

# Does political participation make a difference? The relationship between political choice, civic engagement and political efficacy

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## Abstract

While the determinants of political participation have long been scrutinized by scholars, their consequences are not well known. In this article we examine how macro-environmental factors—specifically, how distinctive political choices are from one another—affect the cognitive consequences of political participation. Although there are two possible causal directions between political participation and cognitive factors, we instead focus on how this macro-environmental factor affects the association between these two variables. We hypothesize that political participation promotes the efficacious feeling that participation makes a difference by improving the cognitive articulation of the political system. We find support for this hypothesis through our analysis of 22 countries in the CSES dataset using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). Additional analysis shows that political participation has a compensatory effect on political efficacy for those who do not feel that their political position is well represented by the current party system. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Electoral systems; Political participation; Political efficacy

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## 1. Introduction

Political participation is essential for democracy to function effectively. As a consequence, political participation has been studied extensively, mainly by investigating its antecedents, such as demographic characteristics which affect representation in democratic politics, features of social capital, or other elements of civic culture (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba et al., 1978; Kabashima, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 2000). However, curiously enough, the other side of the coin—studies on the consequences of political participation—have been more rarely advanced. In other words, there is a shortage of

studies that treat political participation as an independent variable. It is as if civic engagement itself is the final destination of democratic politics. Yet no one would agree that political participation by itself is sufficient condition for a well functioning democracy. We need to ask the question: what are the consequences of political participation? This article addresses this question by treating political participation as an independent variable.

By focusing on the cognitive consequences of participation, we argue that political participation brings about political efficacy by promoting a better understanding of the complexities of the political system. We further argue that the extent to which political parties are distinct from each other affects this relationship as a macro-environmental factor, namely, the more distinctive the parties are from each other, the stronger

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this micro-relationship between political participation and cognitive articulation will become. Although it is already well known that political participation is integral to a well-functioning democracy, the cognitive consequences of participation and its macro-institutional constraints discussed in this paper provide additional insights into why political participation and the institutional design of democratic politics is of such fundamental importance.

## 2. Macro- and micro-consequences of political participation

The consequences of political participation can be easily divided into macro- and micro-dimensions. In the macro-dimension, we see the possibility that an excess of participatory zeal makes democracy unstable and difficult to manage; for instance, too much competitive and antagonistic participation from opposing parties may cause aggressive conflicts that are difficult to resolve (cf. Lane, 1962, ch. 26; Almond and Verba, 1963, ch. 15). However, in many countries the problem is the reverse, i.e. a paucity of participation which may lower democratic legitimacy (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Putnam, 2000).

This problem of legitimacy is directly related to the micro-dimension, namely, the benefits that citizens gain from political participation. We posit that there are three types of benefits.

1. Commitment: participation enables citizens to have more trust on the democratic system.
2. Emotional satisfaction: participation generates greater public satisfaction with democracy.
3. Cognitive awareness: participation enables citizens to understand the mechanisms of democracy better, and to be more aware of the players who are involved in democratic processes.

We will discuss the macro-problem of the decline of participation by examining the role of commitment, satisfaction, and understanding.

## 3. Three types of micro-consequences

The first type of benefit, commitment—trust by participation—has been frequently studied by supposing the reverse causal relationship, namely, that trust causes participation. Newton (1999) pointed out that the relationship between social (interpersonal) trust and political/social participation is positive but weak in Europe and the US. Norris (1999) also found no discernible

correlation between confidence in politics and voting participation in the US. Moreover, she found that trust in political institutions is negatively correlated with participation in political protest, but positively correlated with social trust.<sup>1</sup> Park and Shin (2005) showed that social trust is not positively tied to political participation in Korea. Although these analyses are based on correlations, they all treat participation as the dependent variable.

However, other studies have questioned this causality. By analyzing the 1995 DDB Needham Life Style Study data, Shah (1998) found that civic engagement contributes to interpersonal trust, and its impact was greater than other relevant variables. Similarly, Jennings and Stoker (2004) tried to disentangle this two-way causal process by analyzing their thirty-year-long panel data which spans three generations. They detected both types of the causality, although the direction moving from trust to civic engagement was the stronger of the two. Thus, the causal route could be from participation to trust.

