

How Important are Political Interest and Internal Political Efficacy in the Prediction of Political Participation? Longitudinal Evidence from Germany¹

Frank Reichert

University of Hong Kong

Abstract: This study aims to disentangle the effects of interest in politics and internal political efficacy in the prediction of different political activities. The analysis examines the hypothesis that political interest is a more important precursor of electoral and unconventional political participation, and that both political interest and efficacy are required to promote participation in political parties. Using the German Longitudinal Election Study, multiple regression analyses yield that political efficacy is a strong and positive predictor of intentions to participate in party politics and unconventional political behaviour. Political interest has differential effects on voting conditional on whether respondents are surveyed before or after elections, and differential moderated effects appear for conventional and unconventional political action. The findings are discussed with respect to the importance of political interest and efficacy for citizen participation.

Keywords: citizen participation, civic engagement, political efficacy, political interest, political participation

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Frank Reichert, Room 217, Runme Shaw Building, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR. Phone: +852 2241 5571, Email: reichert@hku.hk

¹ This is the version that was accepted for publication. The final, published version may differ slightly and should be cited; it was published in *Revista de Psicologia Social*, 2018, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 459–503. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02134748.2018.1482056>

Citizen participation is important for the legitimacy of political decision-making in democracies. It is commonly understood that people who are more interested in politics and who feel more able to influence political decisions are more politically active. However, political interest and political efficacy do not necessarily affect political activities to the same extent, as both tap different aspects of human motivation and cognition. Party-political participation is related to “big” politics and arguably requires a more general effort, compared to “unconventional” or electoral political participation, which is usually less binding and issue- or event-related. This paper builds on a dual pathway model of behaviour (Strack & Deutsch, 2004) and examines whether political interest and internal political efficacy represent two different paths leading to different kinds of political participation.

Specifically, political interest is understood as an affective behavioural motive (Koestner & Losier, 2004) and hypothesized positively to predict any kind of legitimate political behaviour. On the other hand, internal political efficacy is hypothesized to be only a significant predictor of party politics once political interest is taken into account. That is, efficacy is supposed to be necessary for cognitively sophisticated political activities that require more control and a higher degree of commitment (Ajzen, 1991). Finally, this study examines interaction effects between internal political efficacy and political interest. This examination of political interest and internal political efficacy as pathways to different kinds of political participation is novel and important to our understanding of the policies and pedagogies needed for politically active citizenries.

Political participation

Political participation —also *political action* or *political behaviour*— consists of every voluntary activity a citizen does to influence decisions that “deals with government, politics or the state in a broad sense” (van Deth, 2014, p. 351). *Behavioural politicization* is a wider concept and comprises actual and intended political participation. We may distinguish

at least three kinds of political action (Barnes et al., 1979; Steinbrecher, 2009): *Voting* does not require much effort, and it is not usually bound by a strong commitment. Restrictions arise only from formal regulations, such as the presence of a certain citizenship. *Party-political* activities are traditional, party-related forms of participation and often characterized as “conventional” political behaviour. These activities are usually institutionalized; they require a higher degree of commitment and a more extensive investment of time in the long term. *Unconventional* activities refer to a broad range of less time-intensive or committed political activities outside the realm of political parties. These have a long tradition in many Western countries and are often problem-oriented, that is to say, they deal with narrower social or political issues or a specific political problem. These activities have also been labelled “issue-based participation”. *Legal* forms of unconventional political participation comprise behaviours such as signing a petition, joining a demonstration, or working in a citizens’ initiative. The latter is commonly conceptualised as a form of unconventional protest against governments or party politics in the German context (Erhard, Lauwers, & Schmerz, 2013; Kaase, 1990; Reichert, 2016). Unconventional political participation can also be *illegal* if located outside the legal framework (e.g., political violence); however, illegal participation is beyond the focus of this analysis.

Predictors of political participation

Political participation can be explained by various factors such as demographics (e.g., age, gender), resources (e.g., status, income), social capital (esp. social networks), political values and attitudes, or macro level variables (cf. Steinbrecher, 2009; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Personality traits and genetics have also been taken into consideration to explain political participation (e.g., Hatemi & Verhulst, 2015). However, political interest and efficacy are among the most powerful predictors (Finkel, 1985; Gabriel, 2004; Hadjar & Becker, 2007; Krampen, 2000; Reichert & Print, 2017a): Countless studies have

demonstrated that political interest —often defined as the “degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity” (van Deth, 1990, p. 278)— is a strong and positive predictor of socially accepted political participation. The same applies to internal political efficacy as the feeling that one is capable to understand political facts and processes and to influence political decisions (Almond & Verba, 1965; Balch, 1974; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954). Yet most research examines these variables as factors that predict behaviour without a more nuanced explanation of their potentially distinct effects.

Two pathways to political action

We can “borrow” from dual pathway models, such as the reflective impulsive model (Strack & Deutsch, 2004), to tap the differences between interest and efficacy. “The reflective system generates behavioral decisions that are based on knowledge about facts and values, whereas the impulsive system elicits behavior through associative links and motivational orientations” (Strack & Deutsch, 2004, p. 220) Accordingly, this model assumes that affective processes are always involved in the initiation of behaviour and are dominant in spontaneous, cognitively less demanding activities. On the other hand, reflective processes are only activated in addition to impulsive processes when reasoned action is required. Thus, the reflective system is only active if specific knowledge, skills, or attitudes and motivations need to be considered and weighed against potential costs and the chances of success. On the other hand, the impulsive path depends on particular habits and the satisfaction of basic needs as well as motivational orientations which ease information processing and behaviour.

Efficacy would then be a reflective variable that “generates behavioral decisions that are based on knowledge about facts and values” (Strack & Deutsch, 2004, p. 220), and particularly useful when self-control and reasoned action is required (Reichert, 2017). Political interest as a motivational orientation is per se less reflective and would be linked to political behaviour in a more direct or even habitual way (Reichert, 2017). Accordingly,

political interest should always increase the propensity to act politically and, hence, represent a more impulsive path. Yet interest may be insufficient to predict political activities that require long-term commitments and higher levels of planning, reflection and skills, above and beyond pure interest and strength (Dewey, 1913).

