

Social Psychological Bulletin

Psychologia Społeczna

Conforming to Collective Action: The Impact of Rejection, Personality and Norms on Participation in Protest Activity

Emma A. Renström¹, Hanna Bäck², Holly M. Knapton²

¹ University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

² Lund University, Lund, Sweden

Corresponding author: Emma A. Renström (Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Haraldsgatan 1, SE-413 14, Gothenburg, Sweden. E-mail: Emma.Renstrom@psy.gu.se)

Handling editor: Tomasz Besta (University of Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland)

Received: 4 May 2018 • **Accepted:** 17 June 2018 • **Published:** 28 December 2018

Citation: Renström, E. A., Bäck, H., & Knapton, H. M. (2018). Conforming to collective action: The impact of rejection, personality and norms on participation in protest activity. *Social Psychological Bulletin*, 13(4), Article e26427. <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.v13i4.26427>

Related: This article is part of SPB's special issue on "Activism – Radicalization – Protest", *Social Psychological Bulletin*, 13(4).

Abstract

Social norms guide humans' everyday behavior, and previous research has shown that social norms consistently predict some forms of political participation. Failure to conform to norms may lead to deviation and possible rejection, which humans innately seek to avoid since it threatens their need for belongingness. Following an episode of rejection, individuals are therefore likely to become increasingly willing to conform to norms in order to re-establish a position in their social group. In an experiment, we show that 1) individuals conform to a perceived political engagement norm, and that 2) when rejection associations are made salient, they become increasingly willing to conform to a political engagement norm. We also show 3) that this effect is moderated by individual-level need for belongingness, such that rejection primed participants with a high need to belong, showed the highest levels of conformity to the perceived political engagement norm. The results imply that social pressure is a strong motivating factor in political engagement, which is an important result suggesting that basic social affiliation needs may in fact have an impact on politics and political outcomes.



Keywords

social norms, rejection, need to belong, collective action

The forms of political engagement are changing. Previous comparative research has shown that institutionalized practices, such as party activity, have decreased, while protest activities, such as demonstrations and signing petitions, have increased across Western societies (Dalton, 2014; Norris, 2002). This could possibly be due to a shift in social norms, from *duty-based citizenship* to *engaged citizenship* (Dalton, 2008). This suggested shift means that individuals change from believing that it is their duty to respect the system and participate in traditional forms (e.g., voting), to a more engaged citizenship norm, seeking alternative ways of affecting policy via non-institutional based routes (e.g., collective action).

Social norms guide humans' everyday behavior, and impact the ways in which individuals become politically engaged (Bäck, Bäck, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013; Bäck, Teorell, & Westholm, 2011). One reason as to why individuals tend to adhere to social norms is that deviation from said norms may lead to disapproval and rejection (Asch, 1955; Dijkster & Koomen, 2007). Since humans are social beings with an instinctive desire to belong to groups, they are attentive to cues of rejection (Williams, 2007) and once rejected become very adept at avoiding future rejection (Pickett, Gardener, & Knowles, 2004), by conforming to others. Even subtle cues of rejection are enough to elicit conformity. For instance, threats to belongingness manipulated through silence elicit conformity to group norms (Koudenberg, Postmes, & Gordjin, 2013).

This paper aims to examine how perceived social norms relating to political participation, may shape an individual's willingness to engage in protest activity, and how that relationship is moderated by certain personality dispositions.

Theory and Previous Research on Collective Action**Incentives and Political Participation**

Much of the previous research on collective action builds on the early work by Olsen (1965), and suggests that the choice to participate, for example, in protest events, is based on a cost-benefit calculus. In the political science literature, rational choice accounts of political participation have focused on solving the so called 'paradox of participation', that is, when people participate in collective action, even though the individual's probability of influencing the collective outcome is small, the collective benefits are available to everybody, and there are costs to participating, which increases the incentive to free-ride on the efforts of others (Klandermans & van Stekelenburg, 2013).

This literature has identified two main solutions to the paradox, where the first focuses on *collective incentives*, assuming that people do not consider their own opportunities to influence the outcome to be negligible, which implies the existence of expected collective benefits. The second solution focuses instead on *selective incentives*, that is, benefits that ac-

crue only to those who participate and that can be enjoyed independently of the outcome (Bäck, Teorell, & Westholm, 2011). Selective incentives refer to the benefits that can bring satisfaction regardless of the political outcome. These selective incentives are often based on social factors. For example an individual may experience satisfaction when complying with social norms about being a good citizen, or enjoyment through the company of like-minded others, regardless of the political outcome (Bäck et al., 2011; Bäck et al., 2013).