The second type of benefit, emotional satisfaction, has been studied by those examining post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977, 1990). The logic of this tradition posits that post-materialistic values emphasize self-actualization, which is fulfilled through social or political participation, such as having a say in the government, or attaining freedom of speech in the public sphere, and that this fulfillment or self-actualization brings about satisfaction. Also in a different context of study, Schlozman et al. (1995) showed that both social and political participation accompanies community satisfaction, and leads to the gratifying feeling that one has an influence over government policy.

Finally, what of the third type of benefit, which we conceive of as cognitive awareness brought about by participation? We argue that participation not only gives rise to greater knowledge about democratic politics, but also that it enables people to recognize differences among players in democratic politics. Most often, it enables them to recognize differences between competing political parties. These perceived differences, in turn, promote smoother decision making when deciding which party to vote for. Moreover, participation may help people to understand that the result of an election has important consequences, and this may strengthen citizens' commitment to democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Although correlation between personal (social) trust and political trust (including confidence in political institutions) is not always strong empirically, both are often the target of analyses in the same context. As the distinction of these trust concepts is not the main theme of this paper, we will not pursue the topic here.

This possible causal consequence of political participation is arguably constrained by macro factors. For instance, under a two-party system where the parties do not cover the wide spectrum of left-right ideological dimension, voters may find it difficult to clearly recognize the differences between the parties even if they become knowledgeable about politics. In the US, for example, having deeper knowledge about a Democratic candidate whose position on a particular issue is similar to a Republican position (especially plausible under the Single Member District system) may cause ambivalence about committing to this candidate, even though parties and candidates try to highlight how they differ from opponent camps (often regardless of their actual differences). Thus, macro-institutional political configurations could affect the strength of the relationship between political participation and cognitive awareness.

However, even after controlling for this macro factor, we would hypothesize that political participation will increase political knowledge, making people better able to discern differences among political parties. Moreover, we believe that this increase in knowledge will make it easier for people to choose political candidates, which will in turn lead to greater political participation, such as turning out to vote. In this way, these factors are mutually causally intertwined. The former part of this causal direction has not been well tested as compared with the hypotheses regarding the previous two types of micro-consequences, namely, benefits of commitment and emotional satisfaction.

In this study we will focus on this theoretical relationship regarding the cognitive awareness that may flow from political participation. In order for this relationship to be more empirically grounded, we will review the literature regarding the following three theoretical suppositions:

1. Through political participation citizens will have more communication and discussion relevant to political and social issues, which will enhance political knowledge.
2. Political participation leads to greater articulation about political choices.
3. Through communication, discussion and articulation, political participation brings about a more differentiated perception of political choices and political efficacy in the sense that participation makes a difference.

#### **4. Mechanisms of cognitive consequences**

There are several mechanisms that lead to the cognitive consequences of political participation. First,

political discussion is one of the essential elements of political participation. By analyzing survey data from the US and the UK, [Bennett et al. \(2000\)](#) showed that discussion about politics increases civic knowledge of public affairs, even after controlling for relevant variables such as media exposure, political interest, and level of education. Similarly, using principal component analysis, [Delli Carpini and Keeter \(1996, ch. 5\)](#), showed that a behavioral component that included political discussion with friends had a large impact on obtaining political knowledge, and, in turn, that political participation as well as consistency among opinions are boosted as a consequence of knowledge gain ([Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, ch. 6](#)). Political discussion, participation, and knowledge are therefore closely interrelated.

Second, political discussion is rational in the sense that it typically occurs with those who have high levels of political knowledge. In a comparative analysis of American, German, and Japanese data, [Huckfeldt et al. \(2000\)](#) found a strong tendency for citizens to choose more knowledgeable discussants, even among their close social relationships. They contended that this tendency contributes to the deliberative process of democracy. In other words, this is a macro-benefit of political discussion that accompanies participation.

Next, political discussion increases an individual's 'argument repertoire' (AR) mechanism, which [Cappella et al. \(2002\)](#) defined as the relevant reasons for one's own opinion on some specific social issues as well as relevant reasons for opponents' opinion. They investigated this issue using a year-long panel survey conducted during the course of the 2000 US presidential election, assigning respondents to 60 moderated online synchronic discussion groups about issues relating to the election. The results showed that the frequency of participation in these discussion groups predicted AR increases of the both sides, even after controlling baseline ARs. Clearly, participation in political discussion helps people better articulate their views about political issues.

