

THE EFFICACY GAP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: WHEN POLITICAL INFLUENCE FAILS TO MEET EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

A range of factors may contribute to a sense that citizens are less able to influence public policy and engage in self-governance than should ideally be the case, yet research has rarely considered the distinction between citizens' judgments of how much influence they *do have*, how much they *ought to have*, and how the gap between these two perceptions affects various modes of participation. We contend that these two distinct efficacy judgments are tied to community integration and media use, yet have very different consequences for political participation. Specifically, we predict that when actual citizen efficacy fails to meet expectations, people will tend to favor more individual forms of political participation over collective efforts. Using data from a random digit dialing community survey, this research finds: (1) that evaluations of desired citizen efficacy are conceptually different from evaluations of actual citizen efficacy; (2) that demographics, community integration, and mass media use significantly predict both types of efficacy—but do so differently; and (3) that the efficacy gap positively predicts individual forms of political participation and negatively predicts collective action.

Democratic societies, by their very definition, expect citizens to participate in the process of self-governance. It is a cornerstone of democratic theory that an enlightened, engaged citizenry is required for a democracy to function effectively. These expectations can be traced back to Aristotle and are reflected in Hobbes' *social contract* and Rousseau's *general will*. Yet many democratic citizens fail to engage in the most basic mode of participation, voting (Lijphart, 1997), let alone more demanding forms of political engagement and collective action

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(McDonough, Sin, & Alvaro Moises, 1998; Putnam, 2000). The failure to participate has consequences, as those who fail to take part, in effect, cede influence over political matters to those who do.

A considerable amount of research has been dedicated to answering the question of why some citizens participate, while others do not (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In this paper, we contend that citizens' sense of efficacy, the belief that they individually or collectively might have some effect on public policy, is directly linked to participation in democratic life. Past research on this relationship has focused on evaluations of actual citizen political efficacy (i.e., how much influence citizens believe they do have), largely ignoring the normative evaluations of efficacy (i.e., how much influence citizens believe they should have). This study explicates the distinction between actual and desired efficacy and examines its relationship with demographic factors, community integration, and media use. More important, we consider the implications of citizens' beliefs that they ought to have more influence than they currently do for modes of political engagement. Specifically, we expect that when actual citizen efficacy fails to meet expectations, people will tend to favor individual over collective forms of political participation, reflecting a strategic shift away from effortful forms of engagement.

We consider relationships between efficacy and participation in the context of a larger model that includes demographic factors, community integration and media use. These factors are thought to play active roles in cultivating a sense of efficacy and encouraging participation (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990; Friedland & McLeod, 1999). In particular, print, broadcast, and Internet news sources contain content that may contribute to expectations of citizen involvement. To examine these relationships, we conducted a RDD community survey that permitted testing of the linkages among demographic and structural variables, public affairs media use, actual and desired citizen efficacy, and various modes of political participation.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENT AND HYPOTHESES

EXPLAINING ACTUAL AND DESIRED EFFICACY

The tension between how much actual political influence individuals possess and how much they ought to have has long animated philosophical thought. For Aristotle, only some individuals—those who participated in governance—should enjoy the rights of citizenship. Writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Locke, an advocate for popular sovereignty of majority decision-making, argued that legitimate governments rested on the consent of the governed (Cecil, 1984; Lipset, 2001). The framers of the American Constitution drew heavily on Locke's theories of law and government (Cecil, 1984), including the rights of citizens to participate in decision-making and elect representative leaders. Yet

these newly won freedoms from monarchy were only endowed to those of a particular gender, race, and social standing.

The expectation of an active, influential citizenry was further developed in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. Rousseau proposed conditions for self-rule in which individuals would be free from control by others and subject only to their own choices and decisions, playing an active rather than a passive role in governance (Lipset, 2001; Rousseau, 1994; Street, 1996). Likewise, Mill, in the nineteenth century, believed in the wisdom of the majority to make sound decisions (Lipset, 2001). Mill found a high degree of popular involvement in governance as crucial to safeguarding liberty (Biagini, 1996). As this suggests, implicit in the arc from Aristotle to Mills is a disagreement about how much influence citizens ought to have.

