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The Price of Rights: Exploring the Role of Individualism,
Collectivism, Rights, and Obligations in Students' Reported
Political Intentions and Civic Behaviors

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Abstract

Previous analyses of U.S. civics textbooks document an overwhelming emphasis on citizen rights to the relative exclusion of citizen obligations and participation. Despite evidence of this uneven coverage, scholars have not yet investigated the psychological and behavioral consequences of this asymmetry, which may be especially consequential in the United States, a predominantly individualistic culture. The present research does just this by analyzing survey data collected from high school students in civics courses. As expected, and in accordance with the content of civics curriculum, students show greater endorsement of rights than of obligations. Moreover, higher support for obligations increases students' intention to vote and to participate in civic and extracurricular activities, whereas endorsement of rights is negatively associated with political participation.

The Price of Rights: Exploring the Role of Individualism,

Collectivism, Rights, and Obligations in Students' Reported Political Behavior

During the last few decades scholars have documented both the predominance of individualism in American popular and political culture, and the potential impact this might have on democratic citizenship. Several disciplines have been engaged in research surrounding these issues. However, the methods with which, and perspectives from which, individualism and related constructs have been studied vary widely across disciplines. Studies in social psychology focus on documenting the overwhelming individualistic culture in the United States compared to non-western cultures (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Hui, 1988; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis & Trafimow, 2001). Social education research also demonstrates the predominance of individualism; for example, civics textbooks disproportionately focus on rights to the relative exclusion of obligations and participation (e.g., Riedel, Gonzales, Avery, & Sullivan, 2001; Gonzales, Riedel, Williamson, Avery, Sullivan & Bos, 2004). Within political science, scholars examine the impact of individualism and collectivism on conceptions of citizenship (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996; Gans, 1988; Lipset, 1996), and the impact of individualism on policy attitudes and outcomes (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1995, 1999). The purpose of our research is to synthesize work in these three social science domains to arrive at a set of predictions about how high school students' sense of individualism and collectivism influences their political attitudes about civic rights and obligations, and about how these political attitudes affect actual and intended political behavior.

The present study is especially relevant given recent evidence of declining citizen participation in the United States and the more notable declines in levels of engagement among American youth. Numerous studies have characterized the citizenry as generally disengaged and alienated from the political sphere. Scholars have noted this decline by examining multiple measures: declines in volunteer activities and decreased charitable contributions (Knack, 1992; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Uslaner, 1998), lower levels of public awareness, decreased interpersonal trust, and reduced levels of support and trust for government (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Rahn & Transue, 1998).

Declines in political participation are most marked among young Americans. Evidence abounds that today's young Americans have retreated from participation in public life (Cohn, 1992; Rahn & Transue, 1998; Quigly, 1999; Galston, 2003), and lack general knowledge about government and public affairs (Cohn, 1992; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Quigly, 1999; Rahn & Transue, 1998; Galston, 2003). Further, surveys reveal unprecedented low levels of political interest, political efficacy, political engagement and political involvement among the younger population (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Galston, 1999; Gamson, 1992; Quigly, 1999). Easterlin and Crimmins (1991) suggest young people have generally retreated from the idea of active political involvement and Galston (2003) argues youth currently demonstrate unprecedented high levels of civic detachment.¹

Avery and Simmons (2000/2001) suggest that the ideal outcome of civics instruction should be to inform students of their broader roles as citizens, including both rights and responsibilities that accompany democratic citizenship. However, research has demonstrated that current approaches

to American civics education fail in this respect and largely emphasize freedoms to the exclusion of citizen obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004, Riedel et al., 2001). Other research further suggests that this reinforcement of individual rights and the accompanying neglect of collective dimensions of American politics may contribute to the general decline in citizen participation in the United States (Bricker, 1989; Garman, 1995). Funk (1998) also supplies evidence that a focus on individualism encourages citizens to value individual over collective benefits, and she suggests that a more collective orientation is necessary to curb declining civic engagement. Overall, current approaches and content in civics courses are compatible with traditions that focus on individual autonomy and rights (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Our research empirically explores whether civic education approaches that focus on rights reinforce individualistic concerns and, thereafter, reduce levels of youth political participation.