Internal political efficacy and party politics

Self-efficacy is “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). It is referred to as internal political efficacy in political realm and should be necessary to engage in cognitively sophisticated political activities that require planning and devotion to politics. Indeed, evidence suggests that intentional behaviour can be explained by means of internal efficacy, also represented as *perceived behavioural control* (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1981). Recent research also suggests that the effect of this variable might be constrained to certain types of behaviour and/or populations (Cicognani, Albanesi, Mazzoni, Prati, & Zani, 2016; Reichert, 2016). In particular, internal political efficacy may have less explanatory value in the prediction of unplanned or habitual behaviour, simply due to the more influential role of other motivational forces and automatic activation (Bargh, 1997).

Therefore, internal political efficacy is hypothesized to be a significant predictor of party politics, because this kind of activity involves a high degree of commitment and a disposition to accept slow negotiation processes, which is likely to rely on a reasoned decision based on subjective skills assessments. On the other hand, the predictive power of internal political efficacy for event- and issue-related political activities might be limited.

Political interest, electoral and issue-related participation

An easily accessible attitude towards politics, political interest can be understood as one of the motivational variables capable of initiating issue-related behaviour. Yet the role of *subject-related* interests has been largely ignored by the traditional theory on how internal

efficacy relates to behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Although political interest also comprises cognition, it combines both emotion *and* cognition (Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004). James (1950, p. 320) emphasised that: “Our interest in things means the attention and emotion which the thought of them will excite, and the actions which their presence will evoke”. Dewey (1913) similarly saw interest as a more spontaneous and potentially volatile influence. Hence, political interest may represent the motivational counterpart to the reflective sense of political efficacy. In fact, political interest is a positive predictor of almost any legitimate kind of political participation, though possibly more strongly correlated with unconventional political participation when compared to internal political efficacy (Gabriel, 2004).

Furthermore, interest is a more accessible attitude than political efficacy. Therefore, it is probably more influential in situations that need decisions on the participation in activities that are likely to yield acceptable solutions for *specific* political problems (“satisficing”), which applies especially to the one-time activity of voting. In addition, issue-related political activities without long-lasting general commitments to politics may also be considered by many people to achieve specific political results. In contrast, conventional politics, such as working in a political committee or in a political party, requires planned and strategic action. As people usually have only limited knowledge about politics and the polity (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), traditional party politics might be perceived as non-transparent, complex and bureaucratic and would therefore require both interest in politics and a sense of political efficacy.

Hypotheses. In his recent study, Reichert (2013) found that political interest was a more proximal predictor of legitimate political participation among Turkish migrant students. Internal political efficacy was less relevant in the prediction of political behaviour, but it was more important with respect to party-political participation compared to other political activities. Among native German students who had been living in Germany for at least three

generations, the same study found a direct effect of internal political efficacy on party politics, but no effect of political interest —though neither of these variables could predict unconventional participation in that sample when confounders were included. Drawbacks of that study, however, were a small panel sample of non-migrants as well as the use of a student sample, which did not allow for generalizations. In addition, that study did not examine the interaction between political interest and internal political efficacy.

The present analysis goes beyond prior research and overcomes those shortcomings. It examines whether political interest and internal political efficacy have differential effects on political action, using longitudinal data and adding to previous scholarship the examination of interaction effects between political interest and efficacy. This study examines three hypotheses:

H1: Political interest as a kind of curiosity (van Deth, 1990) is understood as an affective behavioural motive (Koestner & Losier, 2004) and should be a positive predictor of any kind of legitimate political behaviour even when considering multiple predictors.

H2: Internal political efficacy is supposed to be necessary for cognitively sophisticated political activities that require more control, a higher degree of commitment and a disposition to accept slow negotiation processes (cf. Ajzen, 1991). That is, when controlling for political interest, internal political efficacy is hypothesized to be only a significant predictor of party politics.

H3: Finally, this study asks whether the effects of internal political efficacy are conditional on the level of political interest. It is expected that such conditional effects occur especially with respect to activities that are not directly predicted by efficacy, because political interest should influence participation anyway (see H1).

Method

Data

The German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) long-term panel (Rattinger et al., 2012) was used, because it is a rare source that provides data for both, political interest and internal political efficacy, as well as measures for all three kinds of planned and *actual* political participation. The GLES long-term panel merges data from pre- and post-election surveys conducted around the elections to the German *Bundestag* in 2002, 2005, and 2009. The population includes German citizens aged 16 years and older who lived in Germany at the time of measurement. For 436 persons, data were available for every wave, though participants with “mutations” in age or gender were excluded from all analyses. These longitudinal data are well-suited to examine the hypotheses, as they provide information about behavioural politicization *after* the independent variables were measured. Hence, tests of the direction of effects can be conducted to examine whether interest or efficacy actually preceded participation (“Granger-causality”), which provides more robust evidence for a causal effect (“precedence”) (Granger, 1980). In all analyses, the east/west weight was employed (unweighted $N = 427$), and descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among all variables are in Table A1 (see Appendix).

Independent variables

The independent variables were measured in 2002. On the one hand, political interest was measured by the classic item: “In general terms: How interested in politics are you?” (reverse coded: 1 = *not interested at all* ... 5 = *extremely interested*¹).

On the other hand, three indicators of internal political efficacy were available (1 = *strongly disagree* ... 5 = *strongly agree*): “Politics is such a complex issue that people like me cannot understand what is going on” (reversed coding); “I feel I could play an active role in a group dealing with political issues”; and “I am perfectly able to understand and assess

important political questions”. Their mean score reflects internal political efficacy (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .66$).

Dependent variables

Due to limited measures of identical forms of actual and intended political behaviour, three political activities are utilised as separate outcome variables. Voting is utilised as a variable which requires only limited reflection and efficacy. Post-election participants were asked whether they had voted in the recent federal election (no/yes for 2002; aggregated score for subsequent elections: 0 = *did not vote in 2005 or/and 2009* vs. 1 = *voted in both elections*), whereas pre-election participants indicated how likely they would vote in the forthcoming federal election (recoded: 0 = *uncertain about voting in at least one wave* vs. 1 = *certain to vote in every election*). Moreover, retrospective information about voting decisions in the elections that took place around the previous survey were available for pre-election participants (recoded: 0 = *did not vote in 2002 or/and 2005* vs. 1 = *voted in both elections*).