Similar arguments have been presented in the social psychological literature, where early work mainly focused on grievances, and relative deprivation theory suggested that individuals protest as a reaction to feelings of deprivation in comparison to a certain standard (Klandermans & van Stekelenburg, 2013). Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and van Dijk (2011, p. 92) suggest that three possible pathways to participation have been explored in the previous literature during the past decades, focusing on instrumentality, identity and group-based anger, and in addition they include ideology as an important motivation.

The *instrumentality pathway* is derived from Klandermans' (1984) model, and is based on the assumption that individuals perform a cost-benefit calculus where 'values (i.e., redressing grievances) stand in a multiplicative relationship to expectancies (i.e., the perceived efficacy of the protest)' (3, p. 93). This pathway comes very close to the so called collective incentives model, as presented in the political science literature, focusing on a multiplicative term between efficacy and collective benefits (Bäck et al., 2011). The *identity pathway* is a result of criticisms by many social psychologists that this type of cost-benefit account neglects the social aspects of protest participation, and that the role of collective identification in protest activity should be taken into account. The basic assumption in models emphasizing identity is that the more an individual identifies with a social group, the more likely he or she is to participate in collective action on behalf of this group (e.g., de Weerd & Klandermans, 1999). The *anger pathway* focuses on 'group-based anger'. Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, and Leach (2004) suggest that group-based anger is a form of emotion-focused coping and is one pathway to collective action next to the more instrumental pathway, when a collective disadvantage makes social identity salient.

As mentioned above, van Stekelenburg and colleagues (2011), suggest that *ideology* is also important to consider as a motivation, and following Klandermans (2004), they argue that people 'participate in protest not only to enforce political change but to gain dignity in their lives through struggle and moral expression'. This type of motivation comes relatively close to what has been labeled expressive incentives, drawing on the early work by Riker and Ordeshook (1968), who argued that people derive psychic gratifications from political (electoral) participation, such as 'satisfaction from affirming a partisan preference'.

Hence, the literature on collective action has produced a number of different answers to the question of why people become active, focusing on instrumental (collective) motivations, more social incentives, relating to social identity and expressive incentives, or more emotional motivations. We here connect to the previous literature by focusing on social incentives to participation. This does not mean that we discard the importance of collective benefits and instrumental motivations, but we focus only on the more selective social incentives in this

article, as we believe that we can here contribute by modifying this ‘pathway’ to collective action by introducing the role of rejection or exclusion, which we elaborate on below.

In the present research we are interested in selective incentives, especially conformity to social norms (Bäck et al., 2011). Social norms have consistently been shown to be a predictor for some forms of political participation, for example, voter turnout (Bäck et al., 2011; Thomas & McGarty, 2009), and norm influence is a well-researched area in social psychology (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Individuals may conform to social norms in order to prevent rejection. The fear of rejection is powerful and rejected individuals show greater conformity and adherence to social norms, even when the rejection is not explicit (Koudenberg & van Stekelenburg, 2013; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Therefore, we here aim to investigate if rejection saliency may lead (certain) individuals to conform to social norms of participation.

Social Norms, Rejection and Collective Action

Social norms are shared beliefs within a group about how members should think or behave. They are implicit or explicit rules that inform individuals of acceptable behaviors, values, beliefs and appropriate conduct (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Deviance from group norms elicits discomfort and subsequent conformity, even when individuals do not agree with the group standards (Asch, 1955). Such deviance threatens the individual’s membership status in the group and they may risk being excluded. Considering the strong human desire to belong to social groups, most individuals conform to different group norms. Given this, groups may use (threats of) rejection to strengthen the group and encourage compliance to the norms, ensuring all members act in a manner that fosters and contributes to the collective good (Dijker & Koomen, 2007; Ouwerkerk, Kerr, Gallucci, & van Lange, 2005). By conforming to norms, individuals can prevent rejection and sustain belongingness. If the social norm concerns political participation, this could potentially influence political outcomes. Thus our first hypothesis is:

H1: Perceiving a social norm prescribing political engagement will increase collective action tendencies.

Our rationale is based on the assumption that a fear of rejection or disapproval leads individuals to adhere to social norms as discussed above. Thus it is possible that when rejection is salient, adherence to the norms may increase. Experimental studies have shown that rejection can lead to changes in attitudes and behavior. One study showed that an episode of rejection led to increased willingness to participate in political violence, when the participants were presented with an article that provided a group norm for such violence (Knapton et al., 2014). However, implicit rejection or cues of possible rejection (e.g., a moment of silence) also increase conformity (Koudenberg et al., 2013). Actually, explicit rejection is quite rare; most people respond with subtle signs of condemnation to deviance from norms (Milgram et al., 1986).