Research in Social Psychology

Social-psychological research has provided evidence for two distinct images of the self as independent and interdependent (Hui, 1988; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). Singelis (1994) theoretically and empirically developed a scale to measure strength of an individual's interdependent (connected) and independent (separate and unique) self-construals. In his work, two orthogonal dimensions of the individualism-collectivism scale were supported in confirmatory factor analyses, thus suggesting that the two images of self can and do coexist in individuals and that they can be measured with satisfactory reliability and validity.

Individualism-collectivism constructs have been well documented in social psychology. Levels of individualism have been demonstrated to be much higher in the United States, especially compared to non-western cultures (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hofstede (1980) defines individualism as emotional independence from “groups, organizations, or other collectivities” (p. 221). Individualists, then, give priority to personal goals over in-group goals (Triandis et al., 1988) and emphasize values that promote these individual goals (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), the self-conceptions of citizens in western cultures are more individualistic, due to their focus on separateness and uniqueness.

In contrast to individualistic cultures, collective cultures place an emphasis on subordinating personal goals to those of the in-group (Triandis, 1988) and are characterized by an identity derived from a social system rather than from individual attributes (Hofstede, 1980).

Collectivists emphasize values that promote the welfare of their in-group (Triandis et al., 1990) and tend to think of the group, rather than the individual, as the unit of analysis (Nakane, 1970). The image of self held by members of collectivistic cultures is an interdependent image that stresses connectedness, social contexts and relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In the United States, as compared to non-Western cultures, socialization of individualism is apparent. In comparative studies of child-rearing, for example, Adamopoulos and Bontempo (1984) argue that child-rearing patterns around the world can be described using two dimensions: acceptance-rejection and independence-dependence. Individualist cultures focus on acceptance and independence in child rearing that tends to promote children’s self-confidence. In contrast, collectivist cultures promote acceptance and dependence in child-rearing practices, leading to

conformity. Collectivist upbringing focuses on obedience above other child-rearing values (Guthrie, 1961), whereas in the United States, parents often focus on self-fulfillment and happiness (Setiadi, 1984). Doumanis (1983) also notes collectivism emphasizes social relationships, whereas individualism emphasizes achievement.

Educational institutions compared across Western and Eastern cultures also differ in socializing independent versus interdependent self-construals. Children in Western cultures are grouped and tracked according to individual ability, whereas children in Eastern schools are not tracked by ability and are rarely singled out for separate instruction (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). A study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) challenges the basic idea that increased personal choice results in increased intrinsic motivation, performance, and personal satisfaction. They suggest that children from some Eastern cultures, as compared to children from more Western cultures, actually prefer that their choices be made by significant others who are valued in-group members, whereas intrinsic motivation of American children in the study was increased by individual choice.

Although it is clear that elements of independence and interdependence are evident in every person (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Oerter, Oerter, Agostiani, Kim, & Wibowo, 1996; Simmel, 1908/1971; Spiro, 1993; Triandis et al., 1990; Triandis, 1994, 1995), some scholars have suggested that children first learn the dominant pattern of culture and thereafter may only later learn other patterns to a limited degree (Rosenthal & Bornholt, 1988). For example, they suggest that young people in predominantly individualistic cultures learn independence and self-reliance first; they then may or may not learn to be good team players. Alternatively, those growing up in

a collectivist environment will first demonstrate good in-group membership and they may develop a marginal amount of self-reliance or achievement-orientation. Again, this suggests that although individuals can hold both collectivist and individualist values, the dominant patterns are more likely to be adopted.

Research in Social Education

Several social education studies note that high school civics curricula, an important source of formal democratic socialization for students, generally concentrate attention on rights related to democratic citizenship at the expense of covering obligations to society. The *National Standards for Civics and Government* is a document that outlines what knowledge and skills students should gain from their formal civics instruction. This document—in many ways the model for civics curricula—was shown to disproportionately present citizens as passive individual rights-bearers, while providing fewer examples of citizen obligations to the collective good (Riedel et al., 2001).