Party-political behaviour in the past was measured via membership in a political party (no/yes for 2002; aggregated score for subsequent waves: 0 = *not a member in 2005 and 2009* and 1 = *member in 2005 or/and 2009*). The intention to participate in party politics was also measured: “Would you try to get support from a political party?” (1 = *I would definitely not do ...* 5 = *I would definitely do*) (2005 and 2009).

Only membership in a citizens’ initiative was available as unconventional past political action in the GLES (no/yes for 2002; aggregated score for subsequent waves: 0 = *not a member in 2005 and 2009* and 1 = *member in 2005 or/and 2009*). Hence, this measure reflects a specific form of unconventional or issue-related political participation. The willingness to participate unconventionally was measured via “Contribute to a citizens’ initiative” (1 = *I would definitely not do ...* 5 = *I would definitely do*) (2005 and 2009).

Additional measures

Standard socio-demographic variables that were measured in the first survey and might work as confounders in the prediction of political participation were used, such as gender (0 = *female* vs. 1 = *male*) and age. Educational attainment was not available as a metric variable. Therefore, the highest school graduation certificate was recoded into two dummy variables “no or lowest formal qualification” and “intermediary secondary qualification” (0 = *no* vs. 1 = *yes*; remainders with higher qualification). Dummy variables for pre- versus post-election date of interview (0 vs. 1) as well as for region of residence (0 = *West Germany* and 1 = *East Germany*) were also utilised.²

Finally, previous participation was used as an additional control variable. It is well-known that past behaviour is positively associated with future behaviour. In addition, accounting for past behaviour when predicting present or future behaviour provides a more rigorous test of the direction of effects (“causality” or “precedence”) (Granger, 1980). The availability of panel data is a strength in this regard, as both control measures for previous participation and dependent measures of subsequent participation are available.

Results

Multiple analyses were conducted to examine the hypotheses. In a first step, political interest and internal political efficacy as well as socio-demographic control variables were considered as predictors. In a second model, the respective actual past political behaviour and whether it was a pre- or post-election interviewee was included (except for voting, of course) as a more robust test of precedence (“Granger-causality”). Then the interaction between both (mean-centred) independent variables was added to each model.

Voting

The analyses for voting between the first and subsequent surveys yielded mixed patterns (Table 1). Internal political efficacy had no significant effect on voting at all.

Interestingly, the more interested in politics the pre-electoral survey participants were the smaller was the chance that they had also voted in any of the federal elections in 2002 or 2005. However, this is only true for Model II when previous voting behaviour was accounted for. There was no significant effect of political interest in Model I in the pre-election sample. In contrast, higher political interest increased the chances of voting in the post-election sample, no matter if it was accounted for previous voting or not. Tests for Granger-causality showed that interest preceded electoral participation among post-election respondents, whereas the (negative) effect of interest on voting in the pre-election sample was weaker than the reverse effect of past voting on political interest in subsequent surveys.

[TABLE 1]

An additional analysis for the pooled sample (pre- and post-election combined) was conducted which additionally included the interaction between political interest and pre- versus post-election survey. The results of this model in fact suggest the existence of such a difference, as the interaction nearly approached significance ($B = 1.14$, $Wald = 3.49$, $p = .062$). Finally, having voted in the past was a positive and by far the strongest predictor of voting, but none of the models yielded a significant interaction between political interest and internal political efficacy ($p \geq .355$).

Panel analyses were also conducted for intentions to vote in future federal elections (Table 2). This variable was only measured in the pre-electoral surveys and the results are similar for both models: Neither political interest nor internal political efficacy had a statistically significant effect on voting intentions in either model. Having voted in the previous election again had the most significant, positive effect, that is, people who had voted in the federal election in 1998 were way more likely to be certain to vote in the upcoming federal election. The interaction between political interest and internal political efficacy was always insignificant ($p \geq .452$).

[TABLE 2]

Party membership

Looking at Table 3, we find that the odds for having been a party member in 2005 and/or 2009 were higher the more politically interested and the more politically efficacious survey participants felt (Model I). However, having been a party member in 2002 was the best predictor of subsequent party membership, resulting in the insignificance of most other predictor variables in Model II. As past participation was an insignificant predictor in the “Granger-regressions” on political interest and efficacy, it is unclear whether participation precedes interest and efficacy or vice versa.

[TABLE 3]

We also find a moderation effect in addition to the main effects when adding the interaction between both independent variables in Model I (Figure 1; $B = 0.36$, $Wald = 4.26$, $p = .039$). That is, the probability of having been a party member increased with increasing internal political efficacy among those who were highly interested in politics, but was unaffected by efficacy among those with little interest in politics (using one standard deviation above/below the mean). This interaction effect did not hold when added in Model II ($p = .293$).

[FIGURE 1]

Also given are the results of all models for the intention to get support from a political party in 2005 and in 2009 (Table 4). Internal political efficacy was way more important in the prediction of the willingness to ask a political party for support in the future: While political interest was not a significant predictor at all, efficacy constantly predicted higher willingness to ask for support from a political party. Granger-causality was found for intentions to ask a political party for support in both 2005 and 2009. It is astounding though that actual party membership in 2002 predicted a higher willingness to ask a political party for support in 2009

only. None of the interaction effects between political interest and efficacy was significant ($p \geq .095$).

[TABLE 4]

Citizens' initiative

As we could have expected by knowing that neither political interest nor political efficacy was significantly correlated with being a member of a citizens' initiative (Table A1), the same applies to multivariate analyses (Table 5). Only respective past political participation predicted membership in a citizens' initiative in 2005 and/or 2009: Those who had been a member in 2002 were more likely to be a member again later in time.

[TABLE 5]

However, we also find a moderation effect in addition to the main effects when adding the interaction between both predictors in Model I (Figure 2; $B = -0.66$, $Wald = 5.14$, $p = .023$). In contrast to the interaction effect presented in Figure 1, the probability of having been a member in a citizens' initiative increased with increasing internal political efficacy among those with *little* interest in politics, but was unaffected by efficacy among highly interested citizens (using one standard deviation below/above the mean). This interaction effect held even when added in Model II ($B = -0.64$, $Wald = 4.37$, $p = .037$).