Hence, when there is a social norm guiding political behavior it is plausible that subtle cues of possible rejection may lead individuals to participate in collective action. Thus, we

suggest that if rejection is implicitly activated, individuals will display increased levels of conformity to the political engagement norm, and we therefore hypothesize that:

H2: When rejection is made salient (compared to when it is not made salient), participants will conform more to the perceived social norms about political engagement.

Belongingness Needs and Collective Action

All humans desire belongingness, but there are also individual differences in this type of feature, as is captured by the *Need to Belong* (NTB) scale (Leary et al., 2007). Need to belong is a personality construct that is positively related to both shyness and anxiousness (Leary et al., 2007). De Cremer (2002) showed that cooperating with a group reduces the risk of social rejection and satisfies the need to belong. Hence, individuals with a high need to belong may more readily adapt to a new group's norms in order to avoid rejection, if they perceive a clear norm that guides them to the appropriate and expected behavior.

Hence, it is plausible that when individuals perceive a social norm prescribing collective action, those primed with rejection that have a high need to belong, may be increasingly willing to engage. This argument is supported by research showing that, among individuals belonging to a group that is societally excluded, the fear of being rejected increased willingness to engage politically (Bäck, Bäck, & Knapton, 2015). Hence, our third hypothesis specifies a three-way interaction (between rejection saliency, perception of social norms, and need to belong), suggesting stronger effects for individuals who have high belongingness needs:

H3: When rejection is made salient, individuals with a high need to belong will be increasingly willing to participate in collective action, the stronger they perceive the engagement norm to be.

Method

To evaluate our hypotheses, a priming technique was used where student participants solved anagrams, in which the words were related to interpersonal rejection, or acceptance. This procedure was adapted from Sommer and Baumeister (2002), who used a similar procedure to prime rejection. The content of the word list functioned as an experimental condition and depending on the condition the participant was assigned to (rejection or acceptance), they received one set of the word lists and the completion of the anagram task subliminally primed participants with feelings of rejection or acceptance in an effort to mimic the effect of rejection/acceptance cues. The participants were also presented with a hypothetical scenario regarding a proposal to implement tuition fees at their university, and were asked to rate their willingness to participate in various forms of collective action against this proposal.

We predicted that individuals who perceived a stronger social norm to participate in political actions would be more willing to participate in collective actions against tuition

fees. Further we expected a two-way interaction between rejection and perception of social norms, and that this interaction in turn would be qualified by a three-way interaction between rejection, perception of social norms, and need to belong. Specifically, we expected that rejection primed individuals would be more willing to conform to the perceived norm, whether it was perceived as prescribing political engagement or not, and that this effect would be magnified in individuals high in need to belong. This is based on the rationale that those high in need to belong would be most concerned with conforming to the perceived social norm regarding political participation, when primed with a threat to their acceptance.

Participants

Participants were 147 undergraduate students (86 females, 42 males and 19 participants failed to report gender). Mean age was 24.3 ($SD = 6.21$), ranging from 17 to 65 years. Participants were recruited from a website aimed at students interested in taking part in scientific studies. The web questionnaire took 15 minutes to complete, and as compensation for their time, participants entered in a lottery to win gift certificates. All participants were notified if they had won or not by email, following the completion of the study. The independent variables were the experimental condition (priming with rejection or acceptance), need to belong, and perception of social norms regarding collective action. The dependent variable was tendency to engage in collective action.

Materials

Need to belong. The scale consists of 10 items measuring individual need to belong and how much individuals care about what others think of them (Leary et al., 2007). Examples of items are “I like to fit in”, and “I do not like being alone”. Participants indicate the degree to which each statement is characteristic of them on a 7-point scale from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely*. Three items are reverse-coded. The index is calculated as the mean of the 10 items (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.64$).

Attitudes toward issue (tuition fees). This contained the three following items: “how certain are you about your position on this issue”, “how important is this issue to you”, and “how strong is your opinion on this issue”; participants responded on scales from 1 = *not at all certain*, *not at all important*, and *not at all strong*, respectively to 7 = *very certain*, *very important*, and *very strong*, respectively.