Given the focus on rights in the *National Standards for Civics and Government*, studies have investigated whether civics curriculum mirrors their emphasis on citizen rights. One such study finds that civics textbooks generally reflect the content outlined in the *National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 1997). A recent content analysis of widely-adopted high school civics textbooks suggests that concepts associated with citizens' rights and freedoms far outnumber concepts associated with citizen obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004). Further, Gonzales and her colleagues suggest that the concept of political participation, outside of voting, also receives less attention compared to rights in civics texts.

In another study, three civics and three United States history textbooks commonly used in junior high schools were examined, and the results suggest that rights—at both individual and group levels—play a central role in textbooks’ “language of democracy” (Avery & Simmons, 2001/2001). Similar to the findings of Gonzales and her colleagues (2004), civics text references to citizen rights outnumbered mentions of duties or obligations by a ratio of almost 4:1. In their analysis, the authors further point to First Amendment rights or the “right to freedom of expression” and the “right to vote” as those rights most frequently mentioned. Other rights, such as the rights of change or revolution, the right to privacy, the right to bear arms, and human rights in general receive less attention. Thus, it appears that the rights that are discussed in these texts focus more on expressive, individualistic rights.

Overwhelmingly, these studies illustrate that both the *National Standards for Civics and Government* and the most widely-adopted textbooks present a narrow view of citizenship, largely focusing on rights to the relative exclusion of obligations and, thus, present a limited, individualistic view of democratic citizenship.

Research in Political Science

Research on individualism and collectivism within political science focuses on how the predominance of individualism in American political culture influences individuals’ conceptions of citizenship. One of the leading examinations (Bellah et al., 1996) suggests that individualism dominates contemporary moral discourse in such a way that it has become a prominent “first language” that actually works to limit political dialogue. Surprisingly, the authors further note

that individualism dominated the language of even more seemingly communal citizens. In summary, Bellah and his colleagues suggest that individualistic notions largely rendered Americans incapable of expressing collective visions for political community.

Conover and colleagues (Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991; Conover, Leonard, & Searing, 1993) argue that although Americans tend to see *some* civic activities as duties (e.g., voting and paying taxes), they are reluctant to see more communal activities (e.g., participating in community service) as anything more than things “good citizens” do. Thus, citizens appeared to view ordinary citizenship markedly less in terms of collective pursuits than in terms of individual actions. In fact, a recent study suggests that high school students are significantly more willing to endorse civic actions when described as “important” compared to when they are described as “duties” (Williamson, Gonzales, Avery, Sullivan, Riedel, & Bos, 2003). Interestingly, students scoring higher on a collectivistic scale are more likely to endorse citizenship actions as “important” than those lower in collectivism, but there was no difference between the groups when those same actions were described as “duties.” The authors suggest this result “supports the notion that in the United States, a highly individualistic culture, students are more willing to endorse civic actions as arising from personal values than from normative social imperatives” (Williamson et al., 2003, p. 203).

Several empirical investigations within political science have explored the role of individualism – as a political culture value—in Americans' political attitudes and, more specifically, citizens' attitudes toward welfare policies (e.g., Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Gilens, 1995, 1999). These

studies illustrate how individualism extends to and can impact political attitudes broadly and also, more specifically, in the policy domain.

Although many political scientists have empirically examined individualism as a political value, the measures are quite different from those utilized in social-psychological research. These political science studies operationally define individualism as a global political culture value – often conceptually defined as economic individualism—whereas social-psychological research views individualism as a global view of the self in relation to others. For example, Gilens (1995) measures individualism using one measure, "government should not guarantee jobs; each should get ahead on their own."

Within political science, then, scholars suggest that individualistic notions restrict views of citizenship and deny citizens the ability to express more collective concerns (e.g., Bellah et al., 1996). Furthermore, individualism and collectivism are suggested to be unidimensional and in tension with one another. This is at odds with how collectivism and individualism are portrayed as orthogonal self-construals in social-psychological research. Our study, which relies on social-psychological definitions and measures of individualism, is quite different from previous empirical examinations of individualism in political science.

Expectations

In this paper, we investigate whether current approaches to civic education may contribute to declining civic by affecting students' conceptions of citizenship and, thereafter, their intentions to participate in politics. The contribution of this research is to bridge several strands of research

across disciplines to develop a more thorough understanding of the negative consequences of primarily rights-focused curricula on students' intentions to engage in participatory politics.

