

Civic Hope and the Perceived Authenticity of Democratic Participation

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Abstract

In two studies, we tested how the expression of civic hope in narratives and the perceived authenticity of civic/political actions relate to civic/political engagement. In a cross-sectional study of undergraduates ($N = 230$), the expression of civic hope predicted the perceived authenticity of civic actions (e.g., voting), which in turn predicted the motivation to engage in them. In a longitudinal on-line study that began 8 weeks prior to the 2020 U.S. Presidential election ($N = 308$ MTurk workers), overall expressions of civic hope positively predicted the perceived authenticity of voting and the motivation to vote. In addition, expressions of civic hope positively predicted the perceived authenticity of voting, which in turn positively predicted the likelihood of reporting that one did vote. These findings indicate that a sense of civic hope and the experience of authenticity in political contexts may be important for democratic engagement.

Keywords

political psychology, self/identity, authenticity, true self

It does not seem controversial to suggest that civic participation is important for democracy. After all, many democracies are characterized by the ideal that government is “of the people, for the people, and by the people,” and citizen participation is a quality indicator of democratic societies (Diamond & Morlino, 2004). It is therefore illuminating that, despite historic turnout in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, approximately 33% of the electorate did not participate (Schaul & Rabinowitz, 2020). Understanding civic engagement is therefore an important endeavor, and while factors embedded within the social structure (e.g., voter identification laws; Hajnal et al., 2017) are significant issues, the identification of psychological processes that predict civic engagement is also needed. We aimed to do the latter by integrating conceptualizations of civic hope (Snow, 2018) with psychological science perspectives on subjective authenticity, or how much someone feels like they are being who they truly are (Sedikides et al., 2017). We suggest that civic hope and the perception that civic actions align with one’s true self robustly predict civic engagement.

Civic hope in democratic societies entails a commitment to pursuing desired ends through democratic processes and a belief that such ends are attainable (Snow, 2018). It is similar to general hope in that it reflects a perception of available routes to achieving goals and an agentic orientation to pursuing them (Snyder, 2002). It is distinct, however, because it specifically focuses on democratic processes and an “openness to the political possibilities a democratic

government can provide” (Snow, 2018, p. 419). Civic hope is also likely connected to collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000) because, like collective efficacy, it consists of agentic feelings about the ability to attain desired ends. Yet, just as general hope is distinct from self-efficacy (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999), civic hope is more than just a belief that one can perform actions to attain goals. It also involves a focus on attaining desired outcomes through the democratic process and a notion that the democratic process will lead to just outcomes, even if they do not perfectly align with self-interest (see Snow, 2018). One could feel a sense of efficacy in pursuing goals through nondemocratic means, but that would not reflect civic hope. We therefore conceptualize civic hope as a set of interrelated cognitions (beliefs) that emphasize the utility of and commitment to the democratic process.

There is some suggestive evidence that civic hope might be important for civic engagement. Cohen-Chen and Van Zomeren (2018) showed that collective efficacy predicted intentions to engage in civic actions when it was accompanied by a belief that positive change was attainable. This

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suggests that civic hope, because it entails a belief that democratic processes will produce desirable outcomes, may predict greater motivation to participate in democracy. Theoretical and empirical accounts of why it might do so, however, are needed. We posit that civic hope may predict greater motivations for democratic actions in part because civically hopeful people are more likely to see those actions as in line with their “true” selves.

To elaborate, people often hold lay beliefs that they possess a “true” self (Christy et al., 2019) that is distinct from other aspects of the self (Strohinger et al., 2017) and experience subjective authenticity when they feel that they are embodying this true self (Sedikides et al., 2017). Subjective authenticity is, among other things (see Rivera et al., 2019), tethered to qualities that convey virtue (Christy et al., 2016), the expression of values (Smallenbroek et al., 2017), and a sense of agency (Seto & Hicks, 2016). One reason for this might be that people generally believe that authentic actions are those that provide fulfillment (Rivera et al., 2019), which may lead them to view virtuous, value expressive, and agentic activities as more authentic. As such, civic hope might correspond to greater feelings that civic behaviors align with one’s true self.

