

## When non-activists care: group efficacy mediates the effect of social identification and perceived instability on the legitimacy of collective action

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, multiple social movements have emerged around the world. In addition, public surveys indicate the highest recorded levels of support for protest. In this context of acceptance of collective action, we examine the role of non-activists in the legitimacy of social movements, as this ‘passive’ support can contribute to social change. Given that antecedents of legitimacy have been neglected in the literature, we carried out a survey (N = 605) among a general sample of the population in Chile to shed light on this issue. We found that social identification with movements and perceived instability predicted the perceived legitimacy of protests by social movements, and that both variables had only indirect effects, through group efficacy. This suggests that perceiving social movements as able to achieve success can lead non-activists to perceive their actions as legitimate, highlighting the importance to movements of being seen to be effective.

In 2006, a number of Chilean secondary school students came on to the streets to express their discontent with the education system. By spreading street demonstrations and occupying their schools in the subsequent months, this movement was the largest since the reinstatement of democracy in 1990. One year later, casual workers in the mining sector staged the longest labour strike in Chile in the post-transition period, protesting about their unequal working conditions compared to permanent staff. These movements were critical as they re-politicized relevant social issues and promoted these topics in the public domain (see Donoso, 2013). Further, the nationwide collective action taken by these two movements launched a protest wave in the country that is still ongoing. Particularly in 2011, there was a proliferation of social movements initially associated with undergraduate students' demands in terms of the quality of public education and its segregating effects. In fact, the student social movement was the spring-board for other recent social movements and causes (e.g., environmental campaigns), and it received very high public approval, reaching up to 89% in the wider population in 2012 (Radio Uchile, 2012). In sum, in the last decade Chilean society has exhibited a cultural change in the perception of political behaviour that has contributed to the development of social identities (see González, Gerber, & Carvacho, 2016); and the country is continuing to experience political transformation through demonstrations and social protests (PNUD, 2015), attracting high rates of support and validation (Latinobarómetro, 2015) that may be an important element of social change. In this

paper we consider the psychological bases of the public legitimacy of social movements. To address this question, we examine the predictive power of social identification, beliefs about system instability, and group efficacy on the legitimacy of collective action among a general population sample that do not take part in collective action.

### **Support for collective action and social movements from non-activists**

Most previous research on collective action focuses on the study of participants and activists, and the antecedents of participation (vs. non-activists, see McAdam, 1986; Oegema & Klandermans, 1994; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). However, recently scholars have shown an increasing interest in the role of individuals that do not necessarily experience the disadvantage themselves but can be significant actors in the social struggle (Stewart et al., 2016; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011), by showing a *solidarity-based collective action* (Saab, Tausch, Spears, & Cheung, 2015). Following this trend, in this paper we focus on non-activists, defined as members of the public who do not directly participate in collective action but, importantly, who are affected by the same social issues and by the social changes that social movements achieve. Further, such non-activists also might affect the course of social movements, contributing to social change (for instance, voting for a political party, or in a referendum; see Abrams & Grant, 2012; Byman, Chalk, Hoffman, Rosenau, & Brannan, 2001; Grant, Bennett & Abrams,

2017; Puga, 2015). Thus, we see non-activists as a relevant group when it comes to the study of the legitimacy of collective action. Therefore, our aim is to focus on the antecedents of the legitimacy of collective action by those societal actors who do not directly take part in the protests.

One of the aims of social movements is to convert sympathizers into activists. This process can involve different stages (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; see also van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2007) and numbers of participants also potentially decrease throughout these stages (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). Although more supporters create a larger potential pool of activists, this may depend on other factors (Louis, Taylor, & Neil, 2004). Supportive environments, in which action is seen as legitimate, may make it more likely for sympathizers to engage in action; however, social movements usually fail to convert most sympathizers into active participants (see Oegema & Klandermans, 1994). But even if eliciting activism is not feasible, at *least* securing support from the general public can be a valuable strategy.

We argue that non-activists can be affected by what happens in the streets (see Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 2004; Moscovici, 1985; Moscovici & Lage, 1976; Moskowitz, 1996) and, in turn, they might affect the issue too (see Saab et al., 2015). That is, (minority) collective action can stimulate other people to take sides and it can also impact on their views and values. In turn, non-activist support might counteract opponents' efforts to question the legitimacy of protest.