We suggest that the streams of research across the disciplines of social psychology, social education, and political science all offer something substantial to our understanding of individualism, collectivism, and related political attitudes and behaviors. Social psychologists have contributed greatly by demonstrating the important role independent versus interdependent self-construals play in guiding individual goals, priorities, and conceptions of relationships to groups. However, throughout their inquiry, scholars have maintained a neutral stance with regard to the impact of interdependent or independent worldviews or self-conceptions on such individual outcomes as political behaviors. They have also failed to explore the potentially negative consequences of these self-construals on the collective good.

Our specific expectations are that students' levels of individualism will be related to their endorsement of rights and obligations, which reflect individualism and collectivism in the civics domain. Furthermore, because civics textbooks seem to largely reflect a bias toward mentions of rights over obligations, we expect students to more strongly endorse rights than obligations (Gonzales et al., 2004; Riedel et al., 2001). Finally, we hypothesize, consistent with the political science literature, that political attitudes with respect to rights and obligations will have effects on students' intended and actual political behaviors. Consistent with prominent political science research and theory (e.g., Bellah et al., 1996; Conover et al., 1991; Conover et al., 1993), strong endorsement of rights is expected to have a negative effect on civic behavior, such that "rights-entitled" students would be less inclined to participate in extra-curricular activities associated

with citizenship. In addition, endorsement of obligations, because it reflects a more responsible, collective conception of citizenship, would encourage civic-related participation and voting intentions in high school students.

Overview

This study is part of an ongoing research program examining adolescent and teacher values and conceptions of citizenship. Researchers administered surveys in intact civics and government classes at seven different public high schools. Measures of individualism, collectivism, rights, obligations, civics-related extracurricular participation, and voting intentions were administered. From these questionnaire data, we constructed a structural equation model to test our predictions regarding the impact of rights-focused civics curricula and students' reported civic-related participation and intentions to vote.

Method

Participants

Participants for the present study were recruited from 12th grade American government and 9th grade civics classes in several urban, suburban and exurban public schools in a large city in the Upper Midwest.² The total sample size was 551. Racial and ethnic demographics were as follows: 88 Asian-American/Pacific Islanders (16.0%), 272 White/Caucasians (49.4%), 129 Black/African-Americans (23.4%), 7 Latinos, 18 American Indians (3.3%), and 37 who did not specify group membership (6.7%). Within the sample, 300 students were female (54.4%), 232 students were male (42.1%), and 19 students (3.4%) did not report their gender. Approximately

43% (239) of the sample was drawn from 9th grade civics students; the remainder was drawn from students enrolled in 12th grade American government courses.

*Measures*³

Collectivism. A ten-item scale was constructed from three measures of collectivism in the literature (Deaux & Reid, 2000; Hui, 1988; Singelis, 1994). These items measured more general collective orientations (e.g., “You should return a favor if a classmate lends a helping hand”) as well as deference to either group opinions or to authority (e.g., “It’s important for me to respect decisions made by a group I belong to”). Students rated agreement with each item (1 = “Strongly Disagree”; 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The reliability for this scale was adequate ($\alpha = .79$).

Individualism. An eight-item individualism scale, composed of items developed by Singelis (1994), was utilized. Individualism items measured importance of independence (e.g., “Being independent of others is very important to me.”), and to individual comfort in a group (e.g., “I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards.”). Each item was rated in terms of agreement (1 = “Strongly Disagree”; 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The reliability for this scale was also adequate ($\alpha = .73$).

Obligations. Students were asked to rate twenty-two items according to their importance to being a good citizen (1 = “Definitely Not Important”; 2 = “Probably Not Important”; 3 = “Probably Important”; 4 = “Definitely Important”). These items, which included several activities directly associated with multiple views of citizenship in the United States, were borrowed from work by Torney-Purta and colleagues (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) in their international investigation of citizenship education more broadly. In

general, the items covered a wide range of obligations to various levels of government (e.g., to show respect for government representatives), expressive obligations (e.g., to participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust), obligations to tolerate others unlike yourself (e.g., to accept people who are different), and obligations to keep abreast of current issues (e.g., to follow political issues in the newspaper, on the radio, on TV). Given the broad scope of these items, students were able to express support regarding several notions regarding citizenship.