Collective action tendencies. We used the two items adapted from van Zomeren and colleagues (2008): “I would participate in a future demonstration to stop this proposal”, and “I would sign a petition in order to stop this proposal”. Participants answered on 7-point scales from 1 = *completely disagree*, to 7 = *completely agree*. The items were highly correlated, $r = .56$, $p < .001$. These two items were combined and averaged to provide a collective action tendencies measure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.71$).

Political Engagement Norm. This was assessed with one item: “There are different perceptions of what it means to be a good citizen. Do you think it is important to actively

try to influence decisions in social issues?’ Participants responded using a Likert scale, 1 = *Not very important* to 8 = *Very important*.

Procedure

The study was introduced as three separate studies, where the first study was presented as a “linguistic ability task”, followed by a “personality study”, and finally a questionnaire investigating “attitudes about higher education in Sweden”. At the beginning of the study, participants were informed about anonymity and that by beginning the study they were providing informed consent to participate. First, participants were asked to solve a set of anagrams, that is, words that were written backwards should be spelled out by the participants in the correct way. This task functioned as the experimental manipulation, as the content of the words aimed to prime the participants with rejection, or acceptance. Participants were randomly assigned 16 words, 8 of which in both conditions were neutral (e.g., PRINTED, DIMENSION), and the remaining 8 differed by condition to either connote rejection (e.g., UNACCEPTED, UNWELCOME), or acceptance (e.g., ACCEPTED, WELCOME).

Following the anagram task, participants completed the need to belong scale (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which was presented as a personality study. Finally, participants were introduced to attitudes about higher education study. Participants were presented with a fake newspaper article discussing the issue of implementing tuition fees. The article described both pros and cons of tuition fees and was presented in the format of a well-known newspaper to enhance the credibility of the article. This was followed by an item that asked the participant to state their thoughts about the implementation of tuition fees. Their attitude was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = *Very bad*, and 7 = *Very good*. This was to ensure that all participants actually opposed the proposal, which is a precondition for willingness to protest against it. We also included other items related to the participants’ position on the issue at hand.

Following these items, participants were presented with items measuring collective action tendencies. We chose two forms of action that are relatively common; demonstration and petition. The items were adapted from van Zomeren and colleagues (2008). Following this, we included some demographic and political items to embed the item on the political engagement norm, that is, to avoid that this item was given too much focus. Participants were then asked to indicate their perception of a political engagement norm (Bäck et al., 2011).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Means and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 1. The means for the items measuring involvement in the issue (certainty of own position, issue importance, and strength of own opinion) were high, as can be seen in Table 1. In general, the participants also perceived a strong social norm to engage in social issues. As expected, most partici-

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for all Independent Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Certainty of own position	6.38	1.20
Issue importance	5.92	1.54
Opinion strength	5.87	1.53
Political Engagement Norm	6.15	1.58
Need to belong (NTB)	4.34	0.63

pants opposed the proposal to implement tuition fees, $M = 1.81$ and $SD = 1.42$. Seventeen participants, or 13%, responded with a 4 or higher on the 7-point scale. Because we assume that participants must oppose tuition fees to be willing to engage, we removed these participants from the main analyses.

In Table 2, correlations for the independent variables are shown, including whether participants were for or against tuition fees. There was no significant correlation between the moderating variables, that is, need to belong and perceived engagement norms. Unsurprisingly, there was a significant correlation between collective action intentions and the perceived norm to engage, as well as collective action intentions and attitude position toward tuition fees. Hence, the stronger the norm to engage was perceived to be, and the more participants opposed tuition fees, the more they indicated that they were willing to engage in protest activity. To ensure that the manipulation did not affect the need to belong measure we performed a *t*-test, using condition (rejected/accepted) as independent variable and need to belong as dependent variable. This test was non-significant and hence the manipulation did not affect need to belong, $t(133) = 0.27$, $p = .45$ ($M = 4.33$ and $SD = .63$ for the rejected and $M = 4.36$ and $SD = .63$ for the accepted).

Main Analyses

In order to test our hypotheses, we ran a hierarchical regression analysis. We regressed perception of social norms, rejection/acceptance (dummy-coded, acceptance = 0, rejection = 1) and need to belong onto collective action tendencies in step 1. In the second step we added all possible two-way interactions, and in step 3, the three-way interaction of all independent variables. The change in *adj.R*² was significant in the first ($p < .0001$) and third

Table 2
Correlations Between the Independent Variables and Collective Action Intentions

Variable	1	2	3
1. Need to belong			
2. Political Engagement Norm	-.03		
3. Attitude Position	-.12	-.11	
4. Collective Action intentions	-.01	.32***	-.55***

*** $p < .0001$.

step ($p = .05$), but not from the second to the third step ($p = .18$). Results from the regression analysis are presented in Table 3.