## **The legitimacy of social protest**

Traditionally, following social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978) the literature has focused on legitimacy as a feature of the status relationship between groups (defined as fairness appraisals regarding ingroup status compared to other groups; for a further distinction see Spears, Greenwood, de Lemus, & Sweetman, 2010). In the same tradition, illegitimacy (particularly in the form of ‘injustice’) has also been examined as a predictor of collective action (e.g., van Zomeren, et al., 2008; van Zomeren & Klandermans, 2011). According to SIT, if status differences between groups are perceived as legitimate, collective action aimed at ending disadvantage is less likely and, further, individuals will abstain from making comparisons between groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; cf. Jiménez-Moya, de Lemus, Rodríguez-Bailón, & Spears, 2012); but when the disadvantaged group perceive status differences as illegitimate or a certain level of ‘injustice’, group members will be more willing to support collective action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tausch et al., 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2004).

In addition, and following the elaborated social identity model (ESIM; Drury & Reicher, 1999), we argue that the concept of legitimacy can also apply to perceptions of *action against* disadvantage; and ESIM and other approaches (e.g., the dynamic dual process model (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; see Becker, 2012) also establish that it can operate as an *outcome* and not just an antecedent of such action. Thus, in this

paper we shift the usual focus by examining legitimacy as applied to protest actions themselves, instead of to the social relations of intergroup disadvantage. Specifically, we ask *what are the conditions under which non-activists come to see collective action as legitimate*, which we argue can affect the course of social movements. Further, we do not focus on legitimacy as an antecedent but rather on the neglected topic of this variable as an *outcome* (e.g., Hersby, Jetten, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2011; Jiménez-Moya, Rodríguez-Bailón, Spears, & de Lemus, 2017; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, Garza, & Mewse, 2011; van Zomeren & Klandermans, 2011) by exploring what predicts the extent to which collective action will be seen as legitimate. We argue that this shift in the study of legitimacy opens a novel and necessary debate in terms of the antecedents associated with the perception of social movements by members of the public who are not involved but still can influence, and are influenced by, the course of social movements.

As suggested above, the legitimacy ascribed to social protests by those who do not participate might be the difference between successful and failed movements. We argue that, knowing that active participation tends to be uncommon (see Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodríguez, & de Weerd, 2002; Rucht, 1994), social movements should seek support among non-activists, as they can become agents of social change by forcing authorities to listen activists' claims or supporting actions that need majority support to be successful.



## **Theoretical model**

In this paper, we test the effect of three relevant variables in the collective action literature, namely social identification, beliefs about perceived instability (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and group efficacy (Drury et al., 1999; Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2004; van Zomeren, et al., 2008) on the legitimacy of collective action. Previous studies have already shown the relevance of two of these variables in predicting political behaviour aimed at reaching social change. Specifically, the social-identity relative deprivation (SIRD) model (Abrams & Grant, 2012) shows that social identity positively predicts social change beliefs, which affect the support for political change, in the context of separatist movement. Further, the more complex Social Identity, Relative Deprivation, collective Efficacy (SIRDE) model (Grant, et al., 2017) includes also group efficacy (together with social identity) as an antecedent of social change beliefs, that predict voting behavior in a context of an independence referendum. Therefore, social identity and group efficacy can trigger support and actions for social change. In the present study we take into account similar antecedents but we differ in the following ways. First, we look at the role of perceived instability instead of beliefs about the necessity of social change. Second, we focus on a different outcome, namely the predictors of the protests legitimacy among non-activists. We expect both social identification with the social movement and perceived instability to have a positive

effect on the legitimacy of social protests. Further, we test the hypothesis that these effects will be mediated by group efficacy.