Unfortunately, this tension between expectations of influence and actual influence has not been used to enrich empirical research on political efficacy. That is, the concept of political efficacy has been defined in terms of how much influence individuals believe they possess without regard for the normative counterpart of how much influence citizens believe they should have. Instead, research has been directed at understanding the implications of self-assessments of actual political efficacy for civic participation, linking assessments of individual competence and influence to various modes of participation. Researchers have found that these assessments of political efficacy matter for voting behaviors (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985; Finkel, 1985; Stewart, Kornberg, Clarke, & Acock, 1992), and in other types of political action, including contacting officials (Hirlinger, 1992; Sharp, 1984; Verba & Nie, 1972; Vedlitz & Veblen, 1980).

Building on the work of Lane (1959), scholars often have separated political efficacy into two dimensions, internal and external. Internal efficacy refers to a belief about one's own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics, while external efficacy refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991). However, even when armed with the recognition that efficacy is a multi-dimensional concept, researchers have inconsistently defined its subcomponents. For instance, internal efficacy has been conceived of as a mixture of understanding and participating (e.g. Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Niemi et al., 1991). Adding to the confusion, Finkel (1985) refers to an individual's sense of political self-competence and Koch (1993) refers to the understanding of the political process as dimensions of internal efficacy. In addition to the sizable gulf between understanding governance and participating competently, these definitions of political efficacy fail to consider two important considerations: (1) assessments of citizen efficacy often reflect beliefs about collectives not individuals; and (2) judgments of citizen efficacy may often fall short of expectations concerning desired levels of influence.

Attention to these distinctions may be important for understanding the broader implications of political efficacy for political participation. Evaluations of desired citizen efficacy may differ markedly from individuals' judgments of their efficaciousness. This may reflect an informed awareness of the limits of individual influence in contemporary politics. For this reason, it seems logical to assume that citizens have higher assessments of desired efficacy than evaluations of actual efficacy, with this gap reflecting individuals' desire for greater citizen influence over matters of public policy. Even when judgments of political efficacy are focused at the community level, where citizen input is a realistic goal, the opposite seems unlikely, that citizens would consider themselves and their fellow citizens to hold more sway over community issues than they should. Accordingly, the first hypothesis proposes that there will be an 'efficacy gap':

H1: Evaluations of desired citizen efficacy will exceed evaluations of actual citizen efficacy.

This is not to suggest that judgments of desired efficacy as opposed to actual efficacy (or citizen efficacy as opposed to self-efficacy) are so removed from their counterparts. In fact, it seems likely that evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy are interrelated and have similar, but not identical, sources and effects. This is because actual and desired efficacy both represent underlying judgments of citizens' potential to shape democratic outcomes. Nonetheless, we expect these judgments to differ in ways that support the theoretical distinction between perceptions of influence and expectations of influence.

For example, McLeod, Zubric, Kwak, and Powell (2000; see also McLeod *et al.*, 2001) found that community integration, enhanced by local media use, is closely related to feelings of personal and group efficacy, ultimately promoting citizen participation. Similarly, Chavis and Wandersman (1990) found a 'sense of community' could act as a catalyst, heightening perceived efficacy. Maton and Rapport (1984) also observed that the development of a sense of community in a religious context was positively associated with psychological empowerment. Thus, highly integrated individuals should have higher estimates of actual citizen efficacy, since they are more closely tied to community resources and presumably have greater faith in community reserves. Individuals with strong ties to the community should be less inclined to judge that citizens should have more influence than they currently do. Hence, community integration should be negatively related to the efficacy gap.

H2a: Community integration will be positively related to evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy.

H2b: Community integration will be negatively related to the gap between actual and desired citizen efficacy.

News media, by the very act of revealing politics to the public, advance the standard and reality of citizen involvement in democracy (Lemert, 1981). Research lends support to the linkage of news consumption and citizen efficacy, finding both newspapers and television news use are positively related to internal efficacy (McLeod, Guo, Daily, Steele et al., 1996). Some suggest that media provide the requisite knowledge for efficacy to blossom and encourage participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In particular, newspaper use may drive evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy because these news sources often reinforce the view that the public should serve as a corrective to the influence of other, less democratic social interests. Use of the Internet to gather and exchange information has been found to have similar effects on civic mindedness (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Television news would also seem to have this potential, though past research has questioned whether certain patterns of TV reporting lead to cynicism and withdrawal rather than efficacy and engagement (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Nonetheless, we offer the following three hypotheses concerning efficacy evaluations:

- H3a: Newspaper use will be positively related to actual and desired citizen efficacy.
- H3b: Television news use will be positively related to actual and desired citizen efficacy.
- H3c: Online information exchange will be positively related to evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy.

