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| Personality and Political Efficacy |
| The effect of need for cognition and need for evaluation on political efficacy |
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| One of the key explanations for political participation has been identified as political efficacy, but little work has been done to explain political efficacy itself. Studies to date have focused on environmental factors, such as education and socio-economic status as explanations for political efficacy. This study argues that such models are incomplete because they do not account for psychological factors that may affect political efficacy. Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between need for cognition (NC) and need for evaluation (NE), stable personality traits, and political efficacy. Using 2008 ANES data, this study indicates that NC and NE predict internal efficacy, but neither predict external efficacy. |

Political scientists have been trying to understand how and why people participate in politics for a long time. Studies of political participation range from broad theoretical questions of why people participate (Verba and Nie 1972; Olson 1965; Downs 1957; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995) to narrower questions of the predictors of participation, which include arguments about political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Kuklinski, et al. 2000; Althaus, 1998; Prior and Lupia 2008), political ideology (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2008; Campbell, et al. 1960), political sophistication (Luskin 1987, 1990; Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001), social influence (Bond, et al. 2012; Barabas 2004), and personality (Ulbig and Funk 1999; Blais and Labbe St-Vincent 2011; Mondak, et al. 2011; Denny and Doyle 2008; Mondak and Halperin 2008). A recent trend in this literature has been to discover the link between internal, psychological factors and participation. One such factor that is thought to influence participation is political efficacy.

 Political efficacy is understood as the feeling of competence and confidence in the political arena. Easton and Dennis (1967) studied efficacy in children and discovered that these feelings are in reality antecedent to understanding of or knowledge about politics. They found that feelings of efficacy can manifest in children as young as third grade, in the absence of political knowledge, sophistication, education, or even experience. This study points toward more deep seated and psychological determinants of efficacy, which is echoed by Weissberg (1975). One possible explanation for efficacy could be found in an individual’s personality.

 Personality traits are, “… relatively enduring dispositions that reflect characteristic patterns of emotionality, self-regulation, and general orientations to the social and physical environment. Traits are basically what people think, feel, and do… what people *automatically* think, feel and do” (John, Robins, and Pervin 2008, p. 183). Personality traits are, thus, highly habituated patterns of action and feeling that are largely unconscious. These traits are also fairly stable, changing only in times of extreme psychic pressure or traumatic environmental upheaval (John, Robins, and Pervin 2008; Campbell et al. 1960; Verba and Nie 1972; Mondak et al. 2010; Plomin et al. 1990; Gerber et al. 2011; Ulbig and Funk 1999; Richey 2012; Mutz and Reeves 2005; Mutz 2000; Denny and Doyle 2008; Bizer et al. 2004; Gerber et al. 2010; Holbrook 2006; Pratto et al. 1994). As Gerber et al. (2011) explain, “…personality traits can be likely be viewed as predating, rather than being caused by, social and political influences, offering an opportunity to examine how fundamental, enduring personality differences affect an array of social outcomes, including political attitudes and behaviors” (p. 111).

 In this study I expand on our understanding of efficacy by examining the link between personality and efficacy, specifically the traits of need for evaluation (NE) and need for cognition (NC). NE and NC are both personality traits that illustrate an individual’s cognitive style, their tendency toward forming opinions and thinking through difficult subjects, which can determine how competent and confident one feels in the political arena (Holbrook 2006).

**What is Efficacy?**

 Political efficacy is defined by Easton and Dennis (1967) as

…a number of interwoven sentiments. To be efficacious it would appear that a person must sense his competency at the level of his political self-identity. He must construct a psychic map of the political world with strong lines of force running from himself to the place of officialdom. He must come to believe that that when he speaks other political actors will listen. He must also internalize the expectation of competence that his political self-confidence is not easily eroded by what he will take to be the mistaken indifference which the political process frequently exhibits to his desires.

 This definition clearly situates political efficacy as an internal factor that incorporates elements of both a cognitive process and affect. Efficacy has been traditionally divided into two distinct concepts: internal and external efficacy (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991; Morrell 2003; Morrell 2005; Kenski and Stroud 2006; Beaumont 2011; Johnson and Kaye 2003; Colombo, Galais, and Gallego 2012; Anduiza Perea, Jensen, and Jorba 2012). Internal efficacy is understood as one’s “beliefs about one’s own competence to understand, and to participate effectively, in politics” and external efficacy is defined as “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). This division between internal and external efficacy is a reflection of the dichotomous nature of the concept. Political efficacy is not only what someone feels about their own power in politics, but also about what that person believes about the government’s responsiveness.