[FIGURE 2]

In contrast to actual participation, internal political efficacy was a significant and positive predictor of the intention to become a member of a citizens' initiative in the future (Table 6). Similar to respondents' intentions to ask a political party for support, Granger-causality was found for intentions to contribute to a citizens' initiative in 2005 and 2009. Political interest did not yield significance in any of the models. Having been a member of a citizens' initiative in 2002 also increased the willingness to become a member in 2009, but

not in 2005 (Model II). Similar to previous analyses, none of the interaction effects between political interest and efficacy was a significant predictor of intended behaviour ($p \geq .235$).

[TABLE 6]

Discussion

This study built on a dual pathway model of behaviour (Strack & Deutsch, 2004) to examine whether political interest and internal political efficacy represent two different pathways to distinct types of political action. Political interest as an affective behavioural motive (Koestner & Losier, 2004; van Deth, 1990) was expected to be a positive predictor of legitimate political activities (H1). Internal political efficacy was hypothesized to be associated with cognitively more sophisticated and committing participation, and it was examined whether efficacy initiates “party politics” above and beyond the effect of political interest (H2), as this type of behaviour requires more reflection than voting or unconventional participation. In addition, this study examined whether the effects of internal political efficacy are conditional on respondents’ levels of political interest (H3).

Political interest and participation

On the one hand, political interest was a significant, positive and Granger-causal predictor of actual voting behaviour in the post-election sample, which supports the assumption that interest relates to behaviour that requires less efforts (assuming that many citizens cast their ballot without extensive studies of election manifestoes). In addition, interest was a positive predictor of party membership, which should be the case if the motivational variable of political interest represents a less reflective path that is always involved in behavioural decision-making. On the other hand, political interest was negatively associated with the odds of having voted in the pre-election sample, and it neither predicted any intended participation nor membership in a citizens’ initiative. At least the latter should have been the case if interest was relevant for any type of political participation, while

interest as an affective motive indeed might not necessarily predict deliberate intentions to participate in politics in the future: Asking people about their intention to participate in politics perhaps does not just yield non-elaborated answers but is interpreted as a question about their future plans and involves more elaboration.

The finding that political interest increased the odds of voting in the post-election sample but tended to decrease those chances among pre-election interviewees is particularly surprising. There were no problems of collinearity, and political interest was not significantly higher among those who had been surveyed before the election compared with post-election participants. Strack and Deutsch (2004) note that motivational orientations, such as political interest, can be activated by increasing or decreasing the distance between person and object (e.g. the time between being asked about an election and electoral participation). However, then we would expect political interest to be a positive predictor of voting in the pre-election sample and no or a negative predictor among post-election respondents, rather than vice versa, as the time period between the elections and the performed behaviour was shorter in the pre-election sample. Although the first hypothesis was proven correct in the post-election sample where political interest significantly increased the odds of voting in the next federal election, several years had passed between the survey and the voting behaviour. Also, differential effects of interest in politics would be plausible only if the levels of interest had changed significantly over time (which did not happen).

In order to shed light on this finding, a supplementary analysis was conducted. The perceived responsiveness of politicians and political parties (“external political efficacy”), measured by eleven items, was identified as a plausible measure of the “distance” between citizens and elections, and it was hypothesised that responsiveness moderated the effect of political interest. If responsiveness was a moderating variable, we would expect a significant interaction between political interest and responsiveness, or a three-way interaction effect

between political interest, responsiveness and pre-/post-election survey. However, this was not the case.³

We consequently can only assume that there might be something going on among pre-election participants, which tends to reduce the odds of casting one's ballot the higher interested one is in politics (although the effect of past electoral participation on political interest at a later time was stronger than the effect of interest on voting a few years later). As we did not find a significant effect of political interest on the intention to vote in future federal elections in the pre-election sample, too, we may conclude that this unexpected zero-effect is fairly stable.

A conjecture might refer to evaluative information considered by the pre-election respondents, specifically the expectation of a negative outcome in the upcoming election which could trigger non-participation in the election (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Other possible explanations could be changes in the levels of satisfaction with democracy or trust in political institutions (Reichert, 2017). Yet it is important to keep in mind that for pre-election participants, we measured whether respondents had voted in 2002/2005. If anything, it would be more plausible to expect a negative effect among post-election participants and not among pre-election participants, as the financial crisis began to hit Europe from 2008.

In conclusion, political interest may to some extent reflect a motivational variable that represents an affective path to political action. However, it may be less relevant for intended participation that perhaps reflects a deliberate decision-making process.

Political efficacy and participation

The most striking result is that internal political efficacy consistently and positively predicted membership in a political party as well as the intention to ask for support from a political party. Clearly, this type of political participation requires time, the acceptance of slow negotiation processes and more elaborated decisions on whether or not to get involved,

compared with voting. Furthermore, the predictive power of internal political efficacy for other political activities was limited, despite positive effects on intended conventional and unconventional behaviour. Asking people about their intention to participate in politics might in fact yield elaborated answers about their future plans, which require reflective cognitive processes. These results further strengthen the thesis that internal efficacy is associated with reasoned action and represents a reflective path to behaviour, as it facilitates deliberate participation in activities that require more commitment than merely casting a vote.

Conditional effects

Finally, the differential interaction effects between interest and efficacy for non-electoral activities are quite interesting. In fact, empirical evidence supported our third hypothesis with respect to actual membership in a citizens' initiative, where the effect of efficacy was conditional on low levels of political interest. We also found an inverse interaction effect with respect to party membership; however, no such effect was identified for voting and behavioural intentions. While it is reasonable that party-related participation requires high levels of both political interest and efficacy due to the long-term commitment and involvement in slow negotiation processes, one could be surprised that efficacy increases the likelihood of participation in a citizens' initiative only among less interested individuals. Apparently, efficacy compensates for low levels of interest in relation to unconventional participation, but interest itself does not predict unconventional participation. Therefore, raising the levels of internal political efficacy is especially important for raising the levels of citizen participation beyond voting.