In a related study, [Price et al. \(2002\)](#) contended that although disagreement and discussion is essential for democratic processes, empirical analyses that support this claim are lacking. In order to ascertain that exposure to opposing views actually helps people to articulate their own views, they recorded ARs using open-ended answers in a national survey conducted in early 2000. Their analysis showed that exposure to disagreeing opinions increased the AR of the opposing camp, and also that disagreeing with acquaintances in the 'public sphere' rather than in the 'private sphere'

caused this increase to occur more dramatically. That is to say, exposure to a diverse set of opinions in the public domain contributed to the articulation of political choice.

In another study by Scheufele (2001), an interaction effect regarding political discussion and media exposure emerged. By analyzing the Civic Participation Study data (1995), he found that: (1) the main effects of political discussion and media exposure (newspaper) on active political participation were significant; (2) adding interaction effects of political discussion and media exposure to the original equation caused the interaction to become statistically significant; and (3) the same held true when political knowledge was the dependent variable. Thus, discussion goes with the provision of information from the mass media to affect further participation and to enhance political knowledge.

The results of previous research show that political discussion accompanying participation promotes political knowledge both about one's own political camp as well as about the opposing camp, which in turn makes it possible to articulate the differences of political choice. Although these findings are largely about political issues and not about party choice in elections, they convey logically parallel insights about the hypotheses used in this article. We are now aware of the cognitive consequences for political participation from political discussion, although the problem of the discussion environment—whether discussion occurs under a heterogeneous or homogeneous group environment—remains to be investigated (Mutz, 2006; Ikeda, 2007).

The basic logic in this article is, therefore, that political participation promotes engagement in democratic practices such as discussion of social issues, and the coordination of activities among participants. This engagement makes citizens more aware of the political system's complexities, and it causes them to deliberate about how to deal with these complexities. In other words, it enhances their political sophistication, which in turn makes citizens more sensitive to the different political choices available to them. We will test this hypothesis by introducing hierarchical linear modeling in order to consider the impact of the macro-environment, i.e. the extent to which political parties are actually different from each other.

## 5. The macro-environment

This model in which the causal direction is moving from political participation to political efficacy is the reverse of previous models. Many previous studies

assumed that the causal direction moved from efficacy to participation, without considering the reverse causal direction. One of the reasons why this causal direction was little criticized seems to be that past studies were implicitly conducted in line with a social psychological theory of attitude, which supposes that attitudes are a readiness to act; i.e. in order to explain some behavior (political participation in this context) scholars set political efficacy as an indicator that individuals are ready to act. In this sense, the past model was orthodox. A comprehensive comparative study of these issues has been written by Dalton (1988); in his book one of the foci was on political participation as a dependent variable, the determinants of which are attitudinal variables including party identification and political efficacy. This study reflects the 'Michigan school' tradition (Campbell et al., 1960) of conducting and analyzing election studies from a social psychological point of view (the same is true for a typical Japanese participation study by Kabashima (1988)).

However, in social psychology, the reverse model has also been a focus of study; that is to say, some forms of behavior cause feedback which will in turn change attitudes. One well-known example is Bem's self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). As was discussed earlier, a few studies in political science already exist about the relationship between participation and trust that consider the possibility of reverse causality. Moreover, studies about how political discussion can change perceptions of political alternatives are directly relevant to our current argument; i.e. these political discussion studies encourage a wider focus on the causal possibility from political participation to efficacy. When assuming this causal direction, if our analysis were to reveal some evidence that efficacy did not increase (or decrease) despite participation, this would be detrimental to participatory democracy. For this reason, the direction from behavior to attitude will be investigated.

Should our next task be to show which direction is causally the stronger of the two models? This is testable using instrumental variables in a two-stage least squares model. As some countries in the following analyses have available a variety of variables, in principle the 2SLS approach is possible. A more rigorous test would be possible if we had a panel dataset. However, we argue that this task is a second priority. Instead, we emphasize the significance of the macro-political environment under which this two-way causal relationship occurs; that is to say, the causal relationship itself could be largely constrained by whether or not the macro-environment supplies more or less substantial political alternatives. This possibility has not been well tested, but is very

important for discussions about participatory democracy. In this sense, our first priority is an analysis which includes the impact of this macro factor. For this reason, we will examine the importance of the reverse causal possibility over very different macro-environments (over the very different democratic political systems).