 The literature about political efficacy has basically taken two directions in studying this concept. One direction has been to treat efficacy as an explanatory variable for various participatory behaviors and the other has been to look for the determinants of efficacy. Studies looking at efficacy as an explanatory variable often treat efficacy as a given, stable trait but do not look at how or why efficacy levels are as they are (Cohen, Vigoda, and Samorly 2001; Kenski and Stroud 2006; Olson 1965; Downs 1957; Colombo, Galais, and Gallego 2012; Anduiza Perea, Jensen, and Jorba 2012). These studies examine the linkage between political efficacy and outcomes, such as voting and political participation, and find that efficacy has a strong and significant effect on these behaviors. These studies indicate that increased levels of efficacy, both internal and external, are causally related to increased levels of voting and political participation.

Studies looking at the determinants of political efficacy take the alternative tack and try to explain what efficacy is and why it varies among individuals. This strain of the literature has focused entirely on behavioral and socio-economic factors to explain efficacy. Beaumont (2001) shows that education levels can increase efficacy while Morrell (2005) shows that deliberation can increase ‘issue specific’ efficacy. Classical studies in participation show that efficacy is determined, to some extent, by socio-economic factors, such as income, social status, education, and age (Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Anderson 2010) whereas others show that political interest and party identification can also impact efficacy (Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009). In fact, some studies have even shown that participation increases efficacy in individuals, creating a sort of feedback loop and argue that participation and efficacy are in fact endogenous (Schweitzer 2008; Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009).

 There is also a growing body of research that studies the role of personality in political behavior and cognition, and some of these studies have directly addressed the concept of efficacy. Gallego and Oberski (2012) studied the link between personality and participation and showed through a log-linear and direct effects model that extraversion and openness, in conjunction with political knowledge, political interest, and discussion, affect efficacy. This finding is line with other similar studies which find the same effect of personality on efficacy (Vecchione and Caprara 2009; Mondak and Halperin 2008). The literature addressing the integration of personality and efficacy is small, and efficacy is not usually the primary trait of interest. Moreover, these articles test the concept of self-efficacy, a concept that is broad and measures how efficacious one feels in all aspects of life. While it is true that self-efficacy is correlated highly with political efficacy, political efficacy is a direct and proximal determinant of participation whereas self-efficacy is broad and distal. The concept of self-efficacy is more closely related to self-esteem, whereas political efficacy is conceptually and operationally more specifically about politics and the political process. As Easton and Dennis (1967) show, political efficacy is not only a distinct type of efficacy, separate from self-efficacy, it is clearly temporally antecedent to and very closely related to political behavior.

In this study, I argue that Need for Cognition and Need for Evaluation, NC and NE, are cognitive and attitudinal antecedents to political efficacy. I argue that NE and NC influence political efficacy and that personality traits can have a significant effect on this mechanism of political behavior. In the next section I define the concepts of NE and NC and develop a theory of how they affect political efficacy.

**The Influence of Personality on Political Efficacy**

 Current studies in the field of political psychology tend to focus on the Big 5 taxonomy to conceptualize and operationalize personality traits (John, Robins, and Pervin 2008; Mondak et al. 2010; Zillig, Hemenover, and Dienstbier 2002; Roccas, et al. 2002; McCrae and John 1992; McCrae and Costa 1995; Gerber et al. 2011; John, Naumann, and Soto 2008; Carney et al. 2008). While the trend seems to be toward the supremacy of the Big 5 factor model, there is still room for other personality measures as well. Studies examining various personality measures find that there are small to insignificant correlations between NE and NC and the Big 5 personality traits (Tuten and Bosnjak 2001; Bizer et al. 2004). These results suggest that NE and NC are distinct concepts from the Big 5 personality traits, making this avenue of inquiry theoretically and substantively interesting.