EXPLAINING INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Research on political participation has traditionally focused on voting (e.g., Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Teixeira, 1987; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980), though recent work has expanded the scope of participation to include a broad range of civic activities, including attending town-hall meetings or deliberating over issues (Fishkin, 1995; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy 1999; McLeod, Scheufele, Moy, Horowitz et al., 1999). Accordingly, scholars have distinguished different forms of political participation in terms of the requisite sophistication, the underlying motives, and the modes of engagement, typically separating voting from other activists (e.g., Milbrath, 1965; Neuman, 1986; Schlozman, Verba & Brady, 1995; Verba et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972).

Evaluations of actual efficacy have been closely tied to political activity and strongly associated with increased participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Milbrath, 1965; Peterson, 1990; Zimmerman & Rapport, 1988). In fact, panel analysis suggests that the causal direction runs from efficacy to participation,

with perceptions of individual and group efficacy significantly related to future political behavior (Finkel & Muller, 1998). Thus, the concept of citizen efficacy has been found to shape political participation, though its relationship with the proposed gap between perceptions of actual and desired efficacy has not yet been examined.

We contend that the disjuncture between individuals' desired and actual levels of efficacy may affect patterns of participation. A larger gap—reflecting less political influence than an individual believes he or she should have—may temper many modes of participation. Because a person feels citizens' influence falls short of what it should be, he or she may feel alienated and opt out of collective action (Olson, 1965). However, a large gap may spur other types of action, as individuals focus on modes of participation that they find meaningful but not too effortful.

Scholars concerned with political alienation advance parallel arguments. Conway (1991, p. 54) defines alienation as 'a feeling of discrepancy between expectations and reality held by an individual or set of individuals,' similar to our notion of the efficacy gap. Finifter (1972) proposes that various types of alienation may have different consequences for political participation, and suggests that political inaction is typically tied to a sense of powerlessness and political normlessness (or anomie). However, Schwartz (1973) contends that alienated individuals can express themselves by voting without fear of social or political sanctions. That is, the effects of the efficacy gap should be tied to the amount of effort required to engage in political acts and the influence of alienation on political participation.

Collaborative forms of participation, like working for a social group or attending a forum, require considerable effort and coordination, than do discrete individual actions like voting. We argue that an individual needs to believe that actual efficacy closely matches desired efficacy to justify expending the time and effort for this type of political participation. By contrast, a larger efficacy gap may spur individual political acts like voting because it requires little effort and imposes no additional costs, yet still fulfills individuals' sense of political duty. Accordingly, a larger gap should be negatively related to collaborative forms of participation and positively related to individual forms of participation, as we hypothesize below:

- H4a: A larger efficacy gap will be positively related to individual forms of participation.
- H4b: A larger efficacy gap will be negatively related to collaborative forms of participation.

These effects are expected to exist over and above the influence of other factors that contribute to political participation. In particular, those who have more education, higher incomes, are older and employed have been more likely to engage in political activities in the United States and Europe (McLeod et al.,

2000; Milbrath, 1965; Pettersen & Rose, 1996; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, McLeod et al. (2000) suggest that community integration provides the structural opportunities and communication provides the knowledge for participation. The mass media, especially local newspapers, have long been seen as complementary to community integration to influence engagement (e.g. Dewey, 1927; McLeod et al., 2001; McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland et al., 1996; Park, 1940/1967).

METHODS

THE SURVEY

This study is an analysis of 657 RDD telephone interviews. The sampling method followed conventional probability sample procedures. A combination of systematic sampling and a variant of random digit dialing were employed to ensure the inclusion of unlisted phone numbers in the sample. The respondents, who are adult residents of Dane County, Wisconsin, USA, including the city of Madison, were randomly selected from each household. The interviews were conducted between October 18 and November 7, 2001, with a response rate of 49.8 percent, calculated following AAPOR/WAPOR response rate formula RR2.