Our analysis is based on hierarchical linear modeling analysis, considering macro- and micro factors at once. First, our target macro factor will be the distinctiveness of the political party system. This distinctiveness is the distance between the political parties on the left-right ideological dimension. If the relationship between political participation and efficacy is stronger under conditions of high distinctiveness, we argue that the design of political institutions should ideally create a system with high distinctiveness. For instance, if a two-party system lowers distinctiveness and invites a weaker participation–efficacy relationship, it may be better to add a PR system which will increase distinctiveness. This argument about the design of election systems will be more systematically and empirically verifiable using the results of hierarchical analysis. This contention is in line with arguments made by Norris (2004), who also targeted macro factors using the CSES module 1 dataset.

Second, the hierarchical approach enables the estimation of a psychological model of participation with a macro-environmental variable as a constraint. This kind of structural constraint has not been well discussed in political psychological models. Using this approach, we can show that, under a one-party dominant system, political participation does not lead to higher efficacy unless people feel effectively represented. As another example, under a highly competitive two-party system where only a small difference between two camps exists (low distinctiveness), voters may be cognitively disturbed even when they have high amounts of participation, which may result in lower political efficacy. Consider a hypothetical situation of a US voter learning about the Republican Party. When she participates in political activities, she will be exposed to a variety of factional information from both the Republican and Democratic parties, which will increase her argument repertoire about both of the parties. This may strengthen her party identification as a Republican, but it may also lead her to feel strong ambivalence due to the fact that both sides of the arguments are equally persuasive, unpersuasive, or even lack discernible differences. This example suggests that a limited distinctiveness as a macro factor may decelerate the two-way participation–efficacy relationship. Then, we may postulate that a larger distinctiveness enables voters to learn more

meaningful choices through participation, then to feel more political efficacy, and in turn causing them to participate to a greater extent.

The inferences above are tested empirically in this article. The CSES module 2 dataset provides the most appropriate opportunity to do so as it contains both the macro- and micro-data relevant to our analysis.

## 6. Hypotheses

The target of our analysis will be the positive effect of civic engagement on basic political efficacy. We also posit that the effect is stronger under political systems with more distinctive party configurations than those with less distinctive configurations. We hypothesize that:

**H1:** By helping to improve the articulation of the complexities of the political system, political participation promotes the efficacious feeling that participation makes a difference. However, this mechanism is constrained by a macro factor, which is the distinctiveness of the political choices that are available.

There are three other hypotheses related to H1:

**H2a:** (Alternative or another independent variable.) Strong party identification makes citizens perceive the distinctiveness of political choice options because they distinguish varieties of political information.

**H2b:** (Interaction effect of party identification and participation.) If party identification is weak, H1 will be weakly supported.

**H3:** (Interaction effect by subjective representation of one's political position.) If citizens perceive that their political positions are well represented by some specific party or political leader, H1 will be more strongly supported than if the case is otherwise.

H2a and H2b are more complicated. Social identification helps people perceive the distinctive difference between in-groups and out-groups (Turner, 1991), which has a direct relevance to H2a supposing that party identification differentiates in-group and out-group identities. H2b is posited because the differential effect of group polarization does not work under this condition. Remember the hypothetical situation of a US voter who experienced greater difficulty when deciding which party to vote for. This possibility is greater for people who are learning about parties for the first time than for people who strongly identify with a particular party, because they do not have a group perception

bias that is derived from group identity. Even when there are competing parties within a narrow range of ideology, in order to maximize their gain, parties will try to emphasize the differences between each other, which facilitates the perceived differences between parties. We guess that this is more effective for strong party identifiers who have a bias in scrutinizing actual differences than it is for people who just starting to learn about parties.

H3 seems natural, as the logic of democratic politics supposes the representation of one's voice as an essential element for its legitimacy. We will test these hypotheses in a comparative perspective.

