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Civic engagement and giving behaviors: The role of empathy and beliefs about poverty

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores different routes to civic involvement by identifying how a context-specific dimension of empathy and beliefs of autonomy and dependency might jointly predict different types of giving behaviors (i.e., monetary donations), which in turn should predict civic engagement. The sample consisted of 1,294 participants (656 females) between the ages of 18 to 64 ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.44$, $SD = 14.71$), randomly selected from seven different cities in Chile. Even after controlling for gender, age, and the socioeconomic status of participants, results mainly support the role of giving behaviors as drivers of actual engagement in civic life. Monetary donations, in turn, are predicted by higher levels of empathy toward poverty and autonomy-oriented beliefs. Implications of these findings are discussed in terms of agentic perspectives on civic participation.

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Why do some people push themselves beyond their own individual sphere and contribute to better societal conditions? Civic engagement, which reflects a broader interest in the common good and may be observed in multiple attitudes and actions (Amnå, 2012), is growing as a recognized ingredient of social cohesion (Kearns & Forrest, 2000). Numerous researchers have also emphasized that people who actively participate in civic life are more likely to show positive development across their lifespan (e.g., Flanagan & Faison, 2001). Despite its relevance to both societal and individual functioning, very little research has examined different routes to civic involvement by identifying behavioral antecedents and psychological mechanisms related to engagement in civic life.

The current literature considers prosocial behaviors (i.e., voluntary behaviors aimed at benefiting others, such as giving, helping, caring, or consoling; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Knafo-Noam, 2015) as a precursor of civic engagement (Luengo Kanacri et al., 2014). Giving behaviors refer to a specific behavioral demonstration of one's concern (Lindenberg, Fetchenhauer, Flache, & Buunk, 2006), in which help (mainly material help) is offered or donated to alleviate another's need. In particular, monetary donations represent a significant example of giving behaviors (Lindenberg et al., 2006) and are characterized by their target, their intensity and persistence, as well as the intended purpose for the donations (e.g., different goals exist for monetary donations in the street, donations to campaigns, and donations to institutions).

The current study explores whether giving behaviors (i.e., monetary donations) are potential drivers of civic engagement and, in turn, whether giving behaviors are predicted by affective and cognitive reactions to poverty (e.g., high levels of empathic feelings and beliefs promoting autonomy-oriented help). We examined these relations in a study conducted in Chile, an understudied South American context. This country seems particularly interesting, because although Chile leads the region's economy, it has one of the

lower levels of social cohesion in the world and one of the highest levels of inequality (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2013).

Civic engagement

Researchers have increasingly recognized civic engagement to be a multifaceted phenomenon that includes formal political activities and more general actions that are intended to benefit one's community (Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009). The concept itself was born in order to capture new forms of youth participation and reflects not only a conventional political institutional dimension, but a variety of other social activities in which individuals express their opinions and preferences as citizens (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Youniss et al., 2002), such as membership in community organizations and volunteering. Thus, although some authors argue that civic engagement involves primarily commitment to political activities, there is an increasing consensus that civic engagement includes a variety of behaviors carried out with the intent to improve the community (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Youniss et al., 2002), in public and nonprofit contexts.

Accordingly, typical indicators of a multifaceted operationalization of civic engagement are participation in associations or organizations, volunteering, electoral participation, and involvement in specific actions as an active citizen (e.g., "sign a petition to support a good cause"). Scholars have considered not only these behavioral aspects, but also attitudinal dimensions, such as the level of an individual's trust in institutions (Amnå, 2012; Bobek et al., 2009). Because countries that have experienced political instability have citizens who show less trust in political institutions (Klingemann, 1999), this vertical dimension of trust represents an indicator of the stability of the democratic system in which citizens are involved. Consequently, in the current study, civic engagement, as a multi-component construct, was comprised of representative actions of participation in the formal political sphere (i.e., intention to vote), the civil sphere (i.e., participation in associations or volunteering), as well as by the attitudinal dimension of civic engagement (i.e., trust in public institutions).

Giving behaviors and civic engagement

Our research focuses specifically on giving behaviors represented by monetary donations sent to recipients who explicitly exhibit the conditions of need or poverty (Ongley, Nola, & Malti, 2014). Monetary donation is a typical giving behavior for adults, which is anonymous, costly, and unreciprocated. In terms of the recipients, monetary donation in the street has an anonymous and random target, whereas donations to institutions or campaigns reflect an intentionally selected recipient (Ongley et al., 2014). However, in all cases the tendency is to act in favor of providing support for others' material needs, often on the basis of recipients' poverty or disability (Ongley et al., 2014; Verhaert & Van Den Poel, 2011).

A developmental approach tends to consider prosocial and giving behaviors during childhood and adolescence as precursors of a generalized concern for others in civic domains in adulthood (Luengo et al., 2014). Some scholars have suggested that behaviors involving cooperation, helping, sharing, and emotions such as empathy, are related to the development of concern for others on a more generalized level (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2015). Attachment theory suggests that people who feel secure in their close relations are more willing to invest time and effort in helping others in broader spheres (e.g., Gillath et al., 2005). Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that cooperative behaviors (i.e., involvement with charitable organizations) are associated with greater trust in institutions (Berigan & Irwin, 2011). Whereas monetary donations and volunteering have been examined as different manifestations of civic involvement, underscored by different predictors (e.g., Jones, 2006), research has not yet examined whether giving is a predictor of a multifaceted index of civic engagement.