Prior participation

For each analysis, two models were estimated: one without and another with prior participation as a control variable. The latter provided a more robust examination of the net effect of political interest and efficacy above and beyond habits, and whether interest and/or

efficacy precede behaviour (Granger, 1980). Indeed, the habitualisation of political participation plays a significant role since previous political participation was the strongest and positive predictor of subsequent participation or participation intentions. This means that getting citizens started might be the most important step towards a politically engaged citizenry—and this should start early.

Research suggests that being part of a civically responsive neighbourhood or being involved in youth voluntary associations supports young people's commitments to participate in civic activities (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Moreover, young people are more likely to join a political party if another family member is a party member (Cross & Young, 2008). Finally, participation in school governance and discussions of social and political issues increase the feeling of being prepared to participate and the likelihood of future intended political participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Reichert & Print, 2017b). Raising young people's levels of political efficacy and interest in politics are significant tasks schools need to be prepared to do.

Limitations and future research

A few limitations need to be addressed. First, this study relied on self-reports which could be biased. In particular the recollection of voting among pre-election participants could be blurred due to the time between the election and the survey some years later, whereas post-election participants would have a fresh memory of whether they had just voted. However, in federal countries such as Germany where local elections, state legislature elections and even elections to the European Parliament may take place between federal elections, it is particularly important to collect information about participation in a specific election immediately.

Second, it is not clear from the present study whether political interest is less important as an affective motive than expected. One constraint of the GLES database is that

political interest was measured by a traditional item, which might be inept to tap the specific motivational facets that relate to unconventional participation. If respondents associate general political interest with traditional politics, such as party politics, then it makes sense that little interest in such kind of politics stimulates issue-related, unconventional political participation conditional on the levels of internal political efficacy. Future studies should use more comprehensive as well as issue-related measures of interest in politics to link motivational and behavioural variables and in order better to link interest to an affective pathway to action.

Furthermore, participation in a citizens' initiative was conceptualised as unconventional participation. However, one could argue that this kind of political behaviour has been institutionalized over the past decades, and that it requires more efforts and commitment and is less spontaneous than other types of unconventional legal political actions (Reichert, 2016). Although our measure of unconventional behaviour certainly reflects issue-related participation, many other (and potentially more "spontaneous") forms of unconventional participation exist, such as participating in a protest march or boycotting products for political reasons. While the GLES provided a useful database, the measurement of unconventional participation was deficient. Future studies should both examine other unconventional activities and use more comprehensive measures of political interest.

Finally, Granger-causality was established for some relationships. Besides the already mentioned limitations, however, it is also noteworthy that internal political efficacy was not measured coherently in all waves of the GLES. While this was unproblematic with respect to the prediction of behavioural politicization, it could affect the validity of the Granger-test. Future longitudinal studies should use consistent measurement models over time, which would also enable even more robust examinations of the distinct effects of interest and efficacy and moderating mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study utilised a longitudinal dataset which provided a quality sample of non-immigrants that also was less constrained than previous research (Reichert, 2013). Yet, it yielded results that are somewhat comparable with respect to voting and especially regarding the non-immigrant sample of the study by Reichert (2013). The key implications of the current study relate to the differential effects of political interest and internal political efficacy in the prediction of political action. Political interest may represent a motivational variable that reflects an affective path to political action. However, it may be less relevant for intended and more committed political activities that require deliberate behavioural decisions. On the other hand, internal political efficacy is associated with reasoned action and represents a reflective path to behaviour, as it facilitates deliberate participation in activities that require activists who are more committed (Cicognani et al., 2016; Reichert, 2016). Moreover, this involves deliberate intentions to legitimately participate in politics in the future, but the degree of organisation associated with political activities needs to be taken into account when linking participation to efficacy. Based on interactions between both interest and efficacy, finally, it is obvious that raising the levels of internal political efficacy, especially at early ages, is of particular significance to increase the levels of citizen participation beyond voting.

Future studies should use more comprehensive measures of interest in politics and apply broader measures of unconventional political participation. Longitudinal researchers should also find ways to let pass less time between elections and the measurement of citizens' participation in those elections. In addition, more consistent measurements of the constructs used in longitudinal research over time should be a key concern of researchers. This task is even more challenging for research that pursues a longitudinal approach over the life course. Yet this kind of research is needed better to link participatory experiences in adolescence, the

emergence of interests and habits, and the development of political skills and efficacy with political participation.

Notes

¹ All scale points were verbally labelled throughout.

² Migration history was excluded due to the small number of immigrants ($N = 3$).

³ Model II was extended by the three-way interaction between political interest, responsiveness of politicians, and pre-/post-election sample, as well as the three corresponding two-way interactions. Only the interactions between responsiveness and pre-/post-election survey ($B = 2.04$, $Wald = 8.23$, $p = .004$), and interest and pre-/post-election survey ($B = 1.61$, $Wald = 3.88$, $p = .049$) gained significance (remainders: $p \geq .810$; responsiveness did not differ between pre- and post-election interviewees).

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
- Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1965). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- Balch, G. I. (1974). Multiple indicators in survey research: The concept 'sense of political efficacy'. *Political Methodology*, 1(2), 1–43.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215.
- Bargh, J. A. (1997). The automaticity of everyday life. In R. S. Wyer (Ed.), *Advances in social cognition: X. The automaticity of everyday life* (pp. 1–61). Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Barnes, S. H., Kaase, M., Allerbeck, K. R., Farah, B. G., Heunks, F., Inglehart, R., . . . Rosenmayr, L. (1979). *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