## 7. Data and method

We use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems module 2 dataset to verify our hypotheses. Our analyses are restricted to the countries that have ideological measures of political parties because we incorporate the distinctiveness of the party system into the analyses. Furthermore, to create weights for the distinctiveness of the party systems, we use the voting rates of each party. Hence, we restrict our analyses to those countries that have ideological measures of party positions and the voting rates for each party that participated in chamber elections. This restriction reduces the number of countries used in the analyses to 22 from 29.<sup>2</sup>

*Dependent variable.* Our hypotheses treat political efficacy as the dependent variable. Political efficacy was created using two items (Q9 'Who is in power can make difference', Q10 'Who people vote for makes a difference'). These items measure how confident voters are in their influence on the political system. These two items are combined into one scale, which we call 'political efficacy' ( $r = 0.42$ ). This efficacy is not in regards to the ability of one's self to directly bring about change (as the term is often used to refer to in psychology; Bandura, 1977), but in the more indirect way of voting. This indirect type of political efficacy means that people believe that the political system is affected by their vote, insofar as a political party which is elected will act differently than opposing political parties would have acted if they had been elected.

*Independent variables.* Political participation is measured as participation in campaign activities (Q1b

'Did you show your support for a certain party candidate?'). This variable is dichotomously measured (1: Yes, 0: No). Party identification is measured by a single item (Q18 'Are you close to any political party?'). This item is dichotomously measured (1: Yes, 0: No). Subjective representation of one's political position is measured using a single item (Q16 'Is there a party that represents R's view?'). This item is measured dichotomously (1: Yes, 0: No).

In order to control for the effects of demographic factors, we include the following variables in the analyses; age (D1), age-squared (D1), gender (D2), education (D3), household income (D20), and fulltime worker. Fulltime worker was created from the question about current employment status (D10). In addition, political knowledge was introduced as a control variable, which was created by counting the number of correct answers on three question (Q25 to Q27).

*Macro factor.* We use the distinctiveness of the political party system of each country as a macro factor that affects the relationship of variables at the individual level. As hypothesized in H1, the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables might be different depending on this macro factor, which we refer to as 'distinctiveness.' The distinctiveness of each country is defined as follows:

$$\text{Distinctiveness} = \sum_i \sum_j \frac{w_{ij}}{\sum w_{ij}} |I_i - I_j| \quad (i > j)$$

where  $I$  is the ideological score of a party and  $w_{ij}$  is a weight. This means distinctiveness is represented as a weighted mean of the absolute difference of ideological scores among all of the combinations of parties in one country. The weight is defined as follows:

$$w_{ij} = w_{1ij} \times w_{2ij}$$

$$w_{1ij} = \frac{1}{V_k \sum_k \frac{1}{V_k}}$$

$$w_{2ij} = \frac{V_m}{\sum_m V_m}$$

where  $V_k$  is an absolute difference of the voting rate in the chamber election of each combination of parties in the country, and  $V_m$  is a mean of vote rate in the chamber election of each combination of parties in the country.

$$V_k = |V_i - V_j| \quad (i > j)$$

<sup>2</sup> The country datasets we used were as follows; Australia, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Great Britain, and United States.

$$V_m = \frac{V_i + V_j}{2} \quad (i > j)$$

$w_{1ij}$  weights the relative difference of vote rates of each set of two parties. If the one party is a major party and the other a minor party, there is a relatively large difference in the voting rate between those two parties. Thus the ideological distinctiveness of those two parties is less weighted by  $w_{1ij}$ . Even if citizens are aware of the ideological standpoints of minor parties in their respective countries, minor parties cannot be substantial alternatives in voting choice for most citizens. On the other hand, if those two parties are competing in their voting rates, the ideological distinctiveness of the two parties is more heavily weighted. This weighing ( $w_{1ij}$ ), however, does not take into account the absolute voting rates of each of these two parties. The weighting coefficient for the combination of two minor parties which have competing voting rates (e.g. the Japan Communist Party and Social Democratic Party in Japan) cannot be differentiated from that of two major parties which are also competing in their vote rates (e.g. the Republican Democratic parties in the US).

In order to avoid this problem, we introduce another weighting coefficient  $w_{2ij}$ .  $w_{2ij}$  weights the relative magnitude of the absolute voting rate of each party. If each of the two parties has a large voting rate, the weighting coefficient becomes larger than is the case where one of the two parties is minor or where both parties are minor. By multiplying these two weights with the absolute difference of ideological scores, we can create a valid measurement of the distinctiveness of the political party system in each country. Note that this measurement of distinctiveness is not based on the perceptions of the survey respondents. Ideological scores and vote rates in the chamber elections are all defined by experts and the actual election data by utilizing the CSES module 2 macro datasets. In this sense, the measurement of distinctiveness is more valid than naively averaging the perceived distinctiveness of individual respondents in each country.