THE VARIABLES

Three different conceptualizations of efficacy were developed in this study, evaluations of actual citizen efficacy, evaluations of desired citizen efficacy and the gap between actual and desired efficacy. The actual citizen efficacy index was derived from three items, amount of influence perceived by the respondent that three kinds of people (the average person, themselves, and people working together) *can* have (mean inter-item $r = .61$; $M = 19.56$; $s.d. = 5.48$; see Carmines & Zeller, 1979, for reporting of mean inter-item correlations for scales composed of four or fewer items). Similarly, the desired citizen efficacy index was based on three items: amount of influence perceived by the respondent that three kinds of people (the average person, themselves, and people working together) *should ideally* have (mean inter-item $r = .60$; $M = 21.50$; $s.d. = 5.09$). For complete question wording, see the Appendix. The efficacy gap was created by subtracting the actual efficacy score from the desired efficacy score (for actual and desired efficacy, $r = .52$); thus a positive value indicates that the individuals have less actual efficacy than they desire, while a negative number means that they have more actual efficacy than desired ($M = 1.92$; $s.d. = 5.14$).

Civic participation, a construct that functions as the criterion variable in our analysis, was measured through four behavioral items that asked whether the respondent had participated in any of the following activities in the last two

years: voted in a local election; attended a civic forum or meeting where citizens spoke about local issues; worked on behalf of a social group, cause or organization; and contributed money to local organizations. All political participation variables were measured dichotomously (i.e., yes or no). Voting and contributing money were added to create the variable of individual participation (mean inter-item $r = .20$; $M = 1.50$; $s.d. = .66$), while working for a social group and attending a civic forum were used to create the collaborative participation index (mean inter-item $r = .30$; $M = .79$; $s.d. = .79$).

Our models also included five demographic variables that indicate the respondent's gender (49.5 percent female), age ($M = 43.41$; $s.d. = 16.50$), education ($M = 15.52$; $s.d. = 2.75$), household income (median = \$30,000—\$50,000), and work status (79.7 percent work). Another group of independent variables concerned the respondent's integration into the community: ownership of a residence (64.2 percent own), number of years lived in a town ($M = 21.54$; $s.d. = 18.08$), and psychological attachment to the community. Community attachment was measured by an additive index of three items, 'I'd be content to live in the Madison area for the rest of my life,' 'I feel at home in the community I live in,' and 'I feel close to many people in my neighborhood' (mean inter-item $r = .41$; $M = 21.37$; $s.d. = 6.03$).

Media use formed another group of independent variables. The measurement of the respondent's level of exposure and attention to newspaper hard news consisted of ten items. Newspaper use was measured by items asking about reading newspaper articles on international affairs, national government and politics, local government and politics, and community issues (mean inter-item $r = .61$, Cronbach's alpha = .94; $M = 61.94$; $s.d. = 23.74$). Similarly, attention to television news was combined into a single variable. Five items were asked on a ten-point Likert scale to attain the respondent's level of attention to news contents of international affairs, national government and politics, local government and politics, and community issues (mean inter-item $r = .58$, Cronbach's alpha = .87; $M = 30.91$; $s.d. = 11.39$). Internet information exchange was constructed with four measures of on-line activities: using e-mail to communicate, following news developments, searching for information, and expressing opinions about issues and politics. The frequency of engaging in each of these activities was measured on a ten-point scale, and then pooled into a single variable (mean inter-item correlation = .69; $M = 15.38$; $s.d. = 10.48$).

RESULTS

EVALUATIONS OF ACTUAL AND DESIRED CITIZEN EFFICACY

Hypothesis 1 predicted that in relation to community issues evaluations of actual citizen efficacy would be lower than evaluations of desired citizen efficacy. This

hypothesis was supported. The desired citizen efficacy scale ($M=21.50$) had a higher mean value than the actual citizen efficacy scale ($M=19.56$), a difference that was significant when tested by a paired-samples t -test (t -value= -9.4 , $p < .01$). Moreover, 54.9 percent of the respondents exhibited higher levels of desired efficacy than actual efficacy, while only 18.4 percent had equal equivalent values, and only 26.7 percent expressed that citizens should have less influence than they do.