Giving behaviors and civic engagement in Chile

Chilean society describes solidarity (i.e., defined as the ties in a society that bind people together; Fireman & Gamson, 1979), as one of its most important values. Indeed, Chile is ranked second among Latin American countries in inhabitants' beliefs about their compatriots' commitment to solidarity (Román, Ibarra, & Energici, 2014). In the Chilean context, prosocial and helping behaviors arise especially in reaction to natural disasters, like earthquakes, which are comparatively frequent. Monetary donations in Chile are very common in everyday life through informal non-structured donations (e.g., spare change at the supermarket or to mendicants on the street), as well as through structured fundraising from organizations and institutions of various categories. As reported in the Latinobarómetro survey (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2013), Chileans consider all types of donations socially desirable. Monetary donations are oddly the least valued and yet the most frequent (Román et al., 2014), with 92.2% of inhabitants declaring that they have donated money in different ways and to different institutions (Fundación Trascender, 2013).

In regard to spheres of civic engagement, Chileans, like people from most Latin American countries, report little trust in their political institutions (66.6% of the population reported having low or no trust in the justice department, 76.9% in the congress and 64.9% in the government; Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2013). Thus, it is not surprising that the observed decline in Chilean voter turnout has been stronger than in other democracies of the world (Corvalán & Cox, 2011). The data from the electoral registry in Chile indicate that between 1988 and 2013, the proportion of voter turnout decreased from 89% to 58% in 2009, and declined further in 2013 to 49.3%. In regard to other civic actions, involvement in associations as volunteers is the least common, with a participation rate of only 6% of the population (Fundación Trascender, 2013).

In spite of this, according to the new Global Competitiveness Index, a combination of 12 factors of competitiveness,¹ Chile was ranked the 35th most competitive country in the world and the first in Latin America (World Economic Forum, 2015–2016). Chile has assumed more and more regional leadership, owing to its stable democracy, high quality of life, and comparatively low poverty rates (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). However, Chile has one of the most segregated educational systems of the world, resulting in significantly unequal education opportunities (OECD, 2009). In sum, Chileans' low rates of civic engagement seem to point in the direction of "little effort and minor impact," which is worrisome for a nation that is still far from being cohesive, even though it leads the region's economy.

The role of empathy and beliefs promoting autonomy or dependency on giving behaviors and civic engagement

Several researchers have highlighted the influences of empathy (concern for others based on comprehension of their emotional state; Batson, 1990) and beliefs about the importance of contributing to the common good on prosocial behaviors and civic actions (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Luengo Kanacri et al., 2014). Empirical research shows that empathetic individuals are more prone to engage in prosocial behaviors, ranging from formal help through institutions to more informal or spontaneous help to others (e.g., Einolf, 2008; see Eisenberg et al., 2015). For example, the tendency to feel concern for others based on comprehension of their emotional states has been associated with volunteering, as a specific form of civic engagement (e.g., Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Regarding giving behaviors, recent studies have highlighted a positive relation between empathy and donations (e.g., Einolf, 2008; Verhaert & Van Den Poel, 2011). However, scholars infrequently consider specific targets of empathy, such as empathy toward impoverished people. Batson, Fultz, Schoenrade, and Paduano (1987), who experimented on empathy toward a homeless man, called attention to the need to focus research efforts on clarifying the role of empathy for altruism toward stigmatized groups. More empirical support is needed to elucidate the specific role that empathic feelings toward people

in poverty may have in explaining levels of prosocial involvement with others, such as monetary donations and civic engagement.

In regard to the role of personal beliefs, the literature distinguishes between two types of beliefs associated with helping behaviors, dependency-oriented and autonomy-oriented. The former reflects a helper's belief that recipients are not able to solve their problems (i.e. poverty) by themselves. The latter describes a helper's belief in the value of offering instrumental assistance to improve recipients' situations to make them autonomously able to help themselves (Nadler, 2002; Schroeder & Graziano, 2015). Those who hold beliefs promoting autonomy should support a more equal society in which social groups are agents of their own development and sufficiently independent to obtain what they need on their own. Those who adhere to beliefs promoting dependency are likely to focus on maintaining the prevailing social hierarchy, which reflects the dominance of high status (helpers or donors) over low status groups (recipients of donations; Nadler, 2002).

The current study

The current study was designed to examine how a context-specific dimension of empathy (empathy toward the poor) and beliefs promoting autonomy (i.e., views about people's capacity to solve their own situation of poverty) and dependency (i.e., views about people's lack of competence to cope with their vulnerable situation), might jointly predispose or counteract people's giving behaviors (i.e., monetary donations), which in turn should favor their civic engagement. This study can be considered novel in various aspects. While prior research has isolated the role of empathy, beliefs, or giving behaviors as predictors of civic engagement, this is the first study that simultaneously considers them all. It should offer a picture regarding how psychological mechanisms (i.e., empathy and beliefs) can support behavioral drivers (i.e., monetary donations), which in turn can be associated with civic engagement. Additionally, other studies have considered indicators of civic engagement one by one, rather than as a broad multi-component latent model, in which three representative dimensions of civic involvement are considered.