### **Social identification**

Imagine a man who is invited to a demonstration against gender violence. The most likely response is that he will not attend it (Klandermans et al., 2002). However, he might perceive that gender violence is indeed an important social issue and that its occurrence does not fit with his ideal of how the world should be (Packer, 2008; see Smith, Thomas, & McGarty, 2015); thus, he might agree that something has to be changed. Although he might not attend the protest, he would support its demands and, because of that, he might feel a *link* with those who actually attend the demonstration. That is, non-activists might perceive themselves as part of a broad group of protesters (i.e., an *opinion-based group*, Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007; McGarty, et al., 2009; Smith, Gavin, & Sharp, 2015) in the sense that they endorse the same point of view that the protesters demonstrate publicly; and thus this shared opinion becomes the connection between the man and those who participate in the protest (see Puga, 2015). In this way, a new identity emerges based on the fact that a group of individuals agree regarding a certain issue, dividing the world into those who think like them and those who do not (see McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith, & Bliuc, 2014; O'Brien & McGarty, 2009), and turning broad perspectives or ideologies into real social forces (McGarty et al., 2009).

In line with the idea that opinion-based group identification predicts emotional reactions towards the actors involved in the social struggle (see Musgrove & McGarty, 2008) and engagement in political action (Bliuc et al., 2007), we argue that social identification will also positively predict a more evaluative dimension, namely the legitimacy of social protests. What is more, predictions from the ESIM strengthen this hypothesis. Specifically, for the ESIM social identity is defined in positional terms, and consequently it changes as a result of new relations between social groups (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury et al., 2012). Thus, given that individuals act according to their social position, new forms of action and possibilities can arise from changed identities (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003) or from new identities reflecting opinion-based groups (McGarty et al., 2009). Thus, actions that were initially evaluated as non-normative or unjustifiable can become legitimized over time. When the man of our example realizes that he is actually on the protesters' side (in terms of the shared opinion) he starts to see as legitimate actions by them that perhaps he did not approve or saw as unnecessary in the past. In this way, social identity defines what action is seen as appropriate for the group (see also Louis, Mavor, La Macchia, & Amiot, 2014) - which is precisely what we expect here, that is, a positive effect of social identity (measured as social identification with social movements) on the legitimacy of collective action (Drury et al., 2003).

Further, we go beyond this and expect that the positive effect of social identification on the legitimacy of collective action will be mediated by group efficacy. Previous research shows that social identification can lead to group efficacy (Grant et al., 2017; van Zomeren et al., 2008)<sup>1</sup>. In line with this, our rationale is that if social identification can serve as a source of shared social meanings (Swaab, Postmes, van Beest, & Spears, 2007; Turner, 1991), it will affect the way in which individuals perceive and evaluate social reality and group effectiveness. To state this in a different manner: social identity is likely to shape the way in which individuals perceive the group as able to impact upon changing social disadvantage (see Drury & Reicher, 2005; for reviews see Klandermans, 1997; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; Walker & Smith, 2002; for a meta-analysis see van Zomeren et al., 2008), probably because shared identity activates expectations of social support for ingroup-normative action (Drury & Reicher, 1999). Thus, the more that people identify with a movement, the more that they see the group as high in efficacy. Further, as we will argue later, the perception that the movement is high in efficacy will lead to the legitimacy of its protests.

### **Perceived instability**

Along with legitimacy (and permeability of group boundaries), SIT suggests that stability perceptions regarding the social hierarchy is a structural factor that shapes intergroup behaviour (Tajfel, 1978). If disadvantaged group members perceive their low

status position as stable, they will probably try to move upwardly individually in the social structure or engage in social creativity strategies (depending on whether group boundaries are permeable, see Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, when the system is perceived as unstable, and consequently social relations are perceived as changeable, disadvantaged groups are more willing to engage in social competition, presumably encouraged by the fact that reality (and the group itself) is not a fixed thing, but could be changed (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001). Related to this, unstable situations in which individuals perceive they might be able to move upwards in the social structure are associated with higher rates of perceived legitimacy (see Caricati & Sollami, 2016). That is, the perception that the system is unstable seems to be related to the way in which individuals frame intergroup relations and consequently, social issues. Extending this to our example, if the man invited to the demonstration perceives that the protest will make it possible to achieve the group's aims (i.e., people against gender violence) and that there is scope to improve the social situation, he should perceive that its protest as legitimate. Based on that, we expect a positive relation between the perception that the system is unstable and the legitimacy of collective action.