To test H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b, and H3c, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses with actual efficacy, desired efficacy and the efficacy gap alternately serving as the dependent variables. The demographic controls were not significant predictors of actual citizen efficacy, desired citizen efficacy or the efficacy gap (Table 1). Among these demographic variables, only age was a significant predictor, and just for evaluations of actual citizen efficacy and the efficacy gap. The effect of age was negative, indicating that older people felt less efficacious than the young. Older people also had a larger efficacy gap.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that community integration would be positively related to both evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy. This hypothesis was partially supported. Community integration was a significant contributor to

TABLE 1 Models predicting evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy

	<i>Actual efficacy</i>	<i>Desired efficacy</i>	<i>Efficacy gap</i>
N	581	581	576
<i>Demographics</i>			
Gender (female)	-.02	-.02	.00
Age	-.13*	-.01	.14*
Education	.06	.02	-.04
Income	.01	-.04	-.03
Work status	.03	.03	.00
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	0.7	0.4	1.0
<i>Community integration</i>			
Community attachment	.21**	.08	-.17**
Years lived in a town	-.03	-.08	.05
Own house	-.00	-.01	.02
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	5.4**	1.0	3.3**
<i>Media use</i>			
Newspaper	.09 [#]	.12*	.02
Television news	.10*	.04	-.06
Online information exchange	-.04	-.11*	-.06
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	2.2*	2.3**	0.5
<i>Final R² (%)</i>	8.4**	3.7*	4.7**

$p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two tailed).

Note: Values are final betas from OLS regression. Gap in efficacy = desired efficacy minus actual efficacy.

evaluations of actual efficacy, but not to desired citizen efficacy. Consistent with expectations, community integration played a stronger role in evaluations of actual efficacy than for desired citizen efficacy. Community attachment was the lone significant variable. However, neither years in the community nor home ownership were significant predictors. This difference is further reflected in the fact that community attachment was a significant contributor to the efficacy gap, lending some support to Hypothesis 2b. This relationship chiefly exists because those with lower levels of community attachment had larger efficacy gaps.

Hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c, which predicted a relationship between informational media use and both actual and desired efficacy, received some support, although the observed results are more complex than assumed. Informational media use explained 2.2 percent of the incremental variance in evaluations of actual efficacy and 2.3 percent in desired efficacy. In the regression equation, television news use was a significant predictor of evaluations of actual efficacy, while newspaper reading and Internet information exchange were not. For desired citizen efficacy, only newspaper and Internet information exchange were significant after community integration was entered. Contrary to expectations, informational Internet use had a negative effect on evaluations of desired citizen efficacy, suggesting it reduces expectations of political influence. Thus, H3a and H3b received partial support, whereas H3c was not supported by analysis. Notably, newspaper, television news, and informational Internet use were not significant predictors of the efficacy gap (Table 1).

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLABORATIVE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Hypotheses 4a and 4b predicted that the efficacy gap would differentially predict collaborative and individual participation. Both hypotheses were supported. But the efficacy gap performed differently, depending on the mode of participation. A larger efficacy gap negatively predicted collaborative forms of participation, supporting H4a, while the gap positively predicted individual forms of participation, supporting H4b (see Table 2). In other words, individuals were more likely to disengage from collaborative acts when their perceived influence was far from their desired level of influence. Instead, they were more likely to engage in individual modes of political participation when their self-perceptions of actual influence failed to meet their expectations.

Notably, these relationships were observed after accounting for the effects of demographic, community integration, and media use variables. Demographics were significant for both forms of participation. Education was a strong predictor of both collaborative and individual participation. In addition, community integration explained 2.7 percent of incremental variance in individual and 6.6 percent in collaborative participation. Home ownership was significant for both types of participation whereas community attachment was significant for individual participation

TABLE 2 Models predicting collaborative and individual political participation

	<i>Collaborative participation</i>	<i>Individual participation</i>
N	655	654
<i>Demographics</i>		
Gender (female)	-.05	-.07*
Age	-.03	.08 [#]
Education	.18***	.23***
Income	.05	.07 [#]
Work status	.04	.05
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	11.9***	18.5***
<i>Community integration</i>		
Community attachment	.01	.15***
Years lived in a town	.06	.02
Own house	.13**	.23***
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	2.7***	6.6***
<i>Media use</i>		
Newspaper	.25***	.09*
Television news	-.03	-.01
Online information exchange	.06 [#]	.02
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	4.7***	0.5
<i>Evaluations of efficacy</i>		
Efficacy gap	-.07*	.07*
<i>Incremental R² (%)</i>	0.5*	0.5*
<i>Final R² (%)</i>	19.9***	26.1***

$p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed)

Note: Values are final betas from OLS regression. Collaborative participation = 'participated in a civic forum' and 'worked on behalf of social group.' Individual participation = 'contributed money to local organization' and 'voted in a local election.'

only. Media use also had significant effects on collaborative participation, but was not significant for individual participation. This pattern was the opposite from the contribution of demographics and community integration, which account for more variance in individual participation than in collaborative participation. Among the media variables, only newspaper use was a significant predictor of both forms of political participation. However, television news did not achieve significance in either model and Internet information exchange was significant for just collaborative participation. Overall, these results confirm the general expectation that newspaper use is an especially strong predictor of political participation.