Both NC and NE, along with other social psychology concepts similar to them, have largely been tested in the context of information processing questions in political science (Kam 2005; Holbrook 2006; Frederico and Schneider 2007; Arceneaux and Wielen 2013; Kuo et al. 2012; Petty et al. 2009; Druckman and Nelson 2003). Traditionally, political efficacy has been seen as a product of information and education (Beaumont 2001), but this belies the research mentioned above that shows that political efficacy is temporally prior education or information about politics (Easton and Dennis 1967). Political efficacy, in order to be so foundational as to be present in young children and others that do not have a full grasp of the political world, must involve more than environmental factors. In addition to the external environment, the internal factor of one’s personality should also exert some influence.

 Personality, in political science, is understood as affecting behavior in conjunction with environmental factors. Mondak et al. (2010) state that, “environmental forces influence political behavior, but how and to what extent they do differs as a function of individuals’ traits. Likewise, psychological dispositions and even genetic differences contribute to patterns in political behavior” (p. 85). No psychological factor or explanation can capture the full extent of a behavioral outcome, or even a cognitive outcome, but will affect these outcomes in conjunction with environmental and social factors. As mentioned above, political scientists interested in political efficacy have moved away from the psychological theory of efficacy proposed by Easton and Dennis (1967) and have moved toward a more environmental theory. However, it is clear that the environment and personality interact to create outcomes and, in this regard, political efficacy is no different. The personality traits of NC and NE are eminently suitable for this investigation as they are traits that, broadly speaking, refer to one’s tendency to want to know more about the world and to make judgments about it. Both of these tendencies are closely aligned with the theoretical concept of political efficacy.

 Need for Cognition is defined as, “an individual’s tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors” (Cacioppo and Petty 1984, p. 306). Petty et al. (2009) explain that NC is a measure that emphasizes cognitive processing rather than outcomes. In other words, NC cannot determine how well someone processes information or even if they are right or wrong. This measure says nothing about the quality of the processing, only that some people enjoy difficult cognitive tasks while others do not. This is important because, as Petty et al. (2009) further explain, “NC taps into differences in motivation rather than ability…[and] is only moderately related to measures of cognitive ability” (p. 319). NC is therefore, more of a tendency or a trait that says nothing and makes no assumptions about cognitive ability.

 Studies using NC as an explanatory factor have mostly tried to predict behavior, such as political learning (Holbrook 2006), partisan evaluations (Arceneaux and Wielen 2013), heuristic use (Kam 2005), and memory recall (Kuo et al. 2012). Petty et al. (2009) conducted a review of NC studies and found that, overall, “individuals high in NC tend to think more than those low in NC about all kinds of information, including their own thoughts (metacognition)” (p. 325). This tendency to think more and more deeply about issues and concepts directly relates the feeling of internal efficacy. Internal efficacy is defined as the sense that one understands and feels confident about politics and political issues. This is a ‘sense’, a feeling, rather than an objective reality, which is more reliant on cognitive factors than external ones. NC is, in large part, a measure of how confident one is about their cognitive abilities. Many studies have shown that people high in NC tend to be more confident about their cognitive abilities and their opinions, which is conceptually very similar to internal efficacy.

Holbrook (2006) shows that NC predicts political learning, or the tendency to gain information about politics. Logically, then, NC should relate to internal efficacy because confidence and enjoyment of cognition, along with a tendency to learn about politics in particular, would be antecedent to understanding of and confidence in political knowledge specifically.

NC also directly relates to external efficacy, which is a sense of the government’s responsiveness and one’s ability to influence politics and government. Individuals high in NC, those who enjoy thinking and thinking about difficult things, generally tend to feel more confident in their abilities and their intellectual prowess. This confidence can translate into the confidence that one’s action and opinions not only matter, but that they can influence politics in a meaningful way. Kuo et al. (2012) show that NC levels predicted an individual’s recall of stimuli and that, in conjunction with an affective component, will cause people to form behavioral intentions. People with high NC tend to learn more, want to know and understand more, which can include how the government works and the avenues of access to politics. Therefore, NC would be an antecedent to external efficacy. Consequently, I formulate the following hypotheses:

**H1:** *Higher levels of NC will predict higher levels of internal efficacy.*

**H2:** *Higher levels of NC will predict higher levels of external efficacy.*

NE is a concept related to NC in that it is a personality measure that taps into the cognitive and affective tendencies of individuals. The two concepts are very highly correlated, implying that there is significant overlap between the cognitive and affective components of each trait (Holbrook 2006; Jarvis and Petty 1996). This overlap indicates that NE and NC complement each other in their explanatory power, making it logically and theoretically important to include both together.