## 8. Results

All the estimations were conducted using HLM (hierarchical linear modeling).<sup>3</sup> HLM is useful for

<sup>3</sup> HLM is useful for cross-national comparisons because each individual is nested in each nation, i.e. having hierarchical structure. And within each nation, there are often intraclass correlations that violate the assumption of the ordinary least-square estimation of multiple regression models. For more about HLM, see Raudenbush and Bryk (2001).

investigating data that have a hierarchical structure, especially when we examine interaction effects between the variables at both the national and individual levels. For example, we can investigate whether the national factors, such as political institutions and economical environment (macro factors), affect individual behavior and psychology (micro factors).

Table 1 shows the results which test hypothesis H1. We assumed random effects only on the slopes of the intercept and political participation and all of the other demographic variables were assumed to have only fixed effects; and we regressed the slope of political participation on distinctiveness. This means the variance of the slope of political participation which varies among countries is explained by one macro factor, distinctiveness. If the coefficient of distinctiveness has a significantly positive effect, it indicates that the effect of political participation on political efficacy is larger in countries where the distinctiveness of the political party system is more apparent. The results of Table 1 clearly support this ‘macro’ part of the hypothesis H1 ( $t$ -ratio = 3.19\*\*). Distinctiveness has a significantly positive effect on the slope of political participation. Political participation enhances one’s political efficacy and its effect is stronger when the distinctiveness of party system is greater. However, by holding the distinctiveness constant, the average slope of the relationship between political participation and efficacy is not larger than zero, i.e. the former part of H1 (‘micro’ part of the hypothesis) was not supported alone ( $t$ -ratio = .71, not significant).

The directions of the effects of the other demographic variables are consistent with the previous literature. Political efficacy declines as one gets old, but this effect is not linear because the coefficient of age-squared has a positive effect on political efficacy. Those who are women, with more education, greater income, and more political knowledge feel that the political system is more effective than men, and those with lower education, income, and political knowledge. And these effects are all consistent in the subsequent analyses. Though the residual variance of political participation slope is still significant (see variance component in random effect part), it is not unusual because we used only one explanatory variable (i.e. distinctiveness) in the level-2 regression.

Table 2 shows the result of a test of Hypothesis 2a. We additionally introduced party identification as an independent variable and retained distinctiveness as one of the level-2 explanatory variables as we did with Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 2, party identification has a highly significant effect on political efficacy. The

Table 1  
Political participation and political efficacy (Hypothesis H1)

Dependent	Political efficacy				
		Coefficient	Robust S.E.	t-Ratio	p-Value
<b>Fixed effect</b>					
For slope of					
Intercept	Intercept	6.79	0.23	29.72	**
Age	Intercept	-0.02	0.01	-2.28	*
Age (squared)	Intercept	0.00	0.00	2.38	*
Gender	Intercept	0.06	0.03	1.77	+
Education	Intercept	0.07	0.02	4.04	**
Household income	Intercept	0.06	0.02	2.64	**
Fulltime worker	Intercept	-0.03	0.02	-1.03	
Political knowledge	Intercept	0.20	0.02	8.96	**
Political participation	Intercept	0.13	0.19	0.71	
	Distinctiveness	0.17	0.05	3.19	**
N = 28,438					
<b>Random effect</b>					
		Variance component	$\chi^2$		
Intercept		0.35	1984.78	**	
Political participation slope		0.06	76.46	**	
Level-1		4.24			

p values: +0.05 < p ≤ 0.1, \*0.01 < p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01.

t-ratio is 15.04, which is much larger than political participation. However, distinctiveness still has a significant effect on the slope of political participation, which means the interaction effect of political

participation and distinctiveness is not a spurious correlation caused by party identification.