DISCUSSION

Analysis suggests that evaluations of efficacy can be separated into judgments about actual and desired influence, and that the gap between these types of

efficacy differentially affect political participation. Said another way, the results of this study indicate that, on average, expectations of efficacy outpace perceptions of actual influence and that this disjuncture has consequences for participation in democratic life. Evaluations of actual and desired efficacy were influenced by community attachment and patterns of media use. The size of the gap in perceptions was positively related to individual forms of participation, negatively related to collective forms.

After confirming the existence of the gap in these data, predictor variables were found to explain 8.4 percent of the variance of actual efficacy, mostly from community integration (incremental $R^2 = 5.4$ percent) and media use (incremental $R^2 = 2.2$ percent). Closer analysis revealed that community attachment and use of newspapers and television were crucial in establishing whether people felt they could affect community affairs, consistent with previous literature. Yet these same predictor variables accounted for just 3.7 percent of the variance in the normative component of efficacy, with only media use (2.3 percent of incremental R^2) making a significant contribution. These variables accounted for 4.7 percent of the variance in the efficacy gap, primarily accounted for by differences in community integration (3.3 percent of incremental R^2). Thus, community integration contributes to citizens' sense of actual efficacy but does little to influence their desired efficacy, thereby contributing to the efficacy gap. In contrast, media use accounts nearly equally for both actual and desired efficacy, and thus does not predict the efficacy gap. This suggests that estimates of desired efficacy are less rooted in one's community ties and more closely related to media use.

The media measures yielded intriguing relationships with evaluations of actual and desired citizen efficacy. While newspaper use affected evaluations of actual and desired efficacy, this was not the case for television news use and online communication. Television news use was positively related to evaluations of actual citizen efficacy, while Internet information exchange negatively predicted evaluations of desired citizen efficacy. For newspaper users, this suggests that print media may be particularly effective at conveying important information that becomes the building blocks for perceptions of actual efficacy while at the same time encouraging normative expectations of influence. Television's limited effect on desired efficacy may be explained by the fact that broadcast news often provides information without offering the interpretive and thematic coverage that places citizen influence in relation to the other institutional stakeholders. Conversely, the negative relationship of informational Internet use with evaluations of desired citizen suggests a somewhat cynical reaction toward traditional political values, including the norm of citizen efficacy.

Further, the finding that older individuals have lower evaluations of actual efficacy and larger efficacy gaps suggests that aging makes individuals more measured about the influence of the typical citizen. It may be that adults become more aware of the complexities of institutional influence, grow less convinced of

their ability to sway political outcomes, and thus temper their evaluations of actual influence. This is consistent with the common wisdom that people become less idealistic with age. Future research should examine whether people become less optimistic about their levels of actual efficacy as they age or whether certain cohorts are more or less efficacious, regardless of age, in order to better understand this effect.

With regard to participation, the efficacy gap produced intriguing and opposing results depending on the mode of engagement in governance. Individual forms of participation appear to be encouraged by the efficacy gap in place of collaborative forms of participation. That is, individuals were less likely to engage in more difficult types of collaborative participation, such as attending a meeting or work on behalf of a cause, when the gap between desired efficacy and actual efficacy was small or reversed. In contrast, a larger efficacy gap was associated with less effortful individual forms of participation such as voting and donating money. While past research links collective participation to high levels of actual efficacy, this analysis suggests that participants also need to believe that their actual influence is close to their desired influence. In other words, a small efficacy gap appears to encourage engagement in political acts that require time, energy, and cooperation. A heightened disparity between expectations and reality seems to reduce the willingness to invest energy in these types of efforts. Instead, those separated from desired levels of political influence engage in relatively easy, low-cost types of participation. This may reflect a type of passive resignation, a sense that individuals lack as much influence as they should have, for which actions like voting or check writing still fulfill a sense of duty.