Consider potential voters in a democratic election. Some voters may “desire to promote or attain the legitimate ends of democracy” (Snow, 2018, p. 419) and view the democratic process as capable of producing just outcomes. This hopeful orientation should make voting feel more authentic because it entails the expression of virtuous democratic ideals and a sense of agency in civic affairs. In contrast, voters who lack civic hope should be less likely to see voting as authentic because the lack of civic hope diminishes agency and the connection between voting and democratic ideals. Thus, civic hope frames civic actions as expressions of ideals and agency—a possibility consistent with theorizing about the virtuous nature of civic hope (Moellendorf, 2006; Snow, 2018)—and may consequently correspond to greater feelings that civic actions are authentic.

The possible link between civic hope and perceptions that civic actions are authentic is notable because it can explain why civic hope might predict greater civic action. People are motivated to feel authentic (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013) and to engage in behaviors that provide a sense of authenticity. For example, people who feel more authentic at work show greater engagement and motivation in their jobs (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2018). People also experience authenticity in conjunction with positive motivational states such as being inspired (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013) and interested (Dormanen et al., 2020), and pursuing goals that are concordant with authentic self-aspects leads to greater effort and likelihood of goal completion (Sheldon, 2014). Expressing civic hope may therefore connect to a greater sense that democratic participation is

authentic, which in turn may relate to a stronger motivation to participate in democracy.

Drawing from this theorizing, we tested whether civic hope and subjective authenticity predict civic engagement in a cross-sectional study (Study 1) and in a longitudinal study that began 8 weeks prior to the 2020 U.S. Presidential election (Study 2). Participants in both studies wrote narratives about their feelings toward politics and the U.S. Government, and these narratives were coded for the expression of civic hope. In this way, the current approach was inspired by work on narrative identity (Adler et al., 2017), which suggests that coded narratives can provide unique insights into psychological processes over and above self-report measures (Adler et al., 2016). Indeed, we did not specifically ask about civic hope in our prompts, and as such, our operationalization of civic hope reflects its spontaneous expression. We viewed this as a particularly useful operationalization because it reflects the expression of hope in the absence of any strong demand, thus circumventing some of the pitfalls of traditional fixed-format measures (e.g., social desirability). We hypothesized that people who expressed civic hope would report greater feelings that civic engagement was authentic, which in turn would predict greater civic engagement motivation.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Introductory psychology students ($N = 228$; 120 women, 107 men, 1 nonreporting) participated for course credit ($M = 19.42$ $SD = 1.13$). The sample was 79.6% White, 7.6% Asian, 4% Black or African American, 2.7% Indian, 0.9% American Indian/Alaska Native, 2.7% more than one race, and 2.7% indicated “other.” About a quarter were Hispanic (26.7%). Self-reported political affiliation was 45.2% Republican, 30.7% Independent, and 24.1% Democrat.

Procedure. Participants spent 4 min responding to narrative prompts focused on personal experiences that impacted their feelings about the U.S. political system. After writing their responses, participants rated how authentic they would feel engaging in seven civic behaviors (e.g., voting) and rated their motivation to participate in those behaviors.

Measures

Narrative Prompt and Hope Coding. The political narrative prompt read as follows:

Describe a particular scene or event in your life story that was pivotal for how you feel about the political system in the United States. Describe the event, where and when it

happened, who was involved, what you were thinking and feeling, and how the event has shaped your current feelings about the United States political system. What are those feelings?

We instructed coders to code a narrative as expressing civic hope if it conveyed “a belief that governments/politics can make a positive difference, that the system can be improved, that engaging in politics can have an effect, or that one is (or should be) open to the possibilities of achieving democratic ends.” Conversely, essays that were judged to express “a belief that politics/government cannot deliver the desired ends of democracy, that participation doesn’t matter, and that change isn’t possible” were coded as an expression of civic pessimism. Essays expressing neither civic hope nor civic pessimism were coded as “neither.” These target sentiments were selected after two of the authors (a social psychologist and philosopher) collaboratively identified concrete expressions consistent with current conceptualizations of civic hope (e.g., Snow, 2018). We opted for a categorical approach because we had no expectation that the narratives would allow for reliable assessments of differences in degree. In addition, we were most interested in a comparison between people who spontaneously expressed hope and those who did not. Once we arrived at a coding scheme, the same social psychologist and philosopher coded 40 narratives and resolved disagreements via discussion. These coded essays were used as a criterion to train two independent raters (see Supplementary Information for the scheme and example narratives). Both raters achieved acceptable reliability with the criterion set ($\kappa > .700$) and independently coded half of the remaining essays. The resulting distribution of codes was 58 (civic hope), 44 (civic pessimism), and 126 (neither).