- Campbell, A., Gurin, G., & Miller, W. E. (1954). *The Voter Decides*. Evanston: Row, Peterson and Company.
- Cicognani, E., Albanesi, C., Mazzoni, D., Prati, G., & Zani, B. (2016). Explaining offline and online civic engagement intentions between Italian and migrant youth. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 31(2), 282–316.
- Cross, W., & Young, L. (2008). Factors influencing the decision of the young politically engaged to join a political party: An investigation of the Canadian case. *Party Politics*, 14(3), 345–369.
- Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1913). *Interest and Effort in Education*. Cambridge: Riverside.
- Erhard, J., Lauwers, S., & Schmerz, S. (2013). Do unconventional forms of citizen participation add value to the quality of democracy in Germany? A case study of the Bürgerdialog Energietechnologien für die Zukunft. In A. Römmele & H. Banthien (Eds.), *Empowering Citizens. Studies in Collaborative Democracy* (pp. 17–106). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Finkel, S. E. (1985). Reciprocal effects of participation and political efficacy: A panel analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, 29(4), 891–913.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1981). Attitudes and voting behaviour: An application of the theory of reasoned action. In G. M. Stephenson & J. H. Davis (Eds.), *Progress in Applied Social Psychology, Vol. 1* (pp. 253–313). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gabriel, O. W. (2004). Politische Partizipation. In J. W. van Deth (Ed.), *Deutschland in Europa. Ergebnisse des European Social Survey 2002-2003* (pp. 317–338). Wiesbaden: VS.

- Granger, C. W. J. (1980). Testing for causality. *Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control*, 2(1), 329–352.
- Hadjar, A., & Becker, R. (2007). Unkonventionelle politische Partizipation im Zeitverlauf: Hat die Bildungsexpansion zu einer politischen Mobilisierung beigetragen? *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 59(3), 410–439.
- Hatemi, P. K., & Verhulst, B. (2015). Political attitudes develop independently of personality traits. *PloS one*, 10(3), e0118106.
- Hidi, S., Renninger, K. A., & Krapp, A. (2004). Interest, a motivational construct that combines affective and cognitive functioning. In D. Y. Dai & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Motivation, Emotion and Cognition: Integrative Perspectives on Intellectual Functioning and Development* (pp. 89–115). Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- James, W. (1950). *The Principles of Psychology. Vol. I*. First published in 1890. New York: Dover.
- Kaase, M. (1990). Mass participation. In K. M. Jennings, J. W. van Deth, S. H. Barnes, D. Fuchs, F. J. Heunks, R. Inglehart, . . . J. J. A. Thomassen (Eds.), *Continuities in Political Action. A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies* (pp. 23–64). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Kahne, J. E., & Sporte, S. E. (2008). Developing citizens: The impact of civic learning opportunities on students' commitment to civic participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 738–766.
- Keating, A., & Janmaat, J. G. (2016). Education through citizenship at school: Do school activities have a lasting impact on youth political engagement? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(2), 409–429.
- Koestner, R., & Losier, G. F. (2004). Distinguishing three ways of being internally motivated: A closer look at introjections, identification, and intrinsic motivation. In E.

- L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (pp. 101–121). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Krampen, G. (2000). Transition of adolescent political action orientations to voting behavior in early adulthood in view of a social-cognitive action theory model of personality. *Political Psychology*, 21(2), 277–297.
- McFarland, D. A., & Thomas, R. J. (2006). Bowling young: How youth voluntary associations influence adult political participation. *American Sociological Review*, 71(3), 401–425.
- Rattinger, H., Roßteutscher, S., Schmitt-Beck, R., Weßels, B., Falter, J., & Gabriel, O. W. (2012). Langfrist-Panel 2002-2005-2009 (GLES 2009). Köln: GESIS Datenarchiv.
- Reichert, F. (2013). *Kognitive Politisierung bei Studierenden mit türkischer Migrationsgeschichte: Zum Einfluss von politischem Interesse und politischen Kompetenzen auf politisches Handeln sowie zur Rolle kollektiver Identitäten im Prozess kognitiver Politisierung*. München: Oldenbourg.
- Reichert, F. (2016). How internal political efficacy translates political knowledge into political participation: Evidence from Germany. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 12(2), 221–241.
- Reichert, F. (2017). Conditions and constraints of political participation among Turkish students in Germany. *Cogent Psychology*, 4(1), 1351675.
- Reichert, F., & Print, M. (2017a). Mediated and moderated effects of political communication on civic participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(8), 1162–1184.
- Reichert, F., & Print, M. (2017b). Civic participation of high school students: The effect of civic learning in school. *Educational Review*, 1–24.
- Steinbrecher, M. (2009). *Politische Partizipation in Deutschland*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Strack, F., & Deutsch, R. (2004). Reflective and impulsive determinants of social behavior.

Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8(3), 220–247.

van Deth, J. W. (1990). Interest in politics. In K. M. Jennings, J. W. van Deth, S. H. Barnes,

D. Fuchs, F. J. Heunks, R. Inglehart, . . . J. J. A. Thomassen (Eds.), *Continuities in*

Political Action. A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western

Democracies (pp. 275–312). Berlin: de Gruyter.