Reliability for this scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .85$).

Rights. In order to measure rights, an eleven-item scale ($\alpha = .85$) was utilized. Students rated the items according to how much they considered each activity to be a right (1 = “Definitely Not a Right”; 2 = “Probably Not a Right”; 3 = “Probably a Right”; 4 = “Definitely a Right”). These items contained expressive rights (e.g., right to express your opinions or right to vote) and more basic rights (e.g., right to own property).

Civic Behaviors. Students’ time spent participating in several civic-related school activities served as one of our main measures of participation. Students were asked to rate eight activity categories on the extent that they devoted time to the activity (1 = “No Time at All”; 2 = “Only a Little Time”; 3 = “Some Time”; 4 = “A Lot of Time”). The activities included civic organizations (e.g., political and civic service clubs), school organizations (e.g., student government), and creative activities (e.g., speech, drama, or debate).

Voting. All students were first asked “Do you plan to vote in the elections when you turn 18 years of age? Why or why not?” Then, a second question asked “If you said yes to the previous question, how likely do you think it is that you will vote?” Students rated their likelihood to vote (1 = “Not sure”; 2 = “Probably will vote”; 3 = “Definitely will vote”). Overall, these measures were collapsed into one summary variable representing students’

likelihood to vote (0 = "No" to question 1; 1 = "Not sure"; 2 = "Probably will vote"; 3 = "Definitely will vote").

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before drawing the parameters for our structural equation model, we conducted preliminary tests to examine gender and racial differences in the variables under study. For gender, there were small persistent differences between boys and girls across all variables, in which girls were more likely to endorse all the scales. There were also small differences across ethnicity.⁴

We examined asymmetrical endorsement of individualism as opposed to collectivism, and rights as opposed to obligations. A correlated samples *t*-test revealed that students were no more likely to endorse individualism ($M = 4.12$; $SD = .84$) than to endorse collectivism ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .80$), $t(544) = 1.61$, *ns*. A second correlated samples *t*-test also revealed that, as expected, political rights ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .44$) were more strongly endorsed than were political obligations ($M = 3.09$; $SD = .39$), $t(550) = 29.50$, $p < .001$. In fact, students evidenced a rare show of solidarity in their endorsement of political rights: Fully 25% of the sample (138 students) gave full support for all eleven items measuring rights, reporting them all to be “definitely a right.”

Proposed Model

The central intent of our paper was to examine the political and civic consequences of adolescents' endorsement of individualism and collectivism, as well as obligations and rights. Toward that end, we developed a model that would explain how students' individual differences in individualism would predict certain political attitudes that would ultimately lead to political

intentions and behaviors. We expected that individualism would lead to students' greater endorsement of political rights. Similarly, we predicted that increased collectivism would lead to a greater propensity to support citizenship obligations. To assess a potential relationship between individualism and collectivism, we included an unanalyzed association between these two constructs in our model.

We expected differences in political attitudes to bear on political intentions to vote, as well as on extra-curricular involvement at school. Specifically, students who showed stronger support of citizenship obligations were expected to report stronger intentions to vote in the future, and to be more likely to report participating in extra-curricular activities. Students who were stronger in their support of rights were expected to be *less* likely to participate in extra-curricular activities. This model was tested, and although the fit of the model was decent (GFI = .94, AGFI = .86, RMR = .03, $\chi^2/df = 13.4$), and all paths were statistically significant in the predicted direction (p 's < .01), examination of the residual covariance matrix suggested that more relationships deserved specification.

Final Model

As a result, we added more paths to the model to explain the residual covariance. First, individualism was clearly and directly linked to intentions to vote and to student participation, above and beyond the contribution of political attitudes. These relationships are theoretically feasible insofar as expressive aspects of individualism may lead students to be more politically active. Therefore, two paths were added from individualism to intentions to vote, and to extra-curricular participation. Another strong, unexplained association emerged between political

obligations and the endorsement of political rights.⁶ This association might be explained by patriotic involvement. To the extent that students more strongly commit to their obligations to the nation and society, they may feel more entitled to the rights inherent in democracy and the constitution. For this reason, a path was added from political obligations to political rights.