Perceived Authenticity of Civic Actions. Participants rated how authentic they would feel voting in an election, volunteering for a political party, attending a campaign rally, attending a town hall meeting, discussing politics in a

public place, doing some volunteer work, and learning more about an important social issue. For each activity, the measure presented seven pairs of overlapping circles that displayed an increasing overlap between the “Real-me” and “Me (engaging in activity).” Participants selected the pair that represented their perception. Responses were averaged across activities ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.19$, $\alpha = .796$), with higher scores reflecting greater authenticity. This approach has been validated in previous research and is commonly utilized (Lenton, Slabu, et al., 2013; Sedikides et al., 2017).

Civic Engagement Motivation. Finally, participants rated their motivation to engage in each of the civic activities on a 1 (*not at all motivated*) to 7 (*extremely motivated*) scale. Responses were averaged ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.12$, $\alpha = .788$); higher scores reflected greater motivation.

Results

Power. Our plan was to enroll as many subjects as possible during an academic term. We expected to enroll more than 250 subjects, which would exceed the number required to detect an average effect in social/personality psychology ($f = .215$; Funder et al., 2014) and the number at which correlations tend to stabilize (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). However, recruitment occurred during the 2020 Spring Semester when typical subject pool requirements were altered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Enrollment lagged behind what we would typically expect. Nevertheless, a sensitivity analysis indicated that 228 participants enabled us to detect an effect of $f = .206$ with power set at .80.

Primary Analyses. In a multivariate analysis of variance, we tested whether narratives that expressed civic hope corresponded to greater perceived authenticity of civic actions and greater motivation to engage in them. There was a

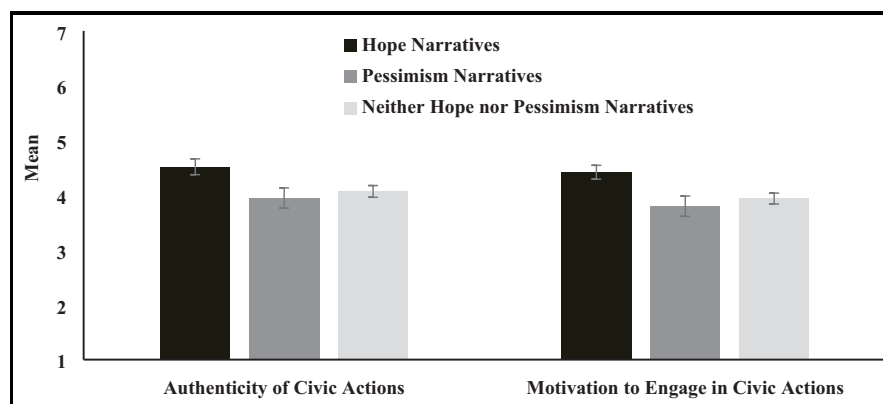


Figure 1. Perceived Authenticity and Motivation Across Each Civic Hope Narrative Category (Study 1)
Note. Higher scores reflect greater authenticity and motivation. Error bars represent standard errors.