In addition, we again take into account the mediating role of group efficacy in this relation. Note that perceptions that the system is susceptible to change through taking collective action is a feature of empowerment, as here individuals understand they are able to transform societies and social relations (Drury, Evripidou, & van

Zomeran, 2015). That is, the belief that the world is not fixed but can be transformed relates to individuals' perceptions that one's group has the ability to affect and alter social relations. Taking this one step further, we test the hypothesis that the perception that the system is unstable positively predicts group efficacy, which in turn should lead to the legitimacy of collective action. The fact that system change is achievable should lead people to attribute efficacy to social movements and their actions, as they might therefore be perceived as useful and functional, which in turn predicts their legitimacy.

### **Group efficacy**

In relation to altering unequal intergroup relations, it is not enough to perceive that a change is possible and necessary; disadvantaged groups also have to perceive their situation can be changed through their own action (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997). Group efficacy is traditionally conceptualized as the belief that the group is able to improve their situation through collective effort (van Zomeran et al., 2004). Going further, we argue that when it comes to social movements, it is not only important to be able to change society (e.g., influencing decision-makers), but it is also a goal of the movement to reinforce and empower the group and its identity (see Hornsey, et al., 2006). Therefore, in this study we take into account two aspects of group efficacy related not only to its ability to change social inequality (political efficacy), but also to its capacity to consolidate and strengthen the movement identity (identity consolidation efficacy, see Hornsey et al., 2006; Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007, Saab et al., 2015).

What is the expected relation between group efficacy and legitimacy of action?

Although these two dimensions have been traditionally framed as analytically separate concepts (e.g., in both SIT and the ESIM), in political terms, they could be related. That is, a movement's ability to organize and be effective is one of the ways that it gains political credibility and acceptance (indeed, this is a core principle behind the anti-fascist strategy of preventing fascists from organizing and public speaking - because when an organization looks able to put its beliefs into practice it increases the extent to which it is seen as a legitimate political force; see also Reicher & Haslam, 2006). This is in line with a perceptual theory of legitimacy (Crandall & Beasley, 2001) which states first that individuals are motivated to have a consistent impression of others in terms of affective consistency - thus if a social movement is efficient it should also be legitimate - and second that a system and its actions can be perceived as a single unit - therefore when a system (e.g., a social movement) is evaluated as efficient its outcomes will be also judged in a positive way (i.e., more legitimate). Further, there is also experimental support for this line of reasoning, from other contexts (Caricati & Sollami, 2016). Thus, we expect a positive relation between group efficacy and the legitimacy of collective action.

In sum, we predict that non-activists' social identification and their perception that the system is malleable will positively predict the legitimacy of social protest both directly and through group efficacy perceptions.

## **Method**

We tested our hypothesis in Chile, where the current climate of support for collective action suggests that people (including those outside the protests) frame it as a legitimate and appropriate way of struggling for justice and other causes. In fact, in this country today there are higher levels of participation in social demonstrations than in previous decades (PNUD, 2015). We used data from a cross-sectional survey conducted by the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES), which addressed a variety of issues related to social conflict, perceived inequality, political participation, and social networks among others.

### **Participants, design and procedure**

In 2014, the COES conducted the National Conflict and Cohesion survey. The sampling method was random probabilistic, stratified by the size of the habitat (Great Santiago, other metropolitan areas and big cities) and the estimated sampling error was +/- 2.2% (95% confidence level). The survey was administered in Spanish and face-to-face by trained and qualified researchers between September 4 and November 30, 2014. Participants were approached at home and invited to participate in the survey. When they accepted the invitation, the researchers carried out the survey. At the end of the survey, respondents were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

A section of this survey contained the measures reported in this paper, concerning perceptions and attitudes toward social movements and collective action in



Chile. This section was answered by 764 Chilean people (57.46% females, mean age = 43,  $SD = 15.6$ ) from 75 municipalities across Chile, representing 78.1% of the urban population and the 68% of the whole country's population<sup>2</sup>. We excluded from the sample those individuals who participated in any type of collective action during the last year (i.e., going to a demonstration, participate in a strike, damaging private property, occupying houses/schools, blocking streets or roads), in order to test our hypothesis concerning people not involved in collective action. The final sample then was 605 Chilean people (59.63% females, mean age = 44.13,  $SD = 15.4$ ).