 NE is defined as the tendency of individuals to engage in evaluative thought processes and hold evaluative attitudes. Studies on NE have examined the link between NE and various political outcomes. Some studies have focused on political learning (Holbrook 2006), NE and the use of ideology in making political decisions (Federico and Schneider 2007) and NE as a moderator of framing effects (Druckman and Nelson 2003). Bizer et al. (2004) studied NE in relation to a number of different political outcomes and found that it positively influenced electoral activism (participation), turning out to vote, and the affective response toward candidates. All of these studies have established the link between NE and the cognitive and behavioral aspects of political activity, but, as Bizer et al. (2004) state, the mechanism by which NE exerts its influence on these outcomes is unclear. One possible mechanism through which NE works on political outcomes is political efficacy.

 For people to believe that they are well-informed and confident in their political understanding, for people to have high internal efficacy, they must first garner information and form opinions and attitudes on political issues. This tendency to garner information and evaluate it in order to form opinions and attitudes is NE. NE describes the tendency of individuals to evaluate information, which is one more step than simply acquiring it. The process of evaluation implies sorting through information, making connections and inferences, and judging its credibility in order to fit it into the larger picture. This tendency to evaluate information would lead to higher levels of internal efficacy precisely because those who enjoin this process are making decisions and forming opinions, necessary prerequisites to understanding politics and feeling confident of their level of expertise. In addition to internal efficacy, NE would also influence external efficacy in a similar way. Evaluating information and forming opinions about politics necessarily includes information about how to access political structures and one’s opinions and information about the process should spur a feeling of effectiveness in the political realm. Therefore, I formulate the following hypotheses:

**H3:** *Higher levels of NE will predict higher levels of internal efficacy.*

**H4:** *Higher levels of NE will predict higher levels of external efficacy.*

**Data**

I used the 2008 American National Elections Survey to conduct tests of my hypotheses. I used simple OLS regression using the following variables. The dependent variables were internal efficacy and external efficacy. The independent variables of interest were NC and NE.

*Political Efficacy*

Political efficacy, as explained before, is actually two concepts: internal efficacy and external efficacy. The ANES includes an efficacy battery that specifically separates these two concepts. The internal efficacy battery consists of two questions: (1) politics is too complicated to understand/follow; and (2) I have a good understanding of politics and political issues. The external efficacy battery consists of two questions: (1) public officials/politicians don’t care what people like me think; and (2) people like me cannot affect politics. I combined each set of questions into a simple additive scale to create measures of internal efficacy and external efficacy that range from 0-4, 0 being lowest efficacy and 4 being highest efficacy felt by respondents.

*Need for Cognition*

NC is measured by three questions: (1) some people like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, and other people don't like to have responsibility for situations like that; (2) If you like it, how much or if you dislike it, how much; (3) do you prefer thinking about simple or complex problems. These questions are combined into a scale that ranges from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest NC and 5 being the highest.

*Need for Evaluation*

NE is measured by two questions: (1) do you have opinions about many, some, or few things; (2) do you have fewer or more opinions than an average person. These questions are combined into a scale ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest NE and 5 being the highest.

*Control Variables*

In order to test the demographic/socio-economic theory of efficacy, I included the most commonly used independent variables in the literature as control variables. Socio-economic status is usually defined as an amalgamation of education, race, and income.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition, I include age and gender as further controls. Gender is a binary variable coded 0 for male and 1 for female.

Some studies use political knowledge, interest, and participation as a set of variables to explain political efficacy, therefore I have included them to control for their influence. Theoretically, as mentioned in the above section, these variables should influence efficacy and present a counter explanation for its determinants. For a complete explanation of the control variables, please see the appendix. Lastly, I control for internal and external efficacy in the models. Internal efficacy and external efficacy are separate constructs, yet they are highly interrelated, making it a good idea to control for the effects of one on the other.

On the next page are the OLS results of eight model iterations, four models for internal efficacy and four for external efficacy. I have tested both the traditional hypothesis of socio-economic and environmental conditions as determinants of efficacy and a personality based model.