significant multivariate effect, $\lambda = .955$, $F(2, 448) = 2.63$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$ (Figure 1), with significant effects of narrative code emerging for perceived authenticity, $F(2, 225) = 3.80$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .033$, and motivation, $F(2, 225) = 5.10$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$. The assumption of equal variances was satisfied for both dependent variables. Post hoc tests revealed that essays coded as containing civic hope corresponded to greater perceived authenticity of civic actions than those coded as pessimistic, $t(225) = 2.42$, $p = .016$, $d = .48$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [0.09/0.88], and as neither, $t(225) = 2.42$, $p = .016$, $d = .38$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.70]. Essays coded as containing civic hope also corresponded to greater motivation to engage in democratic activities than those coded as pessimistic, $t(225) = 2.84$, $p = .005$, $d = .57$, 95% CI = [0.17, 0.96], and those coded as “neither,” $t(225) = 2.78$, $p = .006$, $d = .44$, 95% CI = [0.12, 0.77]. Perceived authenticity and motivation did not differ between pessimistic and “neither” coded narratives ($ps > .471$). Exploratory analyses indicated that these effects remained significant when controlling for the number words contained in the narratives, the overall affective tone of the narratives, perceived moral identity, trait hope, political ideology, the strength of political identification, age, ethnicity, and gender (see Supplementary Information).

We also tested a process model where civic hope predicted civic engagement motivation indirectly through its association with perceived authenticity. These analyses were carried out using the “jAMM” module (Gallucci, 2020) in jamovi (v1.6). We focused on a contrast comparing narratives coded as containing hope relative to the other two categories. Hope-coded essays (vs. pessimism and neither) positively predicted authenticity, $b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.18$, $z = 2.77$, $p = .006$, 95% CI = [0.15, 0.87], and perceived authenticity positively predicted civic engagement motivation, $b = 0.66$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = 15.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.58, 0.75]. There was a significant indirect effect of civic hope on civic engagement motivation through perceived authenticity, $b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.12$, $z = 2.72$, $p = .006$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.58]. This indirect effect remained significant while controlling for the number of words contained in the narratives, the overall affective tone of the narratives, perceived moral identity, trait hope, political ideology, the strength of political identification, age, ethnicity, and gender (see Supplementary Information).

Discussion

The spontaneous expression of civic hope in narratives reliably predicted the perceived authenticity of civic actions and civic engagement motivation. In addition, we observed a significant indirect effect of spontaneously expressed civic hope on civic engagement motivation through perceived authenticity. Although there are limitations of cross-sectional indirect effects models, the results provide suggestive support for the process that we predicted. Study 2

builds on these initial findings by examining weekly expressions of civic hope, the perceived authenticity of voting, and the motivation to vote in an election. We also assessed self-reported voting. We predicted that people who expressed more civic hope would see voting as more authentic, which should in turn predict greater motivation to vote and the likelihood of actually voting.

Study 2

Method

Participants. We utilized the CloudResearch® Turk Prime platform to recruit U.S. adults who had histories of providing high-quality survey data in previous studies and who were eligible to vote in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The sample ($N = 308$; 144 females, 164 males) ranged in age from 21 to 76 years ($M = 41.9$ y, $SD = 12.44$ y) and was 85.2% White, 7.1% Black/African American, 4.5% Asian, 1.9% multiracial, and 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.0% selected “other” as their race). The majority of participants were not Hispanic (93.8%). Self-reported political party affiliation was 38.6% Democrat, 30.8% Republican, 27.3% Independent, and 3.3% selecting “other” or “no answer.”

Procedure. Beginning on September 14, 2020, participants received a survey link every Monday for the 8 weeks leading up to the election and the 4 weeks following the election. Each survey had to be completed by the end of the day that it was sent out. Only data from the eight pre-election surveys and the first post-election survey (Week 9) are relevant to the present focus. The first eight pre-election surveys contained a narrative prompt focused on participants’ current feelings about politics and government, a measure of the perceived authenticity of voting, and a measure of motivation to vote. Participants received US\$2.00 for every completed survey and a bonus of US\$8.00 for every four surveys completed. Most (90.6%) of the sample completed at least four of the first eight surveys, with the majority (70.4%) completing all eight. The post-election survey was completed by 214 participants.

Materials

Narrative Prompt and Hope Coding. In each of the first eight surveys, participants responded to the following prompt:

We would like to know how you are feeling RIGHT NOW about the current direction of politics/government in this country. Describe your thoughts and feelings. Please try to get into the writing task and provide as much detail as possible. We ask that you spend at least 3 minutes writing. You will be able to advance in the survey after 3 minutes has passed.