We posited in Hypothesis 2b that political participation and party identification may have an interaction

Table 2  
Party identification and political choice (Hypothesis H2a)

Dependent	Political efficacy				
		Coefficient	Robust S.E.	t-Ratio	p-Value
<b>Fixed effect</b>					
For slope of					
Intercept	Intercept	6.60	0.21	30.87	**
Age	Intercept	-0.02	0.01	-2.25	*
Age (squared)	Intercept	0.00	0.00	2.16	*
Gender	Intercept	0.07	0.03	2.20	*
Education	Intercept	0.06	0.02	3.89	**
Household income	Intercept	0.05	0.02	2.31	*
Fulltime worker	Intercept	-0.02	0.02	-0.89	
Political knowledge	Intercept	0.16	0.02	7.74	**
Political participation	Intercept	0.08	0.11	0.80	
	Distinctiveness	0.11	0.03	4.10	**
Party ID	Intercept	0.75	0.05	15.04	**
N = 27,746					
<b>Random effect</b>					
		Variance component	$\chi^2$		
Intercept		0.37	1172.59	**	
Political participation slope		0.03	45.03	**	
Party ID slope		0.04	90.89	**	
Level-1		4.10			

p values: \*0.01 < p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01.



Table 3  
Interaction effects in party identification and political choice (Hypothesis H2b)

Dependent	Political efficacy				
		Coefficient	Robust S.E.	<i>t</i> -Ratio	<i>p</i> -Value
<b>Fixed effect</b>					
For slope of					
Intercept	Intercept	6.60	0.21	30.82	*
Age	Intercept	−0.02	0.01	−2.24	*
Age (squared)	Intercept	0.00	0.00	2.16	*
Gender	Intercept	0.07	0.03	2.19	*
Education	Intercept	0.06	0.02	3.89	**
Household income	Intercept	0.05	0.02	2.32	*
Fulltime worker	Intercept	−0.02	0.02	−0.89	
Political knowledge	Intercept	0.16	0.02	7.75	**
Political participation	Intercept	0.14	0.12	1.15	
	Distinctiveness	0.13	0.03	4.56	**
Party ID	Intercept	0.76	0.05	14.24	**
Political participation					
* Party ID	Intercept	−0.12	0.08	−1.44	
<i>N</i> = 27,746					
<b>Random effect</b>					
		Variance component	$\chi^2$		
Intercept		0.37	1122.64	**	
Political participation slope		0.06	27.62		
Party ID slope		0.05	90.13	**	
Political participation					
* Party ID slope		0.03	25.41		
Level-1		4.10			

*p* values: \* $0.01 < p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

effect on political efficacy, and that the direction of this interaction effect would be positive. Table 3 shows the results of the model. As can be seen, the effects of political participation and partisanship are exactly the same as in Hypothesis 2a. Distinctiveness has a positive effect on the slope of political participation and the intercept of the party identification is highly positive and significance. The direction of the interaction effect, however, was somewhat contrary to our expectation. The interaction has a negative effect on political efficacy, although it is not significant (*t*-ratio = −1.44). This indicates that the positive effect of political participation is slightly stronger among citizens who do not have strong party identification. In other words, party identification has a strong main effect on political efficacy itself (*t*-ratio = 14.24\*\*), and political participation has a weak compensatory effect on political efficacy for less partisan citizens. Note that the residual variance component of the political participation slope revealed insignificant. After controlling for the effect of party identification and the interaction effect between political participation and party identification, the variance of the slope of political participation is well

explained by the distinctiveness of political party system.

Table 4 shows the result of Hypothesis 3. Similar to the result of Hypothesis 2b, the intercept of subjective representation of one's political position is significantly larger than zero (*t*-ratio = 12.63\*\*). In addition to the main effects, the intercept of the interaction effect between political participation and subjective representation of one's political position is significantly negative, which was contrary to our hypothesis. Again, and this time more strongly, this can be interpreted as political participation having a compensatory effect on political efficacy for those who do not feel their political position is well represented by the current party system. This means that if citizens fail to feel that their political position is well represented in the current political system, political participation is an effective way to enhance their political efficacy. On the other hand, for those who feel their political position well-represented, political participation is less effective due to the fact that their political efficacy is more or less saturated by the high subjective representation of their political position.

One more point to be noted in the table is that the intercept of political participation is now statistically

Table 4  
Subjective representation and political position (Hypothesis H3)