**Table 1: The Effect of Need for Cognition and Need for Evaluation on Internal and External Efficacy**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Internal Efficacy | External Efficacy |
|  | 1a | 2a | 3a | 4a | 1b | 2b | 3b | 4b |
| Need for Cognition | - | 0.02\*\*\*(.01) | - | 0.02\*\*(.01) | - | 0.00(.01) | - | -0.00(.01) |
| Need for Evaluation | - | - | 0.03\*\*\*(.01) | 0.03\*\*(.01) | - | - | -0.01(.01) | 0.00(.01) |
| Gender | -0.06\*\*\*(.01) | -0.06\*\*\*(.01) | -0.05\*\*\*(.01) | -0.06\*\*\*(.01) | 0.01(.02) | 0.01(.02) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01(.02) |
| Education | 0.01\*(.00) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01\*(.00) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01\*(.01) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01\*(.01) | 0.01(.01) |
| Political Interest | -0.05\*\*\*(.01) | -0.05\*\*\*(.01) | -0.05\*\*\*(.01) | -0.05\*\*\*(.01) | -0.01(.01) | -0.01(.01) | -0.01(.01) | -0.01(.01) |
| Political Knowledge | 0.03\*\*(.01) | 0.03\*(.01) | 0.03\*(.01) | 0.03\*(.02) | 0.01(.02) | 0.00(.02) | 0.01(.02) | -0.00(.02) |
| Participation | 0.03\*\*\*(.01) | 0.03\*\*\*(.01) | 0.03\*\*\*(.01) | 0.03\*\*\*(.01) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01(.01) | 0.01(.01) |
| Age | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) | -0.00(.00) |
| Internal Efficacy | - | - | - | - | 0.17\*\*\*(.05) | 0.20\*\*\*(.05) | 0.18\*\*\*(.05) | 0.19\*\*\*(.05) |
| External Efficacy | 0.10\*\*\*(.03) | 0.11\*\*\*(.03) | 0.10\*\*\*(.03) | 0.10\*\*\*(.03) | - | - | - | - |
| Race |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Black | 0.09\*(.04) | 0.11\*\*(.04) | 0.09\*(.04) | 0.11\*\*(.04) | -0.01(.05) | -0.07(.06) | -0.00(.05) | -0.07(.06) |
| Latino | 0.08\*(.04) | 0.09\*(.04) | 0.08\*(.04) | 0.09\*(.04) | 0.01(.05) | -0.03(.06) | 0.01(.06) | -0.03(.06) |
| White | 0.04(.04) | 0.06(.04) | 0.05(.04) | 0.06(.04) | -0.06(.05) | -0.10(.06) | -0.05(.05) | -0.10(.06) |
| Constant | 0.46\*\*\* | 0.37\*\*\* | 0.36\*\*\* | 0.30\*\*\* | 0.35\*\*\* | 0.39\*\*\* | 0.37\*\*\* | 0.40\*\*\* |
| N | 1017 | 807 | 1009 | 802 | 1017 | 807 | 1009 | 802 |
| p>F | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| R-squared | 0.23 | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.25 | 0.26 |

*Source: 2008 ANES Time Series Data. These are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\**P < .001 \*\*P < .01 \*P < .05 *based on two-tailed tests of significance.*

**Discussion**

The OLS results in Table 1 are unstandardized regression coefficients for the two dependent variables, internal efficacy and external efficacy. Columns 1a and 1b show results for the traditional model without the personality variables. Columns 2a and 2b show results for a model including only NC as a predictor, controlling for the SES and demographic variables in the traditional model. Columns 3a and 3b show results for the personality model including only NE as a predictor, controlling for the SES and demographic variables in the traditional model. Columns 4a and 4b show results from the complete model, which includes both personality measures and the SES and demographic variables from the traditional model.

The results of the internal efficacy models show that both Need for Cognition and Need for Evaluation has a significant and positive effect. However, the results of the second set of models show that neither personality variable exerts any influence on external efficacy. These results show that while there is support for H1 and H3, the second set, H2 and H4, do not have any support. Looking closely at the results, an interaction between NC and education comes to light. Whenever NC is added to the models, the education variable becomes insignificant. This is possibly the case because, as mentioned before, NC is all about the need for being responsible for thinking about complex issues. This same drive can conceivably drive individuals toward higher educational attainment. If that is the case, it would make sense that when NC is added to the model, the education variable becomes insignificant, because the primary effect is being driven by the personality trait. This result is consistent across both the internal and external efficacy models, indicating that this relationship is not dependent on the outcome variable, but is independent of it.