Responses were coded as in Study 1, with the exception that the “pessimism” category was not utilized. We were

unable to reliably code that category in Study 2, perhaps due to the differences in narrative prompts across studies. Regardless, because we were able to reliably code hope, and because the “pessimism” and “neither” categories did not differ on our outcomes in Study 1, we thought it reasonable to collapse across those categories in Study 2. A team of six coders achieved acceptable reliability ($\kappa > .700$) with a criterion set of 100 narrative codes (as in Study 1), and each coder coded an independent set of narratives. Overall, 733 (33.6%) of the 2,180 narratives were coded as expressing civic hope.

Perceived Authenticity of Voting. In each of the first eight surveys, participants rated how much they perceived the act of voting in the upcoming election as authentic. This was measured via a single item modeled after the “overlapping circle” authenticity measure utilized in Study 1 ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.76$).

Motivation to Vote. In each of the first eight surveys, participants indicated how motivated they were to vote in the election on a 1 (*not at all motivated*) to 11 (*extremely motivated*) scale ($M = 9.42$, $SD = 2.95$).

Results

Power. Sample size considerations were balanced with the resources available to successfully collect data across the 12-week period. We aimed to recruit 300 participants, which exceeds the sample size at which correlations stabilize (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Estimating power is more complex in multilevel mediation models, but our sample of 308 participants with 12 repeated assessments provides adequate power for detecting a small indirect effect in the multilevel mediation models that we conduct below (Preacher et al., 2011).

Pre-Election: Weekly Civic Hope, Authenticity, and Motivation to Vote. We conducted a multilevel mediation analysis to estimate the within- and between-person associations between civic hope, authenticity, and motivation to vote across the first eight pre-election weeks of the study. The Mlmed macro for SPSS (Rockwood, 2017) was utilized to conduct these analyses, which simultaneously estimates the within- and between-person effects in the multilevel mediation model.

Within-Person Effects. There was no significant within-person association between civic hope and the authenticity of voting (the “a” path), $b = 0.06$ ($SE = 0.05$), $t = 1.26$, $p = .207$, 95% CI = [-0.04, 0.17], but there was a significant within-person association between perceived authenticity and the motivation to vote (the “b” path), $b = 0.33$ ($SE = 0.02$), $t = 13.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.28, 0.39]. There was also a significant within-person direct effect (the

“c” path) of civic hope on the motivation to vote in the election, $b = 0.12$ ($SE = 0.05$), $t = 2.23$, $p = .026$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.23]. This direct effect indicates that, within a given individual, narratives that expressed hope (vs. did not express hope) were linked to higher motivations to vote. The within-person indirect effect of civic hope on motivation to vote through authenticity was not significant, $b = 0.02$ ($SE = 0.02$), $z = 1.25$, $p = .211$, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.06].

Between-Person effects. There was a significant between-person effect of civic hope on the perceived authenticity of voting (the “a” path), $b = 1.78$ ($SE = 0.30$), $t = 5.82$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [1.18, 2.39].² On average, people with a higher proportion of hope-coded narratives had higher perceived voting authenticity. There was also a significant between-person relationship between perceived voting authenticity and the motivation to vote (the “b” path), $b = 1.09$ ($SE = 0.08$), $t = 13.41$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.93, 1.25], and a significant between-person relationship between civic hope and the motivation to vote (the “c” path), $b = 1.22$ ($SE = 0.46$), $t = 2.67$, $p = .008$, 95% CI = [0.32, 2.11]. The between-person indirect effect of civic hope on the motivation to vote via perceived voting authenticity was also significant, $b = 1.94$ ($SE = 0.36$), $z = 5.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [1.25, 2.67]. On average, people with a higher proportion of hope-coded narratives viewed voting as more authentic, which in turn was associated with a greater motivation to vote in the election. These effects remained significant when controlling for trait hope, political ideology, strength of political identification, age, gender, ethnicity, and subjective socioeconomic status (see Supplementary Material).