The fit of the final model was very good (GFI = .99, AGFI = .96, RMR = .01, RMSEA = .04, $\chi^2/df = 3.39$), with all paths significant in the predicted direction, t 's ≥ 2.60 , p 's $\leq .01$.⁷ Please see Figure 1 for a diagram of the model with standardized regression weights.

Discussion

Our study provides preliminary empirical confirmation of three hypotheses that span the interdisciplinary boundaries among social psychology, civics education, and political science. First, as predicted, the social-psychological constructs of individualism and collectivism are positively related to the corresponding political attitudes related to rights and obligations. Second, mirroring the differential coverage favoring political rights over obligations in civics textbooks (Riedel et al., 2001; Gonzales et al., 2004), students' own endorsement of political attitudes supports rights more than obligations. Finally, consistent with the literature in political science, there are negative political consequences to preferential support of rights (e.g., political individualism) over obligations (e.g., political collectivism). Students who thought themselves largely entitled to every political right we posed to them were less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities related to civics and no more likely than others to vote. In contrast, students who saw themselves as more obligated to their nation and community were more likely to participate in civics-related school activities, and expressed greater intentions to vote. Of course,

it is important to note that this evidence is preliminary; our results in Figure 1 are based on a particular student sample in the Upper Midwest, and data from a different sample might result in a somewhat different model.

Nonetheless, the current study *suggests* that there are negative consequences to one particular form of political individualism, namely, a rights-based individualism. Apparently, students who strongly believe that they automatically possess the many rights and freedoms our democracy has to offer, may overlook the important reciprocal relation between individual rights on the one hand, and the fulfillment of obligations so essential for a healthy civic society, on the other. Our findings also call into question the overwhelming focus of rights coverage in high school civics textbooks as opposed to more elaborate discussion of political obligation and community involvement. If we, as a society, consider the democratic involvement of our youth as citizens as an important pedagogical goal of civics instruction, we might also consider teaching them more about political obligations and participation, and less about rights, as a more plausible method of reaching that goal.

Our study also indirectly suggests that the agenda-setting focus on rights to the exclusion of obligations in civics texts may diminish the democratic involvement of students. Not only do authors' focus on rights spell less attention devoted to obligations and civic and political participation in civics textbooks (Gonzales et al., 2004), but an individual rights focus might also directly contribute to diminished civic and political involvement among young people. Other researchers have pointed to current difficulties with realizing democracy in America. For instance, Putnam (1998) demonstrates that civic involvement and trust have declined

substantially in the last sixty years. Within the domain of education, Marciano (1997) has argued that civics education undermines democracy by one-sided presentation of history that neglects several perspectives and allows limited democratic debate within the contested domain of politics. Beyond this, students may be less encouraged to be politically active when they are reminded only of the rights they possess, and not of the civic and political obligations upon which they should act.

In addition to our expected findings, we uncovered some surprising ones. Previous studies by Singelis (1994) have suggested that collectivism and individualism constructs are orthogonal. However, in this study, we find a strong relationship between the two. Perhaps this is because in a high school sample, students are less likely to conceive of any tension between individualism and collectivism. It is possible that both constructs are well socialized and both are seen by youth as socially valuable. For example, students may see individual expression and uniqueness as positive qualities, but also view helping and respecting other people as important. Perhaps adolescent students have not yet encountered situations in which they experience the tension between individualistic expression and the honoring of the larger group norms and directions.

We also found that individualism, though not the endorsement of political rights, was *positively* related to participation and voting intentions. Therefore, strong endorsement of the importance of political rights does not seem to be a politically desirable aspect of individualism as a more general interpersonal orientation. One possible explanation is that individualism, after portioning out the entitlement reflected in the strong endorsement of political rights, indexes

varying levels of expressiveness. Those who believe they are unique believe they have something to offer the political community, and so they are more active and participatory.

Finally, there was a strong relationship between obligations and rights, even controlling statistically for an acquiescence response bias. This relationship may have manifested because both measures reflect political attitudes, and therefore could be explained by students' consistent treatment of all political attitudes. Additionally, students who feel more politically obligated to their nation and community, may also believe they should justly receive the rights granted to members of the community in exchange for their obligations; this view of rights and obligations as "reciprocal" is certainly in keeping with communitarian ideals (see Bellah et al., 1996; Etzioni, 1993; Galston, 1998; Glendon, 1991; Sandel, 1996)⁶.