van Deth, J. W. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, 49(3),

349–367.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism*

in American Politics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

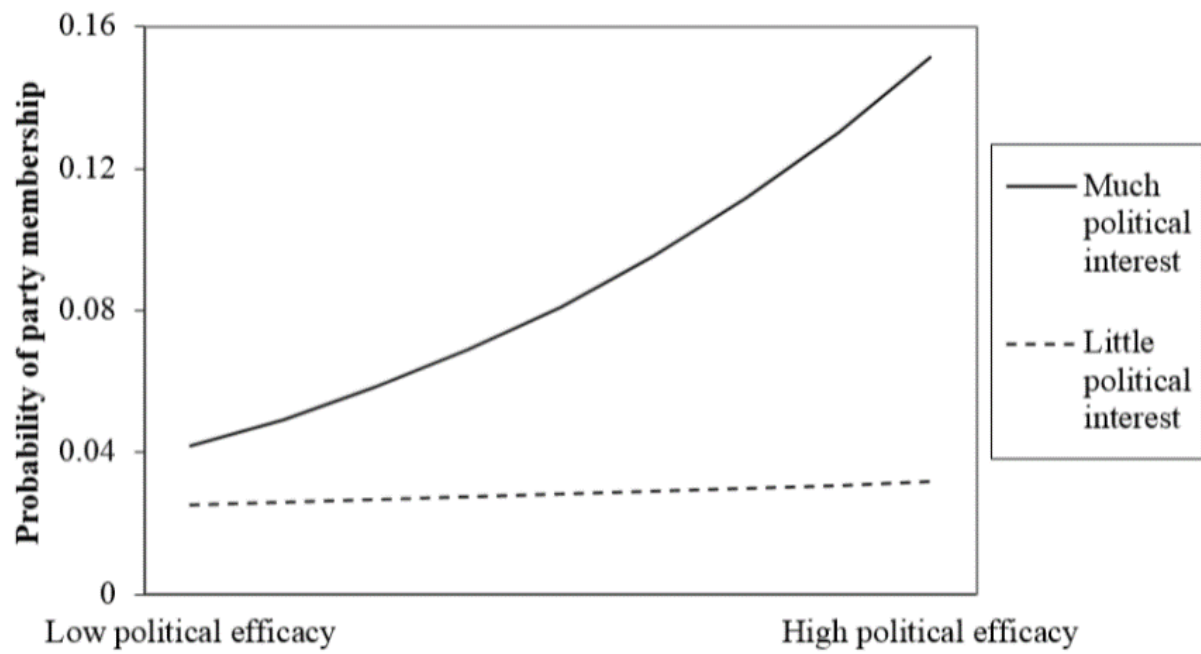


Figure 1. Conditional effect of internal political efficacy on party membership.

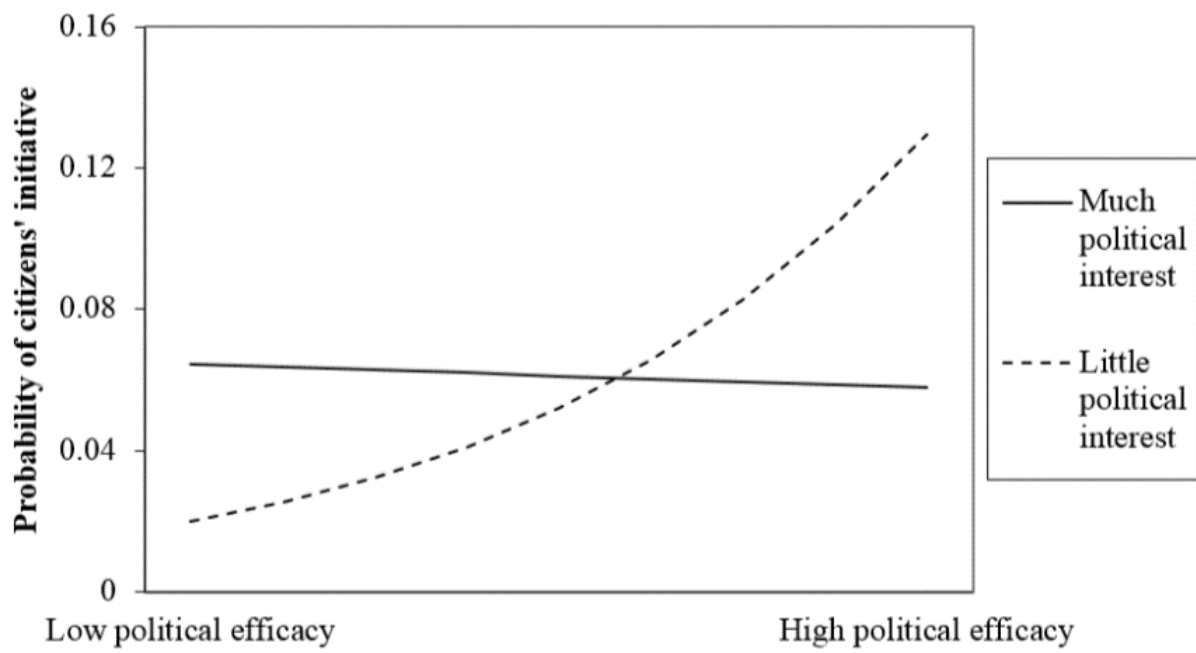


Figure 2. Conditional effect of internal political efficacy on membership in a citizens' initiative.

Table 1

Logistic regression analyses for voting in the federal election 2002/2005 (pre-election sample; N = 188) or 2005/2009 (post-election sample; N = 218)

	Pre-election sample				Post-election sample			
	Model I		Model II		Model I		Model II	
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Political interest	0.39	(2.97)	0.22*	(5.11)	2.78**	(7.13)	2.56*	(4.98)
Internal political efficacy	2.84	(1.80)	4.93	(2.53)	0.47	(2.27)	0.49	(1.78)
Age	1.08*	(4.92)	1.09*	(4.27)	1.00	(0.01)	1.01	(0.04)
Gender	1.07	(0.01)	1.55	(0.16)	0.61	(0.52)	0.44	(1.13)
Region	0.31	(1.08)	0.37	(0.54)	0.32	(2.52)	0.21*	(4.16)
No/lowest qualification	0.19	(1.62)	0.09	(2.50)	0.70	(0.16)	0.43	(0.78)
Intermediary qualification	0.84	(0.02)	0.17	(1.19)	0.47	(0.87)	0.53	(0.54)
Voted in 1998			277**	(8.39)			49.92**	(8.14)
$R_{\text{Nagelkerke}}$.226		.413		.149		.258	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

Table 2

Logistic regression analyses for intention to vote (pre-election sample; N = 202)

	Model I		Model II	
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Political interest	1.23	(0.49)	1.14	(0.18)
Internal political efficacy	1.00	(0.00)	1.06	(0.03)
Age	1.03	(2.20)	1.02	(1.76)
Gender	0.96	(0.01)	1.04	(0.01)
Region	0.19*	(9.88)	0.17*	(10.32)
No/lowest qualification	0.13***	(10.84)	0.10***	(11.31)
Intermediary qualification	0.68	(0.37)	0.48	(1.10)
Voted in 1998			25.35*	(6.28)
$R_{\text{Nagelkerke}}$.214		.265	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

Table 3

Logistic regression analyses for party politics: being a member of a political party

(2005/2009) (N = 436)