In Step 1, as expected we found a significant positive main effect of social norms, indicating that the stronger one perceives the norm of being politically engaged to be, the more

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Political Engagement Norms, Experimental Condition (Rejection/Acceptance) and NTB on Collective Action Tendencies

Step	Predictor variable	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Adj. <i>R</i> ²
1						.15***
	Intercept	3.88		1.13	< .001	
	Political Engagement Norm	0.40	0.41	0.09	< .001	
	Rejection Prime	0.04	0.01	0.28	.87	
	NTB	-0.24	-0.09	0.22	.29	
2						.18
	Rejection×Norm	0.28	0.59	0.18	.12	
	NTB×Norm	-0.04	-0.18	0.12	.75	
	Rejection×NTB	-0.84	-1.17	0.47	.08	
3						.20*
	NTB×Norm×Rejection	0.53	4.96	0.27	0.05	

Note. NTB = Need to belong. Rejection is a dummy variable coded with inclusion as reference category (0).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .0001$.

willing one is to participate in protest activities. This supports previous research that indicates that social norms influence political participation (see, e.g., Bäck et al., 2011). There was no main effect of need to belong or rejection condition.

In Step 2, the expected interaction between perceived political engagement norm and rejection condition failed to reach conventional significance levels. However, there was a tendency in the expected direction, such that individuals in the rejected condition (coded as 1) conformed more to the perceived norm, than individuals in the included condition. That is, when rejection was made salient, individuals showed a higher tendency to be willing to participate in protests, as their perception of the political engagement norm increased in strength (see Figure 1).

In addition, there was also a close to significant interaction between need to belong and the priming condition, such that individuals who had been primed with rejection became less likely to participate the higher their need to belong was (see Table 2). This result is not surprising as individuals who are high on need to belong may also be anxious and shy (Leary et al., 2007). Thus, such individuals may fear condemnation of their actions, especially when rejection is salient. Thus, they must have a strong perception that such actions are socially acceptable or even desired (e.g., social norms) in order to participate. This notion was confirmed in step three, where there was a significant

three-way interaction between the engagement norm, the priming condition, and need to belong. Specifically, the interaction revealed that rejection-primed individuals who were high in need to belong, became increasingly willing to engage in collective action,

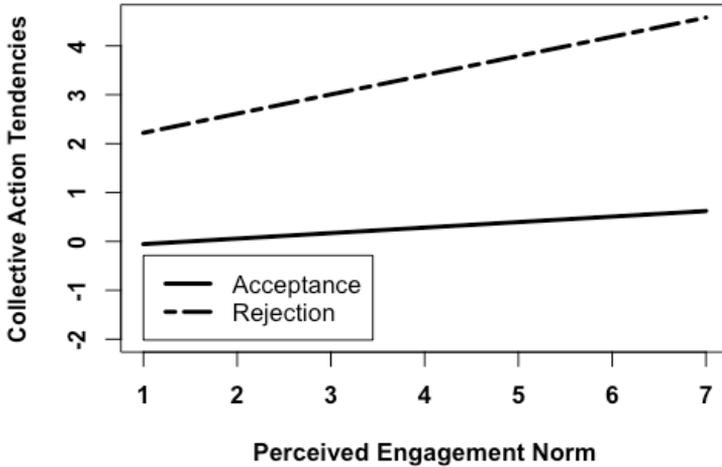


Figure 1. Two-way interaction between rejection/acceptance and political engagement norms on collective action tendencies.

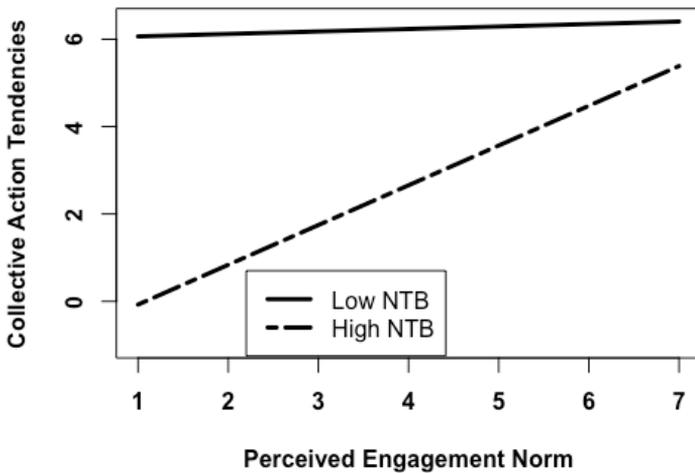


Figure 2. Two-way interaction in rejected participants between NTB and political engagement norms on collective action tendencies.
Note. Low and high NTB is evaluated at two standard deviations above and below the mean of NTB.

the stronger they perceived the norm to engage to be (see Figure 2, where only rejected individuals are shown¹).