Our examination, while not offering a direct test of the relationship between civics curriculum content and political behavior, does indirectly highlight the impact of rights-focused civics curricula on students' political participation. While we understand that other sources of socialization, such as peer groups, parents, and culture may also impact students' levels of individualism and collectivism, our analysis still alludes to the negative consequences of students' endorsement of political rights and the overemphasis on these rights in civics courses. This study illustrates that despite the overwhelming focus of civics curricula on individualism and the exclusion of more collective concerns, our culture still socializes the desirability of both constructs and that students appear to hold and express both collectivist and individualist attitudes. However, we find that while endorsement of obligations increases students' intention

to vote and participate in civic and extracurricular activities, endorsement of rights negatively impacts participatory measures.

We cannot establish from this study whether civics curricula have contributed to the decline of citizen participation among young people in the United States. However, civics curricula represent a socialization mechanism that could contribute to students' sense of individualism or collectivism. Our investigation opens opportunities for future research to further explore the potentially negative consequences of collective and individual self-construals on political behaviors, conceptions of citizenship and, ultimately, on the collective good.

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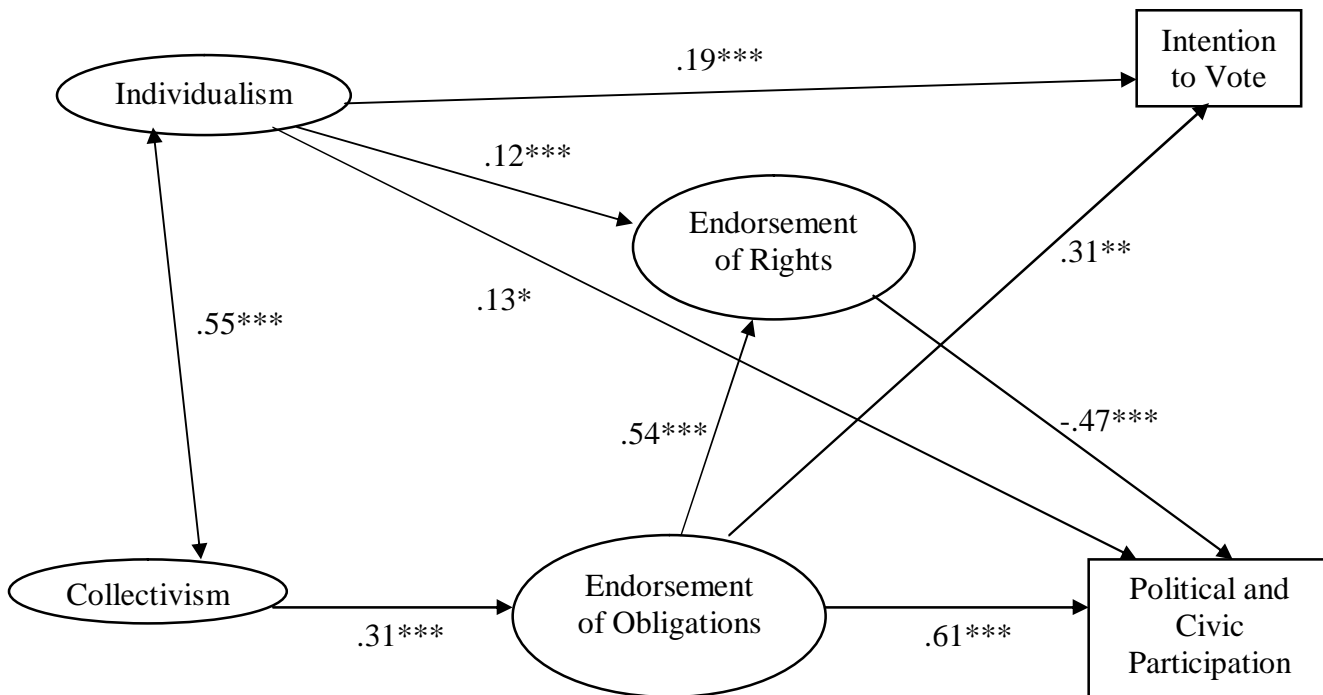
Table 1

Correlations Between Individualism, Collectivism, Rights, Obligations, and Civic Participation

Variable	Individualism	Collectivism	Rights	Obligations	Participation
Individualism		.395** n=545	.322** n=545	.367** n=545	.146** n=526
Collectivism			.375** n=549	.490** n=545	.086* n=528
Rights				.476** n=551	-.049 n=528
Obligations					.213** n=528

Notes. ** correlation differs from zero at $p < .001$, * correlation differs from zero at $p < .01$.

