Felipe Sánchez-Barría

Daniel Miranda

In recent years, we have witnessed several significant episodes of mass mobilization, many of them led by young people. In some cases, youth have gone beyond peaceful forms of collective action, engaging in not only disruptive but also more radical behaviors. A clear example is the "social outburst" in Chile in 2019, which began with secondary school students protesting against metro fare increases. Students entered metro stations and jumped over turnstiles, disrupting services and clashing with the police.

What drives some young people to adopt radical forms of protest, while others stick to conventional participation—or choose not to get involved at all? What factors are associated with the expected participation among a population still undergoing political socialization? Most studies on the individual determinants of political participation focus on adults, who have already been politically socialized. These studies often rely on three main models: the resource model, political opportunity structures, and biographical availability. While the first two help explain whether people participate, they are less useful for distinguishing between *types* of participation. Biographical availability, on the other hand, loses explanatory power in age-homogeneous populations like adolescents.

In this study, we turn to the so-called *Gamson Hypothesis*, also known as the *Mistrustful-Efficacious Hypothesis*. In 1968, concerned about rising youth mobilization and declining trust in institutions in the United States, sociologist William Gamson proposed that optimal condition for radical political mobilization is the combination of high self-efficacy and low institutional trust.

We test this hypothesis using a sample of secondary school students within several countries. Our aim is not only to assess whether the hypothesis helps to explain *levels* of participation but also whether it helps to differentiate *types* of participation.

To do so, we use data from the **International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 (ICCS)**, which includes around 80,000 students from 24 countries (Schulz, 2025). Our main independent variable is the "Gamson typology," which we construct by combining students' levels of self-efficacy and institutional trust. Specifically, we rely on the *Students' Citizenship Self-Efficacy* scale (S_CITEFF) and the *Students' Trust in Civic Institutions* scale (S_INTRUST).

Using these two variables, we create a typology with four core categories. High and low levels of self-efficacy and trust are defined using the 25th and 75th percentiles as cutoffs within each country.

- Students with high self-efficacy (above the 75th percentile) and low trust (below the 25th) are labeled **Dissidents**.
- **Assureds**, or "Loyals" are those with high levels of both efficacy and trust.
- **While the Alienated** are students with low scores on both dimensions.
- Those with high trust but low self-efficacy forms the smallest group: the **Subordinates**.

  Finally, students with mid-range scores on both scales are labeled **Moderates**.

Hypothesis:

For each category within the Gamson typology, we propose a set of testable hypotheses:

- **Dissidents** will show higher levels of expected participation in illegal or non-conventional actions, compared to the other groups and other forms of participation.
- **Assureds** will exhibit greater expectations of engaging in legal or conventional forms of participation.
- **Alienated** and **Subordinates** are expected to display low or no intention to participate in any form of political activity.

Our dependent variables measure students' **expectations of political participation**. The first is *expected participation in legal activities* (S_LEGACT), which includes various conventional forms of engagement. The second is *expected participation in illegal protest activities* (S_ILLACT) composed of several item asking student's expectation of illegal forms of engagement.

To assess the association between the Gamson typology and expected participation, we estimate a series of **multilevel regression models**. In each case, "Moderates" serve as the reference category. Any significant difference for one of the other groups should be interpreted relative to this more typical or "average" group. A non-significant result implies no distinguishable difference from the typical respondent.

This figure shows the results for **expected legal participation**, by country, across the Gamson types. The groups highlighted in red—**Assureds** and **Dissidents**—the most efficacious and, as expected, exhibit the highest levels of expectatives of participation. While

there are some cross-country differences, the pattern is generally consistent: Assureds, as the hypothesis predicts, are most inclined toward legal or conventional political engagement.

Turning to **illegal participation**, we see a similar pattern. Again, Assureds and Dissidents show the highest expectatives of participation. However, contrary to Gamson's original hypothesis, it is not the *Dissidents*—those most mistrustful toward institutions—who express the strongest intent to engage in illegal protest. Instead, it is the *Assureds*—those with both high efficacy and high trust. With one exception which need more exploration Denmark.

We conducted a similar analysis using a Chilean sample, and those results aligned more closely with Gamson's hypothesis. There, Assureds were more likely to engage in legal forms of participation, while Dissidents were more involved in radical actions. One possible explanation is that in the Chilean study we examined **actual participation**, whereas the ICCS data capture **expectative of participation**. It's likely that young people tend to overestimate their own future political engagement. In this regard, we believe that expectations are somehow connected with the perceived **legitimacy** of different forms of action. Highly self-efficacy students—regardless of their institutional trust—may view multiple forms of engagement as normatively acceptable and even necessary. This supports prior findings among adults showing an increasing **positive correlation** between protest and electoral participation.

Chile stands out as an exception. In the last decade there have been an increasing gap between those who engage in protest and those who prefer to vote. So, while in the rest of the world voting and protesting are hand to hand, in Chile es happening the contrary.

On the other hand, we tested the Gamson hypothesis there during the peak of the social uprising, in a context where students were not just thinking about participation but deciding whether or not to act. That context of heightened tension likely made a difference.

Although we did not explore this issue in depth in the current analysis, this final figure shows the **random intercepts** for both legal and illegal participation expectations across countries. As you can see, there is significant cross-country variation in both outcomes. This highlights the need to explore **contextual factors** that may shape how young people around the world form their expectations about political participation.

(In) Conclusion

Understanding the determinants behind political participation expectations among young people is essential for grasping the future of democratic engagement. Adolescents are not merely passive recipients of political messages—they are actively constructing their political identities and frameworks for action. By examining how self-efficacy and institutional trust interact to shape these expectations, we gain critical insight into the early stages of political socialization. These formative attitudes can influence not only whether young people choose to engage politically, but also *how* they choose to do so—through conventional channels, disruptive protest, or not at all. Studying these dynamics across diverse national contexts also reveals the weight of institutional and sociopolitical environments in either fostering or limiting youth engagement. Ultimately, research like this helps us understand the roots of democratic participation and equips us to better support inclusive, responsive, and engaged civic cultures in the years to come.