### **Measures**

Participants were presented with a list of six current social movements and organisations in Chilean society (i.e., the student movement, trade unions, environmental movement, indigenous movement, political parties, and movements in support of diversity) and indicated the extent to which they valued them, in a scale from 1 (little) to 5 (very much). When participants reported a moderate level of support for one or more movement ( $\geq 3$ , the scale midpoint or above), they were asked to choose the movement that they valued the most with reference to the next questions. Almost half of the participants (46.28%) reported the student movement as the most valuable, which is understandable based on the high impact that the movement currently has on Chilean society. Regarding the other movements or organisations, 6.81% choose trade unions, 21.55% chose the environmental movement, 14.26% selected the indigenous

movement, 0.95% choose political parties, and 10.14% of participants chose the movements in support of diversity. All the following items referred to that selected organisation or movement. Participants answered these items using scores ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### **Social identification**

Two items assessed the extent to which participants identified with the social movement selected, adapted from Doosje, Ellemers and Spears (1995) ('I feel part of this group or social movement', 'I feel committed with this group or social movement',  $r = .69$ ).

### **Perceived instability**

One item was used to measure participants' perceptions that the system is unstable, adapted from Drury, Choudhury, Evripidou, Bransgrove, and Sumner (2017) (i.e., 'I think changing society is possible').

### **Group efficacy<sup>3</sup>**

This scale had three items measuring the perception that the movement was able to make a change ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Specifically, we measured both political efficacy and identity consolidation efficacy (see Hornsey et al., 2006; Klein, et al., 2007, Saab et al., 2015). As discussed, the first refers to the group's ability to transform social relations ('The protests of this social movement can generate social change'), while the second measures the extent to which the group is able to strengthen the identity of the social

movement ('The protests of this group or social movement are effective to build an oppositional movement', 'This movement can help to generate solidarity among people').

### **Legitimacy of collective actions by the social movement**

One item created for this questionnaire measured the extent to which respondents perceived as legitimate the protests carried out by the social movement previously selected as the most valuable ('I think it is legitimate that this social group protests').

### **Analytic Strategy**

Initially, to examine the latent structure of the variables social identification (composed by two items) and group efficacy (composed by three items), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed, using Mplus 7.11 statistical software (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The model was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation, and the analysis showed the four variables included in the model (see Figure 1) were indeed four different factors. To evaluate the model's goodness of fit, chi-squared was used as a first approach. Taking into account this indicator's sensitivity to sample size, we also used three other indicators: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with associated 90% confidence intervals (90% CI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI).

According to the criteria proposed by Brown (2006), there is a cut-off point of .08 for SRMR and .06 for RMSEA and 0.95 for CFI and TLI.

We then used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the proposed model. Evaluation of the goodness of fit was based on the same indices indicated above. Social identification and group efficacy were measured at the latent level, whereas the legitimacy of collective action and perceived instability were measured at the observed level.

## **Results**

Results are presented in three sections. First, we report the descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures included in the model. Second, we test the measurement model for the latent variables in the model. Third, we show the results for the structural equation modeling testing the hypothesized model.

From Table 1 it can be inferred that the variables considered in the model exhibited reasonable levels of variability. All of the correlations indexes were, as expected, positive and all means were significantly different from zero.

### **Confirmatory factor analysis**

Social identification and group efficacy constructs were defined as latent variables, following the previously defined indicators. The confirmatory factor analyses of the two latent constructs provided a good fit with the data,  $\chi^2(4) = 14.088$ ,  $p = .007$ ;

RMSEA = .065 (90% CI [.030 – .103]); SRMR = .024; CFI = .99; TLI = .98. This pattern of results supports the performed measurement procedures (see Table 2).