Thus, based on the literature stressing the multicomponent nature of civic engagement (e.g., Amnå, 2012; Bobek et al., 2009), we first hypothesized the multidimensionality of a scale tapping into this phenomenon. Then, we posited a model in which empathy, beliefs promoting autonomy and beliefs promoting dependency predict civic engagement, expecting significant paths of relations among variables. In accordance with a vast body of literature that considers empathy as a psychological root of giving behaviors (see Eisenberg et al., 2015), we assigned primacy to empathy as a predictive factor of monetary donations. Moreover, because in developing countries poverty is often viewed as a transitory state, and any help can be considered the first phase of a long-term way for reaching financial autonomy (Baulch & Hoddinott, 2000), we will explore whether beliefs promoting autonomy are associated with monetary donations. In addition, we argue that beliefs of autonomy will also increase civic engagement because they are aimed at promoting the independence and self-sufficiency of the less fortunate, having equity among human beings as the main goal of any civic and social action. However, given that the empirical support for the relation among beliefs promoting dependency and civic engagement is very limited, we will just explore this association. In doing so, we are inclined to think that people with high adherence to beliefs of dependency may have less interest in being involved as active citizens (volunteering, voting, having trust in political institutions) because their tendency is to maintain the status quo of the societal system (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Finally, since several studies assign a prominent role to contextual (socioeconomic status; SES) and sociodemographic conditions (i.e., gender and age) in the enactment of actions of civic involvement and monetary donations (e.g., Castillo, Leal, Madero, & Miranda, 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), we will consider them as covariates. In order to test if the posited model holds, above and beyond the role of gender, SES, and age, we will include them as affecting all of the variables in the model. In addition, as a secondary goal, in the final model we will assess the plausible mediational role of giving behaviors (i.e., monetary donations)

in linking empathy and beliefs of autonomy or dependency to civic engagement. Finally, even if there are theoretical reasons to expect the pattern of relations among variables as explained above, we cannot exclude the plausibility of the reverse model. In particular, because some studies have shown that trust in institutions can be considered a predictor of monetary donations at institutions (e.g., Aknin, Dunn, Sandstrom, & Norton, 2013), we will assess an alternative model in which civic engagement predicts giving behaviors.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 1,294 participants (638 males; 656 females) between 18 and 64 years old ($M_{\text{females age}} = 38.94$, $SD = 13.78$; $M_{\text{males age}} = 38.05$, $SD = 13.11$), from seven different cities in Chile: Santiago (65%), Valparaíso and Viña del Mar (15%), Concepción and Talcahuano (15%), and Temuco and Antofagasta (9%). These cities were selected in accordance with the distribution of Chile's population. The Chilean population in our sample was 5.3 million, according to INECELADE's projected population for 2012. For the data collection, stratified randomization sampling by objective socioeconomic status in three stages (block, house, and individuals), in each city, improved the population representativeness of the study. Our sample's socioeconomic distribution matched the national distribution: 9.4% corresponded to individuals from the upper-class, 42.5% from the middle-class, and 48.2% from the lower-class. Sampling error is estimated at $\pm 2.7\%$, considering maximum variance and a 95% confidence level. The current study uses data from a cross-sectional survey designed mainly to address attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to solidarity and social responsibility.

Procedures

A Kish selection table² indicated one person within the selected house as a potential participant. Trained researchers visited homes and detailed the main aims and features of the study to the selected participants. Interviews with each participant lasted 1.5 to 2 hours. Prior to the interview, participants indicated their agreement and filled out a letter of informed consent. When the selected subject was not present during the visit, the researcher scheduled another appointment, and if participants declined to participate in the study, a replacement was selected using a random replacement sample.

Measures

Empathy towards poverty

Empathy was measured to capture specific emotional and cognitive empathic experience of being moved by the suffering of the economically disadvantaged (Castillo et al., 2012). Empathy toward poverty was determined to be a latent variable, encompassing four items. Participants were asked to rate (1 = *strongly disagree*, to 5 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they felt worried about the situation of less-advantaged people ("I feel a lot of concern for the poor, when I think how much they suffer") and could put themselves within the condition of other people who are in need ("I try to see things the poor experience from their perspective"; $\alpha = .83$).

Beliefs promoting autonomy or dependency

Beliefs promoting autonomy or dependency were latent variables assessed using a set of four items (two for each variable). These items asked participants the degree to which they agreed with actions that promoted an autonomous and self-directed way to overcome poverty ("Giving the people in need tools,

which they can use to progress by themselves”; “Help the people in need so that they can reconstruct their lives”) and with actions that promoted dependency by giving a complete solution to the problem of poverty without involving the poor themselves (“Solve all the problems of the people in need”; “Giving them a full solution in order to remove them from their current situation”). Pearson’s correlation coefficient between the two items was respectively $r = .56, p < .00$ for beliefs promoting autonomy; and $r = .58, p < .00$ for beliefs promoting dependency.

Monetary donation

A reduced version of the Money Donation Scale (González, Cortés, Manzi, Lay, & Herrada, 2009), was used, consisting of the three items with the best psychometric properties. Monetary donations were measured as a latent variable covering these three different varieties of donations (i.e., on the street, to campaigns, and to institutions/organizations) as distinct indicators of a common dimension. Participants answered the frequency at which they actually make each kind of donation (ranging from 1 = *never*, to 5 = *always*; $\alpha = .61$).

Civic engagement

Civic engagement was determined to be a second-order latent variable encompassing three representative dimensions: participation in associations or volunteering organizations; electoral participation; and individual’s trust in institutions (Amnå, 2012; Bobek et al., 2009; Lerner, 2004). In particular, a higher general factor of civic engagement was represented by three first-order factors: Associationism (two binary items of volunteering in institutions, (1 = *Yes*, 2 = *No*; $r = .26, p < .00$); voting intention (three items of voting intentions in municipal, presidential, and legislator elections; 1 = *I am going to vote*, 2 = *I am still undecided*, 3 = *I am not going to vote*; $\alpha = .98$); and trust in public institutions (three items of trust regarding the government, the senate, and the courts of justice; (1 = *None*, to 5 = *A lot*; $\alpha = .77$).

Control variables

Socioeconomic status

SES was assessed using a prototypical method employed in Chile. Chile usually classifies its population with the GSE (socioeconomic group) indicator, based on the British demographic system NRS (National Readership Survey, 1957) for social grade classification. The GSE is calculated according to income, place of residence, and habits, resulting in eight groups: A, B, C1, C2, C3, D, E and F; in which the ABC1 groups together represent the middle class, while the remainder is the lower class; the upper class, which corresponds to a tiny percentage of the population, is not included in this classification scheme. In this research, participants were assigned to one group based on the objective criteria of GSE indicators (INE, 2011), where lower rates indicated higher socioeconomic status (1 = ABC1 group; 2 = C2 group; 3 = C3 group; 4 = C4 group; and 5 = D, E and F groups).

Gender and Age

Gender was coded as male = 1 and female = 2. *Age* was used as a continuous variable.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Observed means and standard deviations of all variables of the study are reported in Table 1, separately for males and females. *T*-statistics found significant sex differences in empathy toward poverty, donations in campaigns, donations to institutions, and associationism, favoring women



Table 1. Means comparisons by gender, age, and SES for all variables included in the study.

	Mean (SD)			Mean (SD)			Mean (SD)			
	Males		Females	Younger (<age 37)		Older (>age 37)	Low SES		High SES	t
		t								
Empathy-P	3.57 (1.07)		3.72 (1.05)	-2.58*	3.49 (1.05)	3.80 (1.05)	-5.28**	3.75 (1.08)	3.39 (0.97)	5.52**
B. P. Autonomy	4.44 (0.86)		4.50 (0.83)	-1.36	4.42 (0.85)	4.42 (0.84)	-1.88	4.51 (0.83)	4.36 (0.87)	2.81*
B. P. Dependency	3.42 (1.27)		3.55 (1.27)	-1.85	3.44 (1.23)	3.53 (1.31)	-1.20	3.61 (1.27)	3.15 (1.22)	5.79**
Trust in Inst.	1.83 (0.88)		1.91 (0.87)	-1.52	1.84 (0.83)	1.90 (0.91)	-1.22	1.77 (0.85)	2.13 (0.88)	-6.60**
Donation in Street	2.78 (1.27)		2.89 (1.28)	-1.67	2.89 (1.18)	2.78 (1.33)	1.64	2.82 (1.28)	2.87 (1.19)	-0.57
Donation in Camp.	3.01 (1.45)		3.30 (1.42)	-3.63**	3.00 (1.42)	3.31 (1.45)	-3.88**	3.11 (1.47)	3.29 (1.38)	-2.10*
Donation to Inst.	2.78 (1.43)		2.98 (1.40)	-2.62**	2.79 (1.33)	2.98 (1.49)	-2.42*	2.82 (1.46)	3.05 (1.29)	-2.54*
Voting Int. Mun.	2.09 (0.95)		2.22 (0.90)	-2.73**	1.92 (0.93)	2.37 (0.87)	-8.99**	2.08 (0.94)	2.33 (0.85)	-4.47**
Voting Int. Pres.	2.31 (0.89)		2.38 (0.84)	-1.39	2.13 (0.91)	2.55 (0.76)	-9.04**	2.26 (0.90)	2.57 (0.71)	-5.88**
Voting Int. Leg.	2.57 (0.49)		2.53 (0.49)	1.14	2.28 (0.45)	2.81 (0.38)	-23.04**	2.54 (0.49)	2.58 (0.49)	-1.19
Associationism	1.82 (0.38)		1.74 (0.43)	3.35**	1.16 (0.36)	1.27 (0.44)	-5.10**	1.16 (0.37)	1.35 (0.48)	-7.50**
Volunteering	1.85 (0.35)		1.83 (0.37)	-0.77	1.18 (0.38)	1.13 (0.34)	2.38*	1.13 (0.33)	1.22 (0.41)	-4.11**

Note. Empathy-P = Empathy toward Poverty; B. P. Autonomy = Beliefs Promoting Autonomy; B. P. Dependency = Beliefs Promoting Dependency; Trust in Inst. = Trust in Institutions; Donation in Camp. = Donations in Campaigns; Donation to Inst. = Donations to Institutions; Voting Int. Mun. = Intention of Municipal Vote; Voting Int. Pres. = Intention of Presidential Vote; Voting Int. Leg. = Intention of Legislative Vote.

p* < .05; *p* < .01.

in all of these cases (Table 1). In addition, in order to offer a clearer picture regarding the role of the other covariates on the variables of the model, Table 1 also includes group comparisons for age [groups divided by the median (37 years old) into older and younger groups] and for SES [ABC1 groups (for high SES) and the other groups (for low SES)]. Zero-order correlations among all the observed variables of the study are presented in Table 2.

Analytic strategy

Initially, to examine the structure of the civic engagement construct and account for the binary nature of its items, we performed confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) with weighted least square variance matrix (WLSVM) estimator. Two models were tested: a one-factor model and a model with civic engagement as a second-order latent variable encompassing three dimensions: participation in youth associations or volunteering organizations; electoral participation; and individual's trust in institutions. To evaluate the fit of the model to the data, we used the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with 90% confidence intervals (90% CI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). The RMSEA is an absolute index of fit with values under 0.05 indicating a close fit to the data. For the CFI and TLI, fit index values should be greater than 0.90 to be considered acceptable.

Then, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test different hypothesized models (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The evaluation of goodness of fit was based on the same indices mentioned above. We measured civic engagement, monetary donations, empathy toward poverty, and beliefs of autonomy or dependency at the latent level (as latent factors loaded by different indicators as detailed in the measures section) and covariates at the observed level. We regressed control variables on all constructs following standard procedures (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Models began with the seven posited constructs and progressively included the three control variables. In particular, we tested (a) an uncontrolled model; (b) a model controlling for gender; (c) a model controlling for gender and age; and (d) a model controlling for gender, age and SES. Only results of model (a) and (d) were depicted in the figures (1 and 2 respectively). Finally, to test indirect effects, we used the asymmetric confidence interval method (95% CI; Mackinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007).

Confirmatory factor analysis

The CFAs indicated that a second-order factor model (with three first-order factors) provided a better fit to the civic engagement scale, $\chi^2(17) = 56.849$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .04 (90% CI = .031–.055); CFI = .99; TLI = .99; than a one-factor model, $\chi^2(20) = 679.457$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .16 (90% CI = .149–.170); CFI = .92; TLI = .89. We decided to consider the model with a second-order factor the one that best represented civic engagement as a multidimensional construct.

Structural equation modeling

The first model (a), uncontrolled, showed an adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(139) = 292.46$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .03 (90% CI = .025–.034); CFI = .98; TLI = .99. Figure 1 shows parameters estimated for the different variables included in this model. The model explains 26% of the variance of civic engagement. Indirect effects of both—empathy toward poverty and beliefs of autonomy—to civic engagement through monetary donations were found ($\beta = .056$; $z = 4.39$; 95% CI = [.006, .064]; $\beta = .014$; $z = 8.09$; 95% CI = [.012, .079], respectively).

The second model (b) included gender as a control variable. The model fit was also satisfactory, $\chi^2(153) = 251.88$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .03 (90% CI = .014–.0446); CFI = .99; TLI = .99, explaining 23% of the variability of civic engagement. Even if gender has a positive significant impact on civic engagement, empathy toward poverty, beliefs of dependency, and donations to campaigns and

Table 2. Correlations among all variables included in the study.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Gender	–													
SES	–.001	–												
Empathy-P	.075**	–.141**	–											
B.P. Autonomy	.040	–.065*	.154**	–										
B.P. Dependency	.050	–.190**	.342**	.341**	–									
Trust in Inst.	.042	.184**	.035	.067*	.024	–								
Donation in Street	.051	.024	.208**	.109**	.106**	–.027	–							
Donation in Camp.	.103**	.074**	.117**	.144**	.051	.074**	.158**	–						
Donation to Inst.	.071*	.094**	.141**	.094**	.096**	.065*	.185**	.402**	–					
Voting Int. Mun.	.009	.099**	.004	–.012	.052	.002	–.033	.001	.062*	–				
Voting Int. Pres.	–.007	.093**	.013	–.017	.049	.009	–.016	.003	.074**	.927**	–			
Voting Int. Leg.	–.002	.083**	–.005	–.016	.047	–.009	–.040	–.003	.059*	.994**	.926**	–		
Associationism	.094**	.235**	.049	.067*	–.035	.085**	.030	.178**	.196**	.057*	.034	.053	–	
Volunteering	.026	.132**	.023	–.012	.008	.103**	.024	.085**	.107**	.039	.044	.033	.260**	–

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status; Empathy-P = Empathy toward Poverty; B.P. Autonomy = Beliefs Promoting Autonomy; B.P. Dependency = Beliefs Promoting Dependency; Trust in Inst. = Trust in Institutions; Donation in Camp. = Donations in Campaigns; Donation to Inst. = Donations to Institutions; Voting Int. Mun. = Intention of Municipal Vote; Voting Int. Pres. = Intention of Presidential Vote; Voting Int. Leg. = Intention of Legislative Vote.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

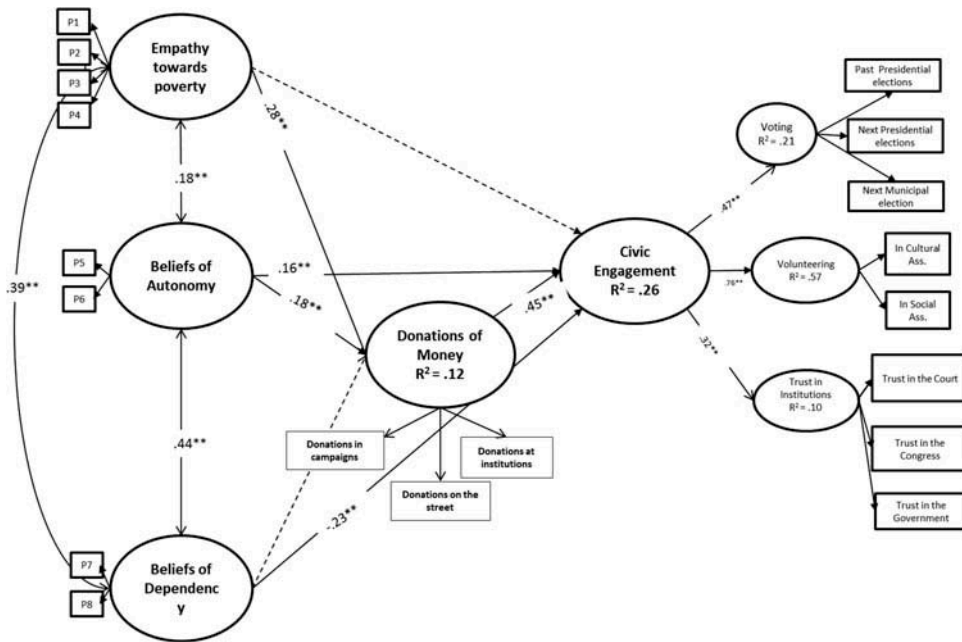


Figure 1. SEM of civic engagement predicted by beliefs and empathy and mediated by solidary behaviors with no control variables.

Note. Results are standardized coefficients. All paths were estimated; only significant paths were shown. The parameters of the measurement model not depicted in the figure are all significant, ranging from .32 to .80. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

institutions, the relations between variables included in the model did not suffer significant changes, compared with the prior uncontrolled model. Thus, the hypothesized relations among variables exist above and beyond the effects of gender. Also in this model, indirect effects were significant, in which empathy toward poverty ($\beta = .047$; $z = 5.99$; 95% CI = [.017, .056]) and beliefs of autonomy ($\beta = .036$; $z = 4.48$; 95% CI = [.012, .057]) contribute to civic engagement via monetary donations.

The third model (c) added age as a control variable. Data fit to the model satisfactorily: $\chi^2(161) = 371.88$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .04 (90% CI = .021–.046); CFI = .95; TLI = .94. When controlling for gender and age, the relation between predictors and civic engagement did not substantially change. As a covariate, age had a significant effect on civic engagement ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$) with older participants tending to engage more in civic activities. The total proportion of variance of civic engagement explained by this model (33%) was higher than the one explained by the previous models. Indirect effects were significant, and empathy toward poverty ($\beta = .037$; $z = 5.97$; 95% CI = [.000, .026]) and beliefs of autonomy ($\beta = .016$; $z = 4.49$; 95% CI = [.001, .031]) contribute to civic engagement via monetary donations.

Finally, the fourth model (d) (see Figure 2 and related Table 3) added SES as a control variable. The model fit well, $\chi^2(180) = 524.87$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .03 (90% CI = .035–.042); CFI = .95; TLI = .94. When controlling for gender, age, and SES (see Table 3), the relation between the independent variables and civic engagement changed, even if beliefs of autonomy still had a significant positive effect on civic engagement. In this model, instead, the negative direct effect of beliefs of dependency on civic engagement disappeared. SES had a significant effect on civic engagement ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < .001$). The model explained 55% of civic engagement's variability, significantly higher than all prior models. Beliefs promoting autonomy and empathy toward poverty, contributed indirectly to civic engagement in a significant way via monetary donations ($\beta = .027$; 95% CI = [.008–.065]; $\beta = .031$; 95% CI = [.012–.065] respectively).

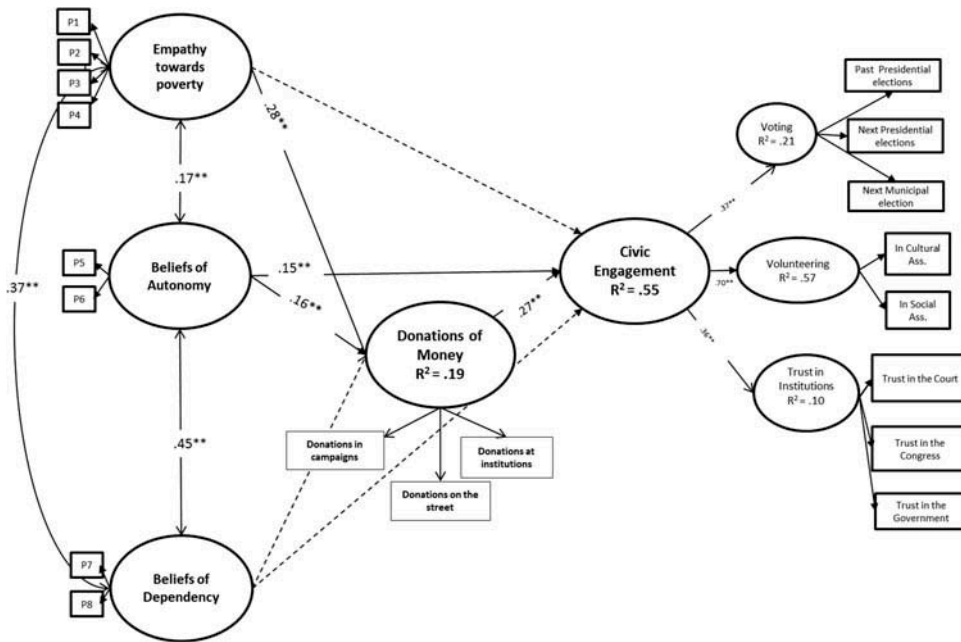


Figure 2. SEM of civic engagement predicted by beliefs and empathy and mediated by solidary behaviors controlling for SES, age, and gender. *Note.* Results are standardized coefficients. All paths were estimated; only significant ones were shown. The parameters of the measurement model not depicted in the figure are all significant, ranging from 0.36 to 0.79. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Standardized effects of control variables on all variables included in the final SEM model (d).

	Gender		Age		SES	
	β	p -value	β	p -value	β	p -value
Civic Engagement	.11	.02	.12	< .01	-.57	< .01
Empathy-P	.08	.01	.12	< .01	.14	< .01
B. P. Autonomy	.05	.15	.03	.36	.05	.11
B. P. Dependency	.05	.08	-.01	.85	.21	< .01
Monetary Donations	.12	< .01	.09	.01	-.22	< .01

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status; Empathy-P = Empathy toward Poverty; B.P. Autonomy = Beliefs Promoting Autonomy; B.P. Dependency = Beliefs Promoting Dependency. Results are standardized coefficients.

Finally, we assessed an alternative reversed model in which, controlling for covariates, civic engagement predicts monetary donations while linking the relation among empathy and beliefs to monetary donations. Fit indexes worsened, $\chi^2(180) = 681.734$, $p < .01$; RMSEA = .05 (90% CI = .042–.049); CFI = .93; TLI = .91. In addition, compared with the hypothesized model, the weight of the relations (β coefficients) were weaker, and the proportion of explained variance of the dependent variable (i.e., monetary donations) was lower ($R^2 = .25$).

Discussion

Global inequality and poverty are still remarkable problems and, as stressed by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the major challenge of human development for the next two decades will be to link greater governmental accountability with social and individual responsibility, capacities, and participation to address these issues (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). As a growing body of literature is emphasizing, a democracy's health depends

primarily on the engaged and proactive participation of its citizens (Youniss et al., 2002). Despite its applicability, psychology has only recently started to pay attention to personal factors and mechanisms that may predict individual engagement in civic domains. In this vein, with an attempt to identify targets for future interventions, the current study explored whether giving behaviors (i.e., monetary donations) could play a role as drivers of civic engagement and, in turn, may be associated with high levels of empathic feelings and beliefs promoting autonomy towards poverty.

A significant covariation among affective (empathy toward poverty) and cognitive (beliefs promoting autonomy or dependency) correlates and civic engagement was found. Current findings mainly stress the role of giving behaviors as precursors of civic commitment, since they may behaviorally predispose people not only to think or to feel in favor of others, but to act concretely upon those feelings and beliefs. People who care about others in need are probably those who are more prone to care about the common good in their daily life. In particular, from current results, the more empathy people felt with impoverished people, the more they exhibited higher levels of monetary donations; and the more they held beliefs assigning importance to facilitating the autonomy of people in need, the more they donated money and engaged in civic life. In contrast, the more individuals assign relevance to beliefs of dependency (i.e., in which the solutions for people who are in need have to come from resources or strategies external to the person), the less they exhibited civic engagement.

Within an agentic perspective, individuals have the capability to exert influence over their own functioning and the course of events through their own actions (Bandura, 1997). Based on the association of beliefs promoting autonomy with civic engagement, we speculate that people who do not have an agentic vision of human development will be less involved with society and the common good, and it is possible that this lack of engagement reflects a lack of confidence in their (and others') abilities to change their communities. Moreover, no association between beliefs of dependency and monetary donations was found. Hence, above the covariation with beliefs promoting autonomy and with empathic feelings, adhering to beliefs promoting dependency does not affect people's tendency to help others materially, since the role of these beliefs is neither strong enough to facilitate nor to interrupt giving behaviors.