Dependent	Political efficacy				
		Coefficient	Robust S.E.	t-Ratio	p-Value
<b>Fixed effect</b>					
For slope of					
Intercept	Intercept	6.31	0.22	29.32	**
Age	Intercept	−0.02	0.01	−2.37	*
Age(squared)	Intercept	0.00	0.00	2.19	*
Gender	Intercept	0.08	0.03	2.81	**
Education	Intercept	0.06	0.01	3.86	**
Household income	Intercept	0.05	0.02	2.49	*
Fulltime worker	Intercept	−0.02	0.03	−0.68	
Political knowledge	Intercept	0.15	0.02	7.31	**
Political participation	Intercept	0.38	0.12	3.14	**
	Distinctiveness	0.10	0.03	3.85	**
Subjective representation of one's political position	Intercept	1.04	0.08	12.63	**
Political participation					
* Subjective representation of one's political position	Intercept	−0.29	0.10	−2.91	**
N = 26,447					
<b>Random effect</b>					
		Variance component	$\chi^2$		
Intercept		0.45	1090.27	**	
Political participation slope		0.07	29.07	+	
Subjective representation of one's political position slope		0.14	150.37	**	
Political participation					
* Subjective representation of one's political position slope		0.04	15.48		
Level-1		3.98			

p values: \*0.01 < p ≤ 0.05, \*\*p ≤ 0.01.

significant ( $t$ -ratio = 3.14\*\*), i.e. even after controlling for macro level of distinctiveness, political participation contributes to the increase of political efficacy significantly. This means that the micro part of the hypothesis H1 is now supported.

In summary, our hierarchical modeling was revealing; political participation enhances a voter's sense of political efficacy, especially when the distinctiveness of political party system is high (H1). However, the relationships of this main effect with other independent variables were not consistent with our expectations. That is, the positive effect of political participation on political efficacy is larger among those who have less party identification and those who do not feel their political position well represented in the current political system.

## 9. Discussion

As was pointed out at the beginning, there are many studies that analyze what determines political participation. And based on these findings, numerous discussions have emerged about how we may promote participation.

However, we re-configured this landscape by examining the reverse side of this coin, what we receive in return from political participation. And this investigation was conducted taking into account a macro factor, namely, different political party systems in terms of the distinctiveness of political parties.

Participation does not only mean an involvement in politics; it makes a difference on its own because it effects commitment, emotional satisfaction, and cognitive sophistication. In this article, we focused on the cognitive effects of participation. Through the analyses of the CSES data, we obtained a clear result supporting the macro part of the main hypothesis, namely, that political participation promotes the efficacious feelings that participation makes difference, and this is constrained by the macro distinctiveness of the political choices available to voters. This result was robust, despite the huge institutional differences between election systems and the cultural differences covering the 22 countries. As for the micro part of the main hypothesis, it was only supported when we considered the interaction effect of subjective representativeness, meaning

the macro factor more strongly affected the micro-relationship than we expected, although where we feel subjectively represented the micro-relationship emerges even when the distinctiveness of political parties is not strong.

Some of the results did not support our original expectations. The hypothesis regarding the interaction effect of party identification and participation showed effects that were opposite to our expectations, even though the main effect of party identification was supported as originally theorized. It does not, however, contradict our main hypothesis nor is it difficult to interpret; the unexpected result reveals that when party identification is weak, the effect of participation is likely to be (though failed to reach significance) stronger than in the case of strong party identification. In one sense, this is good news for democratic practice. On the one hand, strong partisanship makes citizens have higher levels of political efficacy. But on the other hand, weak partisans are also able to obtain these efficacious feelings by political participation, i.e. the latter has a chance to catch up with the former through participation. A weak commitment to the political world in terms of party identification would be compensated for by political participation in order to obtain the cognitively useful efficacy. This finding could not be possible if we assumed the causal relationship based on a traditional psychological model. Only by assuming that political participation is an independent variable are we able to juxtapose participation and political identification, which gave birth to the new insight that participation can play a compensatory role for party identification to promote efficacy. In this sense again, the test of the reverse causal relationship was meaningful.

The compensatory role of participation also emerged in testing Hypothesis 3, regarding the interaction effect of subjective representation on a voter's political position. If citizens perceive that their political positions are well represented by a party or political leader, the main hypothesis should have been more strongly supported than if the case was otherwise. This result showed the reverse. However, here too, political participation brings its benefits for those who feel that they are not well represented in the system. This is also good news for citizens who are alienated from day-to-day democratic politics.

All in all, this study points to two directions for future research. One is to investigate the two-way causal relationship, and the other is to explore a more extensive and systematic macro–micro interaction. The latter is only possible with a dataset which has both levels of data such as CSES. In this context, we have examined the

reverse possible causal relationship (from participation to efficacy) under a macro–micro-interaction model. This combination of analysis has provided new insights about the study of participatory democracy.

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