	Model I		Model II	
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Political interest	1.85***	(11.05)	1.09	(0.10)
Internal political efficacy	1.83**	(8.87)	1.26	(0.67)
Age	1.02*	(4.71)	1.04**	(6.75)
Gender	0.71	(1.35)	0.80	(0.32)
Region	0.25*	(5.64)	0.28	(2.49)
No/lowest qualification	1.41	(1.01)	1.39	(0.48)
Intermediary qualification	1.11	(0.09)	0.57	(1.03)
Pre-/post-election survey			0.71	(0.81)
Party member 2002			141***	(75.56)
<i>R</i> _{Nagelkerke}	.193		.597	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

Table 4

Linear regression analyses for party politics: trying to get support from a political party

	2005 (N = 437)				2009 (N = 439)			
	Model I		Model II		Model I		Model II	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Political interest	.00	(0.02)	-.01	(-0.22)	.04	(0.71)	-.01	(-0.09)
Internal political efficacy	.25***	(4.29)	.24***	(4.10)	.23***	(4.08)	.20***	(3.55)
Age	-.17***	(-3.59)	-.17***	(-3.59)	-.26***	(-5.53)	-.26***	(-5.70)
Gender	-.01	(-0.25)	-.01	(-0.28)	.02	(0.44)	.02	(0.48)
Region	-.08	(-1.62)	-.07	(-1.52)	-.07	(-1.65)	-.06	(-1.34)
No/lowest qualification	-.06	(-1.12)	-.07	(-1.14)	-.07	(-1.17)	-.07	(-1.30)
Intermediary qualification	-.08	(-1.56)	-.08	(-1.59)	-.06	(-1.24)	-.07	(-1.46)
Pre-/post-election survey			.05	(1.92)			.08	(1.74)
Party member 2002			.05	(1.05)			.18***	(3.79)
<i>R</i> ²	.116		.121		.159		.193	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

Table 5

Logistic regression analyses for unconventional participation: membership in a citizens' initiative (2005/2009) (N = 434)

	Model I		Model II	
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Political interest	0.95	(0.04)	0.94	(0.05)
Internal political efficacy	1.57	(2.42)	1.49	(1.81)
Age	1.01	(0.61)	1.01	(0.14)
Gender	1.01	(0.00)	1.08	(0.04)
Region	0.45	(1.15)	0.44	(1.16)
No/lowest qualification	0.82	(0.19)	0.96	(0.01)
Intermediary qualification	0.43	(2.29)	0.45	(2.00)
Pre-/post-election survey			1.04	(0.01)
Member citizens' initiative 2002			7.25***	(12.74)
<i>R</i> _{Nagelkerke}	.051		.111	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

Table 6

Linear regression analyses for unconventional participation: intention to contribute to a citizens' initiative

	2005 (<i>N</i> = 437)				2009 (<i>N</i> = 439)			
	Model I		Model II		Model I		Model II	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Political interest	.01	(0.08)	.00	(0.07)	-.03	(-0.61)	-.04	(-0.68)
Internal political efficacy	.21***	(3.55)	.21***	(3.49)	.17**	(2.90)	.16**	(2.78)
Age	-.10*	(-2.08)	-.11*	(-2.14)	-.20***	(-4.26)	-.22***	(-4.58)
Gender	-.05	(-1.07)	-.05	(-1.04)	.05	(0.99)	.05	(1.04)
Region	.01	(0.16)	.01	(0.19)	-.07	(-1.60)	-.07	(-1.53)
No/lowest qualification	.08	(1.33)	.08	(1.39)	-.08	(-1.44)	-.07	(-1.18)
Intermediary qualification	.00	(0.06)	.01	(0.11)	-.00	(-0.07)	.01	(0.12)
Pre-/post-election survey			.01	(0.11)			.05	(1.00)
Member citizens' initiative 2002			.04	(0.75)			.14**	(3.07)
<i>R</i> ²	.048		.049		.099		.120	

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.

POLITICAL INTEREST AND EFFICACY

Table A1

Bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations (ranges in parentheses)

[illegible]

POLITICAL INTEREST AND EFFICACY

Table A1. (continued)

	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
01 Age	.09	.11	.04	.07	-.13**	.04	-.20***	-.12*	-.26***	-.23***	-.00
02 Gender	-.01	.04	.03	-.03	.05	.03	.02	-.02	.06	.05	.09
03 Income	-.03	.04	.02	.03	.06	-.12*	-.03	-.02	.05	.01	-.02
04 Region	-.02	-.03	-.21**	-.09	-.13**	-.05	-.08	-.00	-.08	-.07	-.00
05 No or lowest formal qualification	-.09	-.13	-.26***	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.15**	-.03	-.16***	-.17***	-.00
06 Intermediary secondary qualification	-.02	.06	.09	-.07	-.03	-.07	-.01	-.00	-.00	.07	-.03
07 Political interest	.08	-.04	.14*	.17*	.27***	.05	.11*	.07	.14**	.06	.02
08 Internal political efficacy	.11*	.11	.19**	.00	.22***	.09	.27***	.18***	.29***	.21***	.01
09 Voted in 1998 (recall)	.04	.28***	.27***	.22**	.03	.04	.03	.03	.05	.09	-.00
10 Voted in 2002 (post-electoral)	.03	—	—	.35***	.06	.03	.03	-.01	.00	-.05	—
11 Member of a political party in 2002	.19***	.07	.17*	.06	.74***	.08	.10*	.06	.24***	.06	.03
12 Member of citizens' initiative in 2002		.04	-.01	.05	.17***	.23***	.09	.04	.08	.14**	-.01
13 Voted in 2002/2005 (recall, pre-electoral)			.36***	—	.09	.05	.14*	.15*	.14	.07	—
14 Intention to vote 2002-2009 (pre-electoral)				—	.17*	.08	.03	.11	.17*	.09	—
15 Voted in 2005/2009 (post-election)					.07	.06	.09	.02	.13*	.14*	—
16 Member of a political party 2005/2009						.15**	.13**	.08	.20***	.01	-.01
17 Member of citizens' initiative 2005/2009							.11*	.14**	.06	.11*	.00
18 Try to get support from a political party 2005								.35***	.35***	.19***	.04
19 Intention to contribute to a citizens' initiative 2005									.24***	.40***	.01
20 Try to get support from a political party 2009										.40***	.08
21 Intention to contribute to a citizens' initiative 2009											.05

Note: *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$. Weighted data.