institutions, and the perception that such institutions are unable to exert an effective social control and to protect the core national social values, may undermine individuals' commitment to their

national group (Antonini et al., 2015; Dalton, 2004; Eder et al., 2014; Nye, 1997; A. C. Pinto et al., 2013; I. R. Pinto et al., 2016). However, this disinvestment from the national group can be avoided and may only occur when citizens feel that they are powerless and that their actions are ineffective (e.g., Bandura, 1982, 1997; Gamson, 1968).

Our results showed that, as predicted, when people believe that the social control system is ineffective but that citizens' participation can be effective, they hold their commitment, and motivation to contribute, to the national group. People do so by ascribing greater power to citizens' participation to generate positive changes in the national group. Indeed, facing national institutions' inefficacy, participants felt the need to resort to individual and/or collective efforts, and ascribe to civic participation the importance, and the way, to change something in society, to strengthen the national group as a whole, to defend and reinforce the national values and normative standards, and support their fellow citizens. Consequently, participants reinforced their commitment to the national group: they increased their motivation to vote in the near future and to get involved in civic activities (although the effect on this dimension was weaker; we believe was due to the fact that we have included here different kinds of civic activities, such as associativism and protest, which are very different from each other); ascribed greater importance of promoting and carrying out civic activities to favor the national group, its members, and defend the national values; and reinforced their national identification.

On the contrary, when participants were led to believe that citizens' participation was ineffective (Low Citizenship Efficacy), civic participation seems to have lost its relevance and strength as a useful mechanism to maintain participants' commitment to the group, and, consequently, they showed disinvestment regarding the national group. These results are in line with a potential feeling of hopelessness, anomie, and group disinvestment, caused by the perception that the group is unable to effectively exert social control, as predicted in the previous research (e.g., I. R. Pinto et al., 2016).

Catalyzing disaffection into ingroup commitment

In sum, perception of an ineffective social control system may not always lead to ingroup disengagement. On the contrary, it might strengthen people's commitment to their national group by increasing their beliefs in the potential pro-group results of civic participation, as long as such civic participation is perceived to be effective. In this case, civic participation emerges as an alternative or compensatory force (i.e., individuals realize the need to resort to their own participation as citizens) aimed to protect and defend the nationals' values and standards, to reaffirm the value of the national group, and to support its members and the group as a whole. Civic participation, thus, is expected to contribute to maintain group cohesion and avoid group disaggregation.

We believe that our research has relevant implications for the social psychological literature on civic engagement. Previous research has focused on how perceived collective/citizenship efficacy successively impacts on individual's motivation to get involved in collective efforts and pro-social initiatives. Our study offers experimental evidences on how citizenship efficacy might counteract or reverse anomie and group disinvestment arising from distrust and disaffection regarding national institutions, and guarantee individuals' motivation to support and stay involved with the national group. We also believe this research has implications for civic education and can contribute for the planning of more effective civic engagement programs. Our findings give important insights and offer some practical suggestions: not only is it crucial to empower citizens with beliefs on the efficacy of their own civic/political participation but it seems paramount that they realize that they cannot rely on national institutions to defend ingroup core social values and standards, and thus, their action is needed, vital, and effective.

Limitations and directions for future research

In spite of the potential contribution of our results to a better understanding of the antecedents of civic engagement and citizens' commitment to the national group, there are potential limitations that should be addressed in the future research.

Our manipulation was about institutional ability to exert social control; specifically, ability to detect and to act against corruption and economic crimes. This manipulation was created in light of SGDT's predictions that beliefs in ingroup's ability to effectively respond to deviant members is crucial to ensure individuals' satisfaction to belong to the group and a positive social identity. Our findings about the potential of beliefs in Citizenship efficacy to reverse individuals' disengagement from the national group, may be restricted to the particular context of our manipulation (i.e., anomie and group disinvestment resulting from the perception that the ingroup is not capable to effectively exert social control, that is, respond to offenders and defend ingroup core normative standards). In a broader context of citizenship and democracy, future research might analyze the effects of citizenship efficacy on other sources of citizens' (dis)trust on national institutions, governments, and political systems (e.g., procedural fairness, inclusive institutions, and equal treatment for all citizens; government political and economic performance; government responsiveness to citizens needs and interests), in order to maintain citizens' commitment and involvement with their nation.

Furthermore, future research might also analyze the effects of perceived institutional efficacy and citizenship efficacy on motivation to engage in different types of civic activities (participation tendencies). We measured participants' motivation and likelihood to get involved in civic activities (e.g., in youth associations; religious groups; sports, cultural, and recreational groups; social movements; protest; volunteering), but in general, and as a dimension (or a component) of individuals' commitment and motivation to contribute to the national group. Thus, future research might test and compare the effects of citizenship efficacy as a mechanism directed at the maintenance and warranty of individuals' motivation to get involved in each one of the different types of civic participation. This seems particularly relevant to better understand the emergence of citizens' contestation and social movements against governments and policies (e.g., the 2011 Egyptian uprising; the 2013 Ukraine's Euromaidan protests; the 2013 Turkey's Gezi park protests; the Spanish "Indignados" movement, Spain; the 2017 Women's March on Washington, U.S.; or the more recent 2018 Great Return March in Gaza; the 2018–2019 "March for our lives" initiative, U.S.; "Fridays for future" movement, globally), as well as, citizens' involvement in community service, solidarity, and volunteering initiatives (e.g., to address hunger, loneliness, homelessness; to support veterans, seniors, or children in need) that aim to strike a balance against the apparent inefficacy of authorities to deal with these issues.

Concluding remarks

Back to the start point of this work, our results are consistent with Chilean former President Patricio Aylwin Azócar's discourse, suggesting that when citizens distrust national institutions and feel powerless about their role in the society, they feel unmotivated to exert their citizenship.

When institutions are, willingly or not, inoperative regarding citizens' beliefs about the standards that ensure their wellbeing and values, and when such institutions, willingly or not, create a psychological state of collective helplessness, individuals disengage from their nations' welfare, thus allowing the persistence of the current state of affairs. In this case, citizens feel powerless about their role in the society, and, to a large extent, they abandon their status as citizens. On the brighter side, however, the present work suggests that individuals may uphold their commitment with their nation when they believe that their actions are susceptible to bring about a desired social change. Indeed, belief in their collective ability to revert the ineffectiveness of national institutions may be an important mechanism for individuals to maintain their attachment to the group, a sense of national cohesiveness, and a continued engagement with the values underlying the community. An important implication of this fact should be that empowering individuals with the sense of citizenship efficacy (e.g., through civic education) may be a decisive way to promote a participatory citizenship and social cohesion, even when citizens feel dissatisfaction and distrust national institutions and the existing socio-political system.

Notes

1. We discarded the data of three participants who failed in responding to at least one of the manipulation checks, namely, Institutional Efficacy (e.g., “In general, I believe that national authorities act effectively against corruption.”; “I believe that the members of national public entities protect our national values.”), and Citizenship Efficacy (e.g., “I believe that my participation makes a difference in the community.”; “I believe that my participation help supporting the national values.”).
2. We used the University dynamic e-mail system that allows sending e-mail messages to mailing lists built according to criteria previously established. For example, a dynamic e-mail can be sent to students (multiple recipients without a limit) from different courses and academic years, from the entire University.
3. We discarded one item from the civic activities’ evaluation scale because they presented low communalities (<.50) in a preliminary analysis.

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Data availability

The data and materials described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at <https://osf.io/jbzne/>.

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