Post-Election: Predicting Self-Reported Voting in the Election. Week 9 data were collected on the Monday following the election and included a dichotomous assessment of voting (yes vs. no). Because this outcome was assessed at a single time point, multilevel analyses were not possible. However, we were able to test an indirect effects model akin to the model tested in Study 1. We created a composite voting authenticity measure consisting of the average authenticity score across the previous 8 weekly surveys and a composite civic hope variable reflecting the proportion of narratives coded as hopeful across the previous 8 weeks. The analyses thus focused on between-person effects.

We utilized the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) to conduct an indirect effects test that assessed whether the percentage of narratives expressing civic hope predicted self-reported voting in the election to the extent that it was associated with greater perceptions that voting was an authentic behavior. The percentage of essays containing civic hope over the 8 weeks leading up to the election ($M = 33.69$, $SD = 28.01$) was entered as a continuous predictor, the average weekly perceived authenticity of

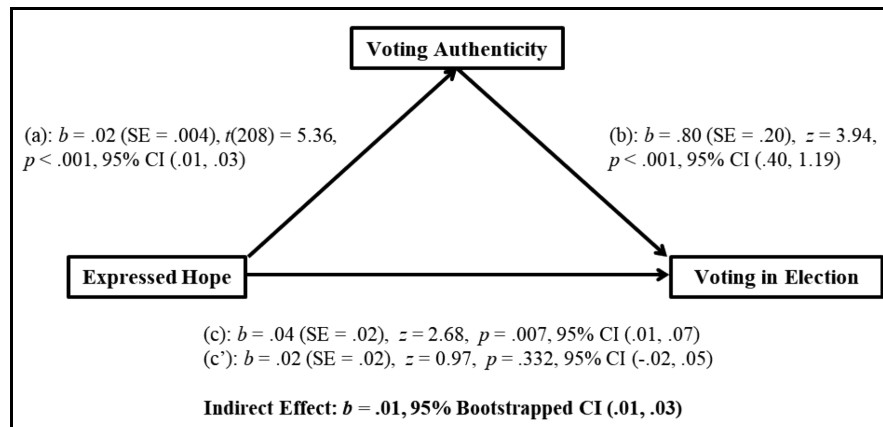


Figure 2. Indirect Effect of Civic Hope on Self-Reported Voting Through Voting Authenticity (Study 2).

Note. Civic Hope = proportion of narratives expressing hope across the eight pre-election surveys; Voting Authenticity = average rating of the perceived authenticity of voting across the eight pre-election surveys; Voting in Election = self-reported voting in the Election assessed on the Monday after the election. The coefficients for all paths connected to “voting in election” are expressed as log-odds.

voting across those 8 weeks ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.57$) was entered as a mediator, and self-reported voting in the election was entered as the binary outcome. Overall, average pre-election civic hope expression exerted an indirect effect on (self-reported) voting in the election to the extent that it was associated with an overall greater perceived authenticity of voting (Figure 2). These effects remained significant when controlling for trait hope, political ideology, strength of political identification, gender, ethnicity, age, and subjective socioeconomic status (see Supplementary Materials).

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1. Spontaneous narrative expressions of civic hope positively predicted the perceived authenticity of voting, which in turn predicted the motivation to vote in the 2020 election. These effects emerged at the between-person level, but not at the within-person level. The absence of a within-person indirect effect could be attributable to the lack of within-person variability in authenticity and motivation. Null models indicated that 72% of the variance in authenticity and 88% of the variance in civic engagement motivation occurred between participants. Of course, identifying factors that explain which people are, on average, more likely to engage in civic actions (e.g., voting) may be practically important. Indeed, an indirect effects model also revealed that people who expressed more civic hope in the 8 weeks leading up to the 2020 election were more likely to report voting in the actual election in part because they viewed voting as more authentic than those who expressed less civic hope.