All in all, most of our hypotheses were supported, highlighting the important role of social norms and motivations for belongingness in relation to willingness to engage in collective actions. Our findings show that when primed with rejection, individuals become increasingly willing to conform to a norm of participation. However, this effect is particularly pronounced among individuals with a high need to belong. Simple slope analyses showed that the simple slope for those high in need to belong (one standard deviation above the mean) was significant, $B = 0.69$, $p = .0001$, while the simple slope for those low in need to belong (one standard deviation below the mean) was not significant, $B = 0.20$, $p = .27$.

Discussion

Why individuals become politically active has been the focus of much research in, for example, political science and social psychology. The aim of the present research was to contribute to this research field by investigating how social rejection may impact willingness to engage in political protests. However, we also aimed at connecting rejection to theories about conformity to social norms, and to personality features such as belongingness needs. This approach has rarely been considered in previous research in this field.

Social norms are an explanatory selective incentive in the ‘paradox of participation’ and have consistently been a strong predictor of political participation (Bäck et al., 2011). However, the mechanisms that drive this have yet to be established, and here social psychological research may be useful. Previous social psychological research has shown that social norms guide individuals’ daily behavior and deviance from norms can elicit discomfort (Asch, 1955; Koudenberg et al., 2013). One possible explanation is that going against a norm will threaten membership status and belongingness in a group, and thus, by conforming, individuals maintain their inclusion in that group. Consequently, we speculated that it is the prospect of rejection that drives conformity to social norms and thus wanted to examine the role of social norms and belongingness motivations on political participation.

Our first hypothesis stated that *perceiving a social norm to be politically engaged increases collective action tendencies*. The results from our hierarchical regression analysis support this, with those perceiving a strong social norm to be politically engaged indicating they were more willing to participate in collective action. Consequently, this supports previous research that implies the role of social norms in political participation (Bäck et al., 2011). As discussed, we suggested that the prospect of potential rejection is what drives conformity to social norms and thus we tested the moderating effect of a rejection or acceptance prime. It was predicted that a rejection prime would magnify conformity to political engagement norms, and thus our second hypothesis stated *that when rejection is made*

¹ Because the interaction was not significant for included participants, these results are not reported.

salient to individuals, they will conform more to the perceived norms about political engagement. The results of our study did not fully support this hypothesis. However, it was a near significant result indicating a possible interaction between political engagement norms and the rejection prime, such that individuals who perceive a social norm to be politically engaged are more likely to conform to this norm through political participation, if they are primed with rejection.

Although all individuals have a desire to belong to a group, there are individual differences in this desire. Such differences can be measured on the need to belong scale (Leary et al., 2007). Previous research has shown the moderating effect need to belong can have on conforming behaviors in the presence of a rejection threat (Kouidenberg et al., 2013). Thus, it is plausible to suggest that need to belong may also impact political participation if activity occurs in order to conform to social norms and maintain inclusion. Therefore, our third hypothesis stated that *when rejection is made salient, individuals with a high need to belong will become increasingly willing to participate as their perception of an engagement norm increases.* Our findings revealed a significant three-way interaction, such that individuals primed with rejection and having a high need to belong, showed low inclination to participate when they perceived a weak participation norm, and high willingness to participate when they perceived a strong participation norm. As a result, our third hypothesis was supported, and thus confirms our suggestion that participation (or lack of participation) belongingness needs should also be taken into account when analyzing the impact of rejection on political engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations are worth noting. We did not find a significant interaction between rejection saliency and political engagement norms as we had expected, and this may warrant some concern. That being said, the interaction was nearly significant, and consequently a rejection manipulation that is stronger may provide stronger effects. In the manipulation procedure used here, the rejection priming cue was independent of the individuals' beliefs regarding political action, and future research may want to consider how implicit rejection cues in response to individuals' political action beliefs may further impact conformity. For example, if an individual expressed their views regarding political action, and then there was an implicit rejection cue (e.g., a silence), these effects may be stronger as the rejection cue is directly related to the political action. Thus, the experimental manipulation may have only affected those who had a high desire to belong – an idea given some support by the three-way interaction between the rejection prime, high political engagement norms and a high need to belong.