Another curious effect seen in the results above is that political interest and participation are positive and significant in the internal efficacy model, as expected, but they are insignificant in the external efficacy models. This indicates that political interest and participation spur internal efficacy, which is the feeling of understanding and being capable of interacting in the political world. This makes sense as increased interest and participation would naturally spur people to know more about the process and to feel more empowered and capable. In some sense, this relationship highlight the classical axiom of “practice makes perfect”. The more an individual interacts with the political world, the more comfortable and competent they feel. However, this relationship might not translate into external efficacy. External efficacy, which is the feeling that politics is accessible and that the political world is responsive to individuals, is not so easily influenced by continued participation. In fact, the more one participates and understands about politics, it possible that one might become jaded and disenchanted with the often frustrating and circuitous functions of politics and bureaucracy.

In the case of external efficacy, the results for NC and NE are both insignificant. These results mean that H2 and H4 are not supported by the data and NC and NE are not predictors of external efficacy. One potential explanation is that this could be a measurement issue. External efficacy is a feeling of competence in an individual’s ability to make a difference in the political realm. This includes related concepts such as government responsiveness and accessibility. It is possible that asking questions about whether politicians listen to people like the respondents and whether they can affect politics is just too vague and broad. It might be better to ask questions that specifically get to the concept, such as “how responsive do you think the government is”, and “could you access government authorities/bodies if you wished/wanted to”.

The last relationship of note in the results is between internal and external efficacy. As expected, internal and external efficacy are related to each other positively. Increases in one type of efficacy is related to increases in the other. It is theoretically expected that these concepts, because they are so interrelated, would show such a relationship. Comparatively, internal efficacy seems to increase external efficacy more than the other way around. This might be the case because internal efficacy is more of a cognitive feeling, a feeling of competence and understanding, which could be antecedent to thinking that you can make a difference in politics. Understanding politics, understanding how and where to act and what issues are at hand and what they mean must come before feeling like your actions mean anything or can affect anything. However, external efficacy does have some effect on internal efficacy, and this might be because thinking that one could make a difference and the government is responsive might spur one to gain more understanding and feel more competent in the political sphere.

**Conclusion**

 In 1967, Easton and Dennis conducted groundbreaking and foundational research in political efficacy and found that the concept occurs prior to participation, knowledge, or information, and yet for decades afterward, political efficacy has been understood as just that, a result of demographic, social, and educational/informational forces. It was not until recently that political scientists revisited the concept of efficacy and began to study it in the context of personality. These studies have shown that political efficacy is, in fact, antecedent to these concepts and has roots in an individual’s personality. This study attempts to extend this line of research and build upon this psychological approach to political science in general.

A potentially problematic relationship shown by the data is between participation and efficacy. Political participation is a statistically significant predictor of internal efficacy, but not external efficacy. As noted before, the literature is a bit unclear on the exact causal direction between participation and efficacy. Traditionally, efficacy has been used as a predictor of participation, but recent research has called this relationship into question. My results show that participation is, in fact, a predictor of internal efficacy, implying that the more one participates, the higher one’s sense of understanding and competence in the political world. However, oddly, participation is not shown to predict external efficacy, a measure more directly related to the feelings one has about their impact in politics.

I would argue that these findings reopen the traditional understanding of political participation and efficacy, specifically internal efficacy. I propose further research into this relationship, specifically, experimental research. The benefit of experimental research is the ability to cleanly and narrowly identify causality, which would be a necessity in trying to unravel directionality in this case. There are some studies that argue that external efficacy is driven by political knowledge, interest, and participation, which is borne out by the data, but yet others claim that there is no connection between reality and external efficacy (Weissberg 1975). If external efficacy is not determined by reality, it would be interesting to find out what the driver behind it is. The data show that we can rule out Need for Cognition and Need for Evaluation as influencers of external efficacy, which begs the question of what might be.

I believe further research is needed to fully integrate our understanding of personality and political behavior and cognition. Personality is an important and stable mover of individual level behavior and understanding its place in the chain of events will lead to better predictions and, ultimately, a clearer picture of the relationship between individuals and the political environment in which they live.

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1. I included income as a variable early on and found it to be consistently insignificant and its inclusion did not drastically change the coefficients for other variables. Realizing that income and education tends to correlate very highly, I use education as an indicator of objective social standing, an objective SES variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)