General Discussion

Overall, our findings suggest that civic hope positively relates to the feeling that civic actions are connected to

people’s true selves and that people who possess those feelings are more likely to be motivated to engage civically. The findings may, on a conceptual level, help address competing interpretations of the authenticity construct and its relationship to positive outcomes. While there is a view that authenticity may be tethered to virtue, for example (Christy et al., 2016; Gino et al., 2015; Strohinger & Nichols, 2014), others note that this relationship may be driven by social desirability (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2016). Our utilization of a qualitative narrative approach that captured *spontaneous* expressions of civic hope attenuates some of these social desirability concerns. It is indeed unclear how a social desirability motive might play out in the context of a narrative about political/government views, given that contemporary discourse on politics is expected to be negative. That the total number of civic hope expressions, though consistent across studies, was less than 50% is in line with this reality. It seems plausible that a social desirability account might predict that hopeful expressions would be less desirable/normative and thus connected to less authenticity, which is precisely the opposite of what we observed. Moreover, our primary findings emerged above and beyond the influence of other variables vulnerable to social desirability influences (e.g., self-reported trait hope, self-reported moral identity), offering additional support for their robustness.

The practical implications of these findings for understanding political engagement are also noteworthy. One might wonder, for example, whether our studies offer insight into a process that could be targeted to increase civic participation. Anecdotally, some politicians have appeared to leverage hope successfully in their messaging. Former president Barack Obama (2007), for example, centered his early campaign on the “audacity of hope,” which, among other things, entailed a general belief that people participating within the bounds of the U.S. political system

can promote positive change. That Obama's campaigns were met with relatively high levels of voter turnout (Schaul & Rabinowitz, 2020), particularly among historically disenfranchised groups (Pew Research Center, 2009), aligns with the tenor of our findings.

At the same time, however, our findings are obviously silent about the causal structure of these variables. Future studies will need to test causal associations, identify the generalizability of these findings in other contexts, and perhaps include different measures of motivation. We focused on people's conscious representation of their motivation to engage in civic activities via self-report, but there are many other ways to measure motivation (Touré-Tillery & Fishbach, 2014) and our approach may have failed to capture important differences in the qualitative aspects of motivation. Authenticity, for example, appears to be positively related to intrinsic motivation but negatively associated with more controlled or extrinsic forms of motivation (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2018).

In addition, a consideration of the systemic barriers to participation that disproportionately affect some groups in society may be important for estimating the potential influence of civic hope. It is plausible, for example, that certain barriers contribute to societal disparities in civic hope that operate in unison with those barriers to discourage sustained participation. Elevating civic hope may therefore be much more difficult in some contexts than others, perhaps most so among the very groups of people who are at risk of exclusion from the democratic process. On this point, it might be notable that relatively low levels of civic hope were expressed in narratives across our studies (~25% to ~33%), suggesting that civic hope may not be particularly salient at default when people broadly reflect on politics. Nevertheless, what little hope was expressed accounted for variability in the perceived authenticity of democratic participation and the motivation to participate. That these relationships emerged above and beyond the influence of relevant individual differences and the overall affective tone of the narrative offers additional evidence that civic hope might help sustain motivation in the face of otherwise turbulent sociopolitical feelings. A little bit of hope might go a long way.

Author Contributions

[Matthew Vess, Matt Stichter, Rebecca Schlegel, Joshua Hicks, and Joseph Maffly-Kipp] developed the research question and designed the empirical studies. [Joseph Maffly-Kipp, Patricia Holte, and Matthew Vess] programmed the studies, analyzed the data, and managed the narrative coding. [Joseph Maffly-Kipp, Matthew Vess] produced an initial draft of the manuscript. All authors provided feedback and helped revise the initial draft. All authors approved the final version of this manuscript.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests


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Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. Both studies contained additional measures not central to this paper. All data and materials are available at https://osf.io/hrbyx/?view_only=e4823fe3944d4005bd73a96f5a-d181aa. We provide a full description of study materials in the Supplementary Information.
2. The way categorical variable centering works in these models means that the between-person effect estimates for civic hope represent the mean difference between a hypothetical cluster (participant) with all narratives coded as hopeful and a hypothetical cluster (participant) with no narratives coded as hopeful. Dividing these estimates by 10 allows for a more straightforward linear relationship interpretation based on a 10% increase in the number of hopeful narratives (see Yaremch et al., 2021).

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