

Does family experience influence political beliefs? Relation between interparental
conflict perceptions and political efficacy in late adolescence

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Abstract

The study examined the relation between adolescents' interparental conflict perceptions and their political efficacy regarding local issues. Longitudinal data (age 15 and 17) from 444 adolescents were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Results showed that young people experiencing frequent interparental conflict reported an increase in depressive mood during late adolescence, which was associated with lower level of political efficacy. Moreover, adolescents who felt more efficacious when dealing with fighting parents felt more efficacious in local politics, even when controlling for personality traits and depressive mood. One possible explanation is that family perceptions generalize to politics because both contexts share certain similar features. Our results underscore that also seemingly nonpolitical experiences can matter in adolescents' civic and political development.

Keywords: Political efficacy; Civic development; Interparental conflict; Depressive mood.

Does Family Experience Influence Political Beliefs? The Relation between Interparental Conflict Perceptions and Political Efficacy in Late Adolescence

Common experience, as well as the results of many studies, show that people who feel able to influence their social environment also engage more in public issues (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). In other words, political efficacy, understood as a persons' belief that they can influence the social system (Bandura, 1997), predicts various forms of civic activity (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006). Despite its importance, we know much less about how political efficacy originates, i.e. why some young people feel efficacious while others do not (Beaumont, 2010). If we take a closer look at political efficacy, we can see that it consists of two interrelated beliefs: an assessment of personal capabilities and resources, and an assessment of the openness of a social system to change (Bandura, 1997). Both beliefs are formed through personal experience with the social system, such as participation in civic organizations and other political actions (Bandura, 1997; Beaumont, 2010; Zimmerman, 1990). However, young people do not have as many opportunities as adults to engage politically. Therefore, we ask whether adolescents' political efficacy also develops in other contexts. Beaumont (2011) suggests that processes fostering political efficacy in youth may occur in informal setting, such as families, but she does not focus in depth on these processes. We suppose that some aspects of family life have features that are similar to politics, which causes that cognitive schemata, formed in the family, generalize and affect political efficacy. Since local politics is closer to adolescents' everyday lives than politics on a national or global level (Císař, 2008; McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, & MacIndoe, 2005; Youniss et al., 2002), we focus on that particular kind of political efficacy.

Adolescents' perceptions of their own competence and the controllability of the environment are influenced by how they perceive interparental relations, and how they interpret parental mutual communication and behavior (Grych & Fincham, 1993; Rudolph, Kurlakowsky, & Conley, 2001). Special importance is attached to appraisals of conflicts between parents. Grych and Fincham (1990) described a cognitive-contextual framework to delineate the processes that associate marital conflict with offsprings' development. This theoretical perspective accentuates the meaning of interparental conflict for young people as a key mechanism. Adolescents form cognitive schemata that represent the typical course of interparental conflict and their personal role in such conflicts. These schemata not only affect adolescents' expectations concerning future parental disagreements, but may also affect their perceptions and behavior in broader social relationships (Grych & Cardoza-Fernandes, 2001).

Adolescents experiencing higher levels of interparental conflict in their families might be less confident that they can influence political issues in their communities. First, adolescents' repeated exposure to negative stressful events, such as family conflict, can lead to chronic and generalized self-blame and deficits in perceived control of external events, which turn into depressive mood (Kerig, 1998; O'Donnell, Moreau, Cardemil, & Pollastri, 2010; Richmond & Stocker, 2003). Cognitive theories of depression imply that depressive thinking consists in the pervasive expectation that negative events will occur from uncontrollable forces and that a person cannot do anything to affect them (Abela & Hankin, 2008; Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989; Beck, 1983; Sweeney, Anderson, & Bailey, 1986). Consequently, young people with depression feel helpless and incompetent in social situations (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, & Seligman, 1992; Whitton, Larson, & Hauser, 2008), and have lower social self-

efficacy (Muris, 2002). Therefore, we expect that person's political efficacy (i. e., belief in influence on one particular social context) will reflect these generalized schemata. Second, adolescents from families with high interparental conflict are more likely to acquire avoidant coping style, which means that their general reaction to problems or interpersonal conflicts is to avoid them (Davies & Forman, 2002; Michael, Torres, & Seemann, 2007; Nicolotti, El-Sheikh, & Whitson, 2003). These young people tend to avoid thinking about or doing something about community problems; thus, we can expect them to have a low political efficacy that is closely associated with awareness of public issues (Zimmerman, 1995). In short, young people from families with high interparental conflict can have low political efficacy because they have developed high depressive mood and/or avoidant coping style.

Furthermore, adolescents' belief that they can influence political issues in their communities can be directly linked to their perceived ability to influence negative events within the family. One of the basic experiences that adolescents make when facing interparental conflicts involves their ability to negotiate with fighting parents, and their ability to influence the course of those conflicts (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). In related literature, this perception is sometimes called 'coping