Another limitation is that the procedure for priming rejection has not been extensively tested in previous research, even though a similar approach has been used before (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). To be certain that the manipulation evokes rejection associations, this must be pre-tested in a separate study, as suggested by Hauser, Ellsworth, and Gonzalez (2018).

This study assessed participants' general idea of political participation norms in society. The results would potentially have been even stronger if we had asked about perceived norms of the student collective instead, as group norms and collective action intentions would then pertain to the same social group. We believe that this means that our study provides a "hard" test of the hypotheses, and the fact that we still find some significant effects here suggests that we would do so also when measuring perceived norms of the specific group.

Another problem may be that the sample used here was a self-selected one, and future research should try to recruit more broadly to be certain that the results hold. Also, this article included a single study only, which, even though it represents a relatively hard test of the hypotheses, should be complemented with studies replicating these results. Given these limitations, we suggest performing additional studies testing the robustness of the findings. For instance, by using other rejection manipulations or assessing perceived social norms more directly related to the social groups of concern to the individual.

Even though the literature on social exclusion have used inclusion as a control condition (Greenaway, Jetten, Ellemers, & van Bunderen, 2015), it would have been beneficial to include a proper control condition. With that said, the results indicate that the effect is limited to participants in the excluded condition and that there were no effects in the included condition.

Finally, it should be noted that not all individuals are motivated by social factors, and we do not suggest that this is the only explanation to political engagement. Individuals are also driven by instrumental incentives, whereby they may solely participate as they believe they can impact a political outcome (Bäck et al., 2011; Olson, 1965). Nevertheless, it is important to consider all reasons as to why individuals may participate and investigate how individual differences and social factors may influence intentions to participate.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

Political groups and activities clearly have social benefits, and these benefits are increasingly being acknowledged (Bäck et al., 2013). These findings add to the increasing amount of literature that implies that some individuals may participate solely due to social incentives (Bäck & Bäck, 2014; Bäck, Bäck & Knapton, 2015). Belongingness motivations are increasingly being suggested as reasons for political participation and violent extremism (Borum, 2011; Silke, 2008). The present research provides systematic evidence showing the impact that activating rejection has on participation intentions, especially among individuals with a high need to belong. These results are in line with previous research that has demonstrated the role that rejection and need to belong have with regard to political participation (Bäck et al., 2015; Knapton et al., 2014). Furthermore, it also adds to the literature that suggests that not only explicit rejection can lead to changes in behavior, but that subtle, implicit rejection cues can also influence people's actions (Koudenberg et al., 2013). In sum, this research highlights the importance of further investigating how personality dispositions and social aspects can impact participation in collective action.

Funding

This research was supported by a grant from the Swedish Research Council, Grant number 421-2011-1333, awarded to the second author.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors have no support to report.

Data Availability

The data analyzed in this paper are freely available via the PsychArchives repository. For further information see the "Supplementary Materials" section.

Supplementary Materials

Data of this study are accessible via the PsychArchives repository.

Index of Supplementary Materials

Renström, E. A., Bäck, H., & Knapton, H. M. (2018). Supplementary materials to "Conforming to collective action: The impact of rejection, personality and norms on participation in protest activity". *PsychOpen*. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.2342>

References

- Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. *Scientific American*, 193(5), 31–35. <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1155-31>
- Bäck, E. A., & Bäck, H. (2014). *The social incentives of collective action: Rejection and social support as predictors of protest activity*. Paper presented at the International Society for Political Psychology, Rome, Italy.
- Bäck, E. A., Bäck, H., & Garcia-Albacete, G. (2013). Protest activity, social incentives, and rejection sensitivity: Results from a survey experiment about tuition fees. *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest*, 1(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3167/cont.2013.010101>
- Bäck, E. A., Bäck, H., & Knapton, H. M. (2015). Group belongingness and collective action: Effects of need to belong and rejection sensitivity on willingness to participate in protests activities. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 56(5), 537–544. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12225>

