

Understanding the conditions under which people engage in political action constitutes one of the core questions in the social and political sciences. However, while many societal problems require collective action, political disengagement seems to be the dominant social norm. At the same time, violent extremism is on the rise worldwide with a few individuals willing to sacrifice everything for a political cause. In the present project we propose a novel model of political engagement that aims to explain such diversity of political behavior. We draw on basic theories of motivation showing that people commit to goals that they consider important and desirable and which they perceive as attainable through their own actions. To achieve these goals, they then engage in behaviors that they believe to be appropriate means. Assuming that political behavior follows the same principles, we suggest that people donate money, attend protests, vote, or join extremist groups because by doing so they hope to achieve some valuable political goals. As such, engagement in political behavior should depend on 1) the *importance* attached to those goals, 2) the *general expectancy* of attaining them, and 3) the perceived *instrumentality* of the particular political behavior coupled with a belief that one can enact that behavior (i.e., *self-efficacy*).

Three interrelated work packages consisting of qualitative, cross-sectional, longitudinal, experimental, and field studies are proposed to test this model in the context of diverse political causes, including causes that are highly relevant in the contemporary world (e.g., gender equality, climate change).

First, we will examine the role of relative goal importance. Past research demonstrated that people fight for the causes that they find important. However, most people strive for multiple goals and it is not clear how commitment to a political cause is related to other life goals and how these relationships affect political engagement. Seven studies will examine how different types of goal structures among activists and non-activists are related to their short- and long-term political engagement.

While people are generally reluctant to engage in actions with uncertain or low chances of success, this effect is not always present in a political context. We hypothesize that inconsistent effects obtained in past studies on expectancy and political engagement could be attributed to a non-linear pattern of this relationship, which we aim to examine. Using various methods, which include content analysis, experiments, and agent based modelling, in nine studies we will investigate the moderating role of importance of the cause and past engagement for the cause.

Finally, despite the role played by goal importance and expectancy in forming behavioral intentions, it is important to remember that intentions are not always translated into actions. People might not be able to perform a given action or they might not be convinced that it is instrumental in attaining their goal. Therefore, even a belief that a cause is important accompanied by an expectation that it might succeed might not be enough to motivate people to do something about it. Through field studies paired with experiments and games, we aim to test how both types of expectations exert their effects on political engagement.

Taken together, the three work packages will establish the empirical foundation for a comprehensive motivational model of political behavior that can explain diverse types of political action of differing extremity.