Of course, it is also possible that those who participate in collaborative activities close the gap between perceptions of actual and desired efficacy. The act of working with others might raise judgments of actual efficacy and thereby reduce the size of the gap. Yet it is harder to understand why individual forms of participation would increase the size of the gap or differentially influence evaluations of actual and desired efficacy. Even so, it is important that future research work to address the causal linkages between different forms of participation and the efficacy gap. Although structural equation modeling provides some insights about causal flow with cross-sectional data, inferences about causal relationships are still limited. Instead, research should rely on panel data to test the causal direction of the relationship between these variables (see Finkel & Muller, 1998).

Notably, media use explained more variance in collaborative participation—more difficult and demanding types of activities—than in individual participation. Perhaps the demands of collaborative participation require greater use of the media's informational resources. By contrast, demographics and community integration accounted for more variance in individual participation than in collaborative participation. Among the media use measures, newspaper use was significant for both types of participation, confirming previous research. However,

our measures of television and Internet use did not predict either form of political engagement, though informational Internet yields a marginally significant link with collaborative action.

Further research should explore these relationships, trace their media antecedents, and examine their contextual determinants. In particular, studies building on this work should examine these linkages in the context of national politics, as opposed to the community issue context of this study. A national panel study containing repeated measures of actual and desired efficacy would be a particularly powerful tool for addressing questions raised by this study.

Nonetheless, this analysis contains some clues for understanding participation in America. Unfortunately, these conclusions may not extend across all democratic systems. The phenomena observed in this study would seem to operate most powerfully in liberal democratic societies such as the United States, more so than the collectivist democracies of much of Europe. Ben-Eliezer (1993, p. 398) notes that a liberal democracy 'ascribes primary importance to liberty and to principles related to the individuals' interests and their ability to realize their will.' By contrast, a collectivist democracy emphasizes equality and unity among individuals who aspire to achieve common goals. We contend that an efficacy gap represents an inability of citizens to realize their will, and thus is most relevant in liberal democratic societies.

This analysis also holds important implications for governments, educators, and journalists concerned about declining levels of citizen participation. It seems one key to fostering collective participation is closing the gap between actual and desired efficacy. Governmental institutions may consider ways to increase the influence of citizens, such as the deliberative forums developed by Fishkin (1995) in the United States and Britain. Educators may adopt curriculum that helps citizens better understand how they can effectively influence the political world and help them develop skills to make the difference. Journalists may apply principles of public journalism to encourage political efficacy. Regardless of the approach, this study provides some evidence that closing the gap between expectations of influence and the reality of influence may help reinvigorate collective participation and facilitate democratic functioning.

APPENDIX : SURVEY QUESTION WORDING

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender: Coded by interviewer

Income: I would like an estimate of your total 2000 household income. Please estimate the combined income for all household members from all sources.

Work status: Could you tell me if you work outside the home or if you are a student?

Age: What was your age on your last birthday?

Education: How many years of school have you completed (Including elementary school)?

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Community ties: I'd be content to live in the Madison area for the rest of my life. I feel 'at home' in the community I live in. I feel close to many people in my neighborhood.

Years in town: How many years have you been living in the Madison area?

Rent/Own: Do you rent or own?

MEDIA USE

Newspaper use: (1) Exposure and (2) attention to

- a. News about international affairs
- b. News about national government and politics
- c. News about local politics
- d. News about community issues
- e. News about urban growth

Television news use: Attention to

- a. News about international affairs
- b. News about national government and politics
- c. News about local government and politics
- d. News about community issues
- e. News about urban growth

Internet Information Exchange: How often are you involved in each of the following Internet activities?

- a. Use e-mail to communicate with people you know
- b. Follow news developments over the Internet
- c. Search for information over the Internet
- d. Expressing opinions about issues and policies

EVALUATIONS OF CITIZEN EFFICACY

Actual: Some people think that public and private groups *can* influence community issues. Where one means LITTLE INFLUENCE and ten means STRONG INFLUENCE, how much influence do you think

- a. the average person can have?
- b. what about you, yourself?
- c. people working together?

Desired: Now, apart from how much influence those people *can* have, how much influence *should* they have? Where one means LITTLE INFLUENCE and ten means STRONG INFLUENCE. *Ideally*, how much influence *should*:

- a. the average person have?
- b. what about you, yourself?
- c. people working together?

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In the past two years have you . . .

- a. voted in a local election?
- b. attended a civic forum or meeting where citizens spoke about local issues?
- c. worked on behalf of a social group, cause or organization? e.g. Contributed money to local organizations?
- d. contributed money to local organizations?

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