- Bäck, H., Teorell, J., & Westholm, A. (2011). Explaining modes of participation: A dynamic test of alternative rational choice models. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 34(1), 74–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2011.00262.x>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529.
- Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1>
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55(1), 591–621. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142015>
- Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). Social influence: Social norms, conformity and compliance. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, Lindzey, G. (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 151-192). New York, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Dalton, R. J. (2008). Citizenship norms and the expansion of political participation. *Political Studies*, 56(1), 76–98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x>
- Dalton, R. J. (2014). *Citizen Politics: Public opinion and political parties in advanced industrial democracies* (6th ed.). Washington, DC, USA: CQ Press.
- de Cremer, D. (2002). Respect and cooperation in social dilemmas: The importance of feeling included. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(10), 1335–1341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014616702236830>
- De Weerd, M., & Klandermans, B. (1999). Group identification and political protest: Farmers' protest in the Netherlands. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(8), 1073–1095. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-0992\(199912\)29:8<1073::AID-EJSP986>3.0.CO;2-K](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(199912)29:8<1073::AID-EJSP986>3.0.CO;2-K)
- Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H. B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 51(3), 629–636. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0046408>
- Dijker, A. J., & Koomen, W. (2007). *Stigmatization, tolerance and repair: An integrative psychological analysis of responses to deviance*. New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenaway, K. H., Jetten, J., Ellemers, N., & van Bunderen, L. (2015). The dark side of inclusion: Undesired acceptance increases aggression. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 18(2), 173–189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430214536063>
- Hauser, D. J., Ellsworth, P., & Gonzalez, R. (2018). Are manipulation checks necessary? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 998. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00998>
- Klandermans, B. (1984). Mobilization and participation: Social-psychological expansions of resource mobilization theory. *American Sociological Review*, 49(5), 583–600. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095417>
- Klandermans, B. (2004). The demand and supply of participation: Social psychological correlates of participation in social movements. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 3620-379). Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell.
- Klandermans, B., & van Stekelenburg, J. (2013) Social movements and the dynamics of collective action. In L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, & J. S. Levy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political psychology*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

- Knapton, H., Bäck, H., & Bäck, E. (2014). The social activist: Conformity to the ingroup following rejection as a predictor of political participation. *Social Influence*, 10(2), 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510.2014.966856>
- Koudenburg, N., Postmes, T., & Gordijn, E. H. (2013). Resounding silences: Subtle norm regulation in everyday interactions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 76(3), 224–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272513496794>
- Leary, M. R., Kelly, K. M., Cottrell, C. A., & Schreindorfer, L. S. (2007). *Individual differences in the need to belong: Mapping the nomological network*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Milgram, S., Liberty, H. J., Toledo, R., & Wackenhut, J. (1986). Response to intrusion into waiting lines. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(4), 683–689. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.4.683>
- Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic phoenix: Reinventing political activism*. Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610073>
- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action: Public goods and the theory of groups*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Harvard University Press.
- Ouwerkerk, J. W., Kerr, N. L., Gallucci, M., & van Lange, P. A. M. (2005). Avoiding the social death penalty: Ostracism and cooperation in social dilemmas. In K. D. Williams, J. P. Forgas, & W. von Hippel (Eds.), *The social outcast: Ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, and bullying* (pp. 321–332). New York, NY, USA: Psychology Press.
- Pickett, C. L., Gardner, W. L., & Knowles, M. (2004). Getting a cue: The need to belong and enhanced sensitivity to social cues. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(9), 1095–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203262085>
- Riker, W., & Ordeshook, P. (1968). A theory of the calculus of voting. *American Political Science Review*, 62(1), 25–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953324>
- Silke, A. (2008). Research on terrorism. In H. Chen, E. Reid, J. Sinai, A. Silke, & B. Ganor (Eds.): *Terrorism informatics: Knowledge management and data mining for homeland security* (pp. 27–50). Boston, MA, USA: Springer.
- Sommer, K. L., & Baumeister, R. F. (2002). Self-evaluation, persistence, and performance following implicit rejection: The role of trait self-esteem. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(7), 926–938.
- Thomas, E. F., & McGarty, C. A. (2009). The role of efficacy and moral outrage norms in creating the potential for international development activism through group-based interaction. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(1), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466608X313774>
- van Stekelenburg, J., Klandermans, B., & van Dijk, W. W. (2011). Combining motivations and emotion: The motivational dynamics of protest participation. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 26(1), 91–104. <https://doi.org/10.1174/021347411794078426>
- van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(4), 504–535. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.4.504>
- van Zomeren, M., Spears, R., Fischer, A. H., & Leach, C. W. (2004). Put your money where your mouth is! Explaining collective action tendencies through group-based anger and group efficacy.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87(5), 649–664. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.5.649>

Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 425–452. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.58.110405.085641>

Williams, K. D., Cheung, C. K. T., & Choi, W. (2000). CyberOstracism: Effects of being ignored over the Internet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 748–762. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.748>