### **Structural equation modeling**

Following our hypothesis, we estimated a model to evaluate the extent to which social identification and perceived instability were associated with the legitimacy on collective action both directly and indirectly through group efficacy (see Table 3). The general fit indexes showed a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(10) = 30.461, p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .058 (90% CI [.035 – .082]); SRMR = .023; CFI = .99; TLI = .97.

Results show that the direct effects of social identification and perceived instability on the legitimacy of collective action by the social movement were not significant ( $\beta = -.033, p = .34$ ;  $\beta = -.073, p = .16$ , respectively). However, there was a significant indirect relationship between each of social identification ( $\beta = .532, p < .001$ ) and perceived instability ( $\beta = .196, p < .001$ ) and legitimacy of collective action through group efficacy. That is, the more that people identified with the social movement, the more group efficacy they reported ( $\beta = .572, p < .001$ ); perceived instability also positively predicted group efficacy ( $\beta = .240, p < .001$ ), and group efficacy predicted the legitimacy of collective action ( $\beta = .788, p < .001$ ).

In order to test the strength and the stability of the model, we carried out a multi-group analysis using the two largest sub-samples in this study, that is, participants who valued the student movement most highly ( $N = 327$ ) and participants who chose the

environmental movement (N = 127). We split the data into these two groups, and using a post-estimation function (ginvariant for SEM) available in Stata 14 (StataCorp, 2016, p. 140), we tested the difference in betas between the groups one by one and using a joint test. We found no significant differences when comparing the model applied to the two subsamples. Specifically, the chi-square test for all parameters constrained simultaneously ( $\chi^2(5) = 8.993, p = .109$ ) indicated that the model works in a similar way for those who feel closer to the student movement and for those who feel closer to the environmental movement. Thus, we confirmed the predicted relationships between the variables in both cases<sup>4</sup>. To conclude, analysis showed that among non-activists social identification and perceived instability are positively related to group efficacy, which predicts the legitimacy of protest actions.

### **Discussion**

Although one of the main goals of social movements is to encourage people to actively join them, the process by which individuals eventually decide to actively fight for a cause is still underexplored and needs further investigation (Livingstone, 2014). However, another important goal is gaining support among the general public, given that the legitimacy of collective action in the view of non-activists is valuable and might be able to make a real change. That is, when (majority) non-activists agree with and legitimize social protests, they can act as *passive* supporters that contribute to accomplish the movement's aims (e.g., by voting for a political party that would cede

the social demands required or by affecting politicians' attitudes towards a certain social issue). Given its importance and the literature gap in terms of legitimacy antecedents, we analyzed predictors of the perceived legitimacy of collective action by social movements among a general population sample not directly involved in collective action.

We showed that group efficacy, the belief that the movement is able to make a change, is a significant predictor of the legitimacy of its collective action. The perception that collective action will be effective is important not only to start pursuing a change in society through collective action (e.g., Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997), but in the present case it also turned out to be relevant when people judge the legitimacy of the action. Specifically, we showed that both social identification with movements and perceived instability of the system positively predict group efficacy, which predicts the legitimacy of social movement protests.

First, focusing on social identification, we found that it positively predicted the perception that the movement was able to make a change, which predicted the legitimacy of collective action. This is in line with the fact that a shared identity shapes group efficacy by increasing expectations of social support (Drury et al., 2015). Thus, if social identification with an opinion-based group relates to the readiness to take political-oriented action (Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009), we argue that it is also relates to the legitimacy of the group protests, via group efficacy perceptions.

Second, there was an indirect effect of perceived instability on the legitimacy of collective action through group efficacy. This can be related to the fact that, when participants in social protests perceive that social relations are malleable, it increases a sense of empowerment as they understand they can contribute to transforming the social structure (see Drury et al., 2015). Therefore, perceived instability can foster the perceived efficacy of collective action, which can confer legitimacy on social protests. Put differently, the ability to be effective can ascribes political credibility and legitimacy of the social movement.