Figure 1: Final Structural Equation Model with Standardized Path Coefficients



Note. *** correlation differs from zero at $p < .001$, ** correlation differs from zero at $p < .005$, * correlation differs from zero at $p < .01$.

Footnotes

- 1 Of course, we acknowledge the myriad personal and situational contributions to the disengagement of youth from the civic and political sphere. Although Putnam (1995b, 2000) has found that “too little time” has only limited explanatory value in accounting for disengagement, according to a report released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (April 27, 2005), nearly a quarter of high school freshmen and nearly three quarters of high school seniors work at some point during the academic year. Moreover, nearly 25% of working freshmen averaged over 21 hours of work per week, and over 50% of working seniors averaged over 21 hours per week. Thus, employment, sports participation, and other activities might, in addition to personal attitudes about civic engagement, contribute to low rates of civic participation among young people.
- 2 233 students (43.4%) were from urban schools and 314 students (56.7%) were from suburban or exurban school settings.
- 3 Please contact the authors for copies of all survey items and scales used in this research.
- 4 There were some differences in mean levels of collectivism and individualism across ethnic groups. For collectivism measures, Whites ($M = 4.16$; $SD = 0.71$) and Asians ($M = 4.21$; $SD = 0.86$) showed greater collectivism than Blacks ($M = 3.87$; $SD = 0.82$), Hispanics ($M = 3.61$; $SD = 0.87$), and Native Americans ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 1.26$). In terms of individualism, Blacks ($M = 4.33$; $SD = 0.89$) showed somewhat higher levels than the other groups: Whites ($M = 4.06$; $SD = 0.78$) Asians ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.84$) Hispanics ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 0.71$) Native Americans ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 1.00$).
- 5 Although our final model includes a relationship between obligations and rights, we also tested other specifications of this relationship. When we specified a reciprocal relationship

between the two, the path from rights to obligations was non-significant (GFI = .99, AGFI = .95, RMSEA = .07, $\chi^2/df = 4.0$). Another acceptable model tested the path from rights to obligations, however, the goodness-of-fit statistics were not as strong as in the final model (GFI = .98, AGFI = .92, RMSEA = .07, $\chi^2/df = 6.4$).

- 6 Although rights may plausibly cause obligations, the reverse relationship has stronger support from the models discussed in our analysis (see Footnote 3).
- 7 Recent research in cross-cultural psychology has revealed that response bias (e.g., extreme responses, acquiescence response sets) are related both to individualism and collectivism and to ethnic group membership, even in such an individualistic society as the United States (e.g., Clarke, 2000; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Marín & Marín, 1989). Therefore, to test for the possibility of response bias, we used a common SEM modeling technique recommended as one of the best post hoc methods for dealing with multiple threats of this kind (see Podsakoff et al., 2003 for a review). An analysis was run in which we created three item parcels or aggregate measures for each of our latent constructs: individualism, collectivism, rights, and obligations. This created a total of twelve measured variables (4×3). Then we added a latent construct that represented the method variance. The twelve measured variables loaded onto both their theoretical construct (e.g., collectivism), and also onto the method factor. All the other paths were kept the same in the analysis. All paths from the method factor to the measured variables were significant, indicating probable response bias.

Nevertheless, although most path coefficients were slightly attenuated, all of the prior hypothesized paths retained their significance ($|\beta's| > .14$, $p's < .05$) with one exception, the path from individualism to rights ($\beta = .04$, $p = .60$). The fit of this model was acceptable, (GFI = .95, AGFI = .91, RMR = .03, RMSEA = .07, $\chi^2/df = 3.48$).