In accordance with our predictions, and based on substantial literature that argues that empathy is a psychological root of prosocial and giving behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2015), empathy emerged as the most relevant antecedent of monetary donations (e.g., Einhorn, 2008), even if it was not directly related to civic engagement. However, the indirect effect from empathy toward poverty to civic engagement, even if weak, is not negligible. Still, it is plausible to reason that the empathic feeling of compassion toward people in need (i.e., empathy toward poverty), may not be sufficient to engage people actively in civic life (i.e., trusting in institutions, being involved in associations for the common good, and voting at different political elections). Cultural features may partially explain this result because, in a society marked by class segregation such as Chile, empathic responding may have the potential to reinforce the status differences between helpers and recipients of help (i.e., people in situation of poverty). In this vein, future studies should incorporate an intergroup perspective (in-group vs. out-group) when studying these issues (e.g., Sturmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005).

We may also reason that, in contrast to prior research in which empathy was positively related to some specific dimensions of civic engagement (e.g., volunteering; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), in conceiving civic engagement as a multifaceted phenomenon, we have tried to integrate the social-civic domain (volunteering and trust in institutions) with the political domain (voting). Using longitudinal designs, future studies will have the important goal of elucidating mediational and moderated mechanisms responsible for linking empathy to civic engagement as an integrative construct.

Moreover, our findings stress the important part played by beliefs promoting autonomy on both giving behaviors and civic engagement. People who view human beings as equally equipped with the

potential to solve different situations of material vulnerability are more disposed to be engaged civically (i.e., significant direct effect) and also via their monetary donations (i.e., significant indirect effect). These findings assign a relevant role to a vision of poverty as a transitory state in which citizens and democracies can provide instruments and conditions to promote autonomous progress by low status groups to create a more symmetric society.

In assessing an alternative model (i.e., in which civic engagement was an antecedent of giving behaviors), our results supported a certain directionality among variables, as proposed in the hypothesized model. However, as Cole and Maxwell (2003) pointed out, with only one cross-sectional assessment, it is extremely difficult to provide insight into the direction of and reciprocal influences between a set of variables, and mediational hypotheses are more difficult to support. Only via longitudinal designs will it be feasible to test if these trends are sustained.

Interesting patterns emerged when we controlled for some sociodemographic conditions of the participants. In particular, when we controlled for SES, the negative effect of dependency beliefs on civic engagement disappeared. The strong effect of SES on civic engagement likely “encapsulates” systemic relations between social classes; that is, donations are likely elicited from donors who are in the best conditions to give money and to benefit people who are in need. The more intuitive thought would be that high SES individuals might be more willing to offer dependency-oriented help, in order to maintain the prevailing social hierarchy as suggested by social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). However, in Chile, the effect of justification of inequity can be even stronger among low-status groups (Centro de Estudios de Conflicto y Cohesion Social, 2015), who may tend to embrace the idea that every citizen gets what he/she deserves, a finding that is consistent with both the beliefs in a just world theory (Lerner, 1980) and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In this way, it might be possible to think that those with a low-status position perceive that the ones who hold an even lower position in the social spectrum do not deserve autonomy-oriented help. It is further plausible that by offering dependency-oriented help to poor people, low-status individuals make sure that they themselves will not represent the most disadvantaged and stigmatized group, in order to maintain a more positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Future research is necessary, however, to disentangle the potential moderation effect of SES on the hypothesized relations among variables of our model.

We are aware of several limitations of the current study. Our cross-sectional data are limited, and more longitudinal data are fundamental for future steps related to the study of mediational mechanisms. Moreover, future research should rely on multiple methods and informants across situations to minimize bias due to self-report. In addition, we acknowledge that some of our measures could be improved. Specifically, it might be that our dependency-oriented help was framed in a positive and desirable way; thus, in general, participants showed high scores in this measure, not necessarily because they wanted to offer dependency-oriented help, but because of social desirability (i.e., most citizens would feel pressured to agree with the fact that people in need should receive help).

Even with these limitations, we do not doubt the useful implications of these results, and we feel that the study presents various strengths. The originality of the current work resides mainly in the simultaneous consideration of monetary donations, affective and cognitive correlates, and civic engagement. The fact that it considers variables as latent constructs is another noteworthy strength of the study, as this offers a deeper comprehension and measurement of psychosocial phenomena. Moreover, the sample size and its representativeness added robustness to the findings in terms of their generalizability.

Implications for educational policies, coming from the current study, are allied with the prominent role of giving behaviors as behavioral drivers and precursors of civic participation. Since empathy has been identified as one relevant psychological root of giving behavior, and beliefs are potentially flexible and changeable psychological structures, future interventions to foster civic

engagement could also be designed to strengthen the empathic responses to poverty and support for autonomy-oriented help, leading people to take civic action.

Notes

1. Institutions, technological progress, macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, financial market sophistication, market size, business, sophistication, and innovation.
2. A Kish table (McBurney, 1988) ensures a random selection of the informant. Household residents of that home between 18 and 64 years old provided information about some characteristics and were assigned a code according to factors defined in the table, so that that code defines who corresponds to the interview.

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