Direct effects of social identification and perceived instability on legitimacy of collective action were not significant. This lack or small direct effects are also evident in similar models in the literature and it might be related to the nature of the group or meaning that it has for individuals (see Thomas et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Our results suggest a prominent role for group efficacy when it comes to legitimate the action of social movements among non-activists who might *judge* collective action in more instrumental terms, compared to individuals who participate in action. For instance, focusing on the case of Chile, it might be that the current support for collective action is related to the belief that social movements can work and are able to transform social relations. Further, the fact that previous movements were successful not only regarding policy-making but also in terms of building an oppositional movement (e.g.,



the student social movement in 2006 and 2011; Donoso, 2013) might be on the basis of the cultural change in the proliferation and acceptance of social protests in this country.

Our results suggest that social movements need to emphasize the similarities among individuals who might not belong to the disadvantaged group, but share the same fate (e.g., individuals who are affected by authorities' decisions in a context of financial crisis) and among those who are closer and exposed to the protests (see Andrews, Beyerlein, & Tucker, 2016). Further, if social identification with a movement leads people to ascribe more efficacy to the movement which in turn will confer legitimacy, leaders of social movements should try to build a more inclusive social category, including not only ingroup members that directly experience the disadvantage, but also paying attention to those individuals who might agree with the movement claims and would be willing to support or to participate in social protests in the long term (see Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Bliuc et al., 2007). Thus, social movements could gain social support and legitimacy in the eyes of others and achieve goals that require majority support. In this sense, we highlight the role of non-activists in social transformation, as they can become in vehicles of change. Individuals (even without participating in collective action) might be influenced by social movements' claims and convictions that contribute to develop new perspectives and beliefs towards social issues. This way, legitimatizing social protests might result in high rates of civic engagement, political participation, interest in social issues etc.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

Although we based our hypotheses in a large body of previous research, our data are cross-sectional which does not allow us to establish causal relations between variables. Based on previous studies (e.g., EMSICA, SIRD and SIRDE models), future research should explore other different relations between the variables included in our model and explore the possibility of reverse causation. Longitudinal data would help to clarify this relationship.

The items presented and used to test our model were part of a larger survey that covered a higher number of scales and interests, which perhaps affected participants' responses to our items. To strengthen our results, more focused and precise studies should be carried out, improving the number of items to measure each variable. In the same vein, our dependent variable in this paper captures participants' perceptions of the legitimacy of collective action. Future research should go beyond this self-report measure by including actual behaviour aimed at, for instance, publicly legitimating collective action (e.g., showing support for a movement through statements on social media).

### **Conclusion**

In recent years, disadvantaged groups have moved democracy and politics to the public domain through social protests and, further, these actions seem to be perceived as legitimate by the wider public. We show that the increasing support that social

movements receive may be related to the fact that their action is considered effective or, at least, more effective than before and may achieve the desired change in society. Specifically, the more that individuals identify with the social movement and the more they believe the system is malleable, the more that collective action will be framed as effective, which in turn can confer legitimacy on the social movement's protest actions. Importantly, this study highlights the role of non-activists in the success of collective action, as they can be affected by social movements' principles and claims, and might become driving forces for social change.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Note that some previous studies have also established that group efficacy positively predicts social identity. Thus, the encapsulated model of social identity in collective action (EMSICA, Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009) determines that together with injustice perceptions, group efficacy triggers group identity, in terms of how the group members see and define themselves. That is, group identity *encapsulates* injustice and efficacy perceptions and leads to collective action support.

<sup>2</sup> The total sample of the survey was 2025 Chilean people, but only half of the sample was asked to answer the items reported in this paper, as part of a section on collective action measures. The survey questionnaire can be seen via a request to the Center for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies, [www.coes.cl](http://www.coes.cl).

<sup>3</sup> In order to be consistent with previous literature and the theoretical models on which we base our predictions, we use the term ‘group efficacy’ to refer to the group efficacy of the social movement.

<sup>4</sup> Given that the student movement presents certain characteristics that might differentiate it from other social movements (i.e., higher rates of support), as complementary analyses, we estimated a multigroup model comparing those who valued the student movement the most vs. those participants who chose a different movement or organisation. In addition, we estimated further alternative models to

explore differences in terms of the different social movements or groups that participants valued. Results showed that the relational pattern among the variables proposed in the theoretical model were similar in terms of direction and strength for both groups. Supplementary data of these analyses are available from <https://osf.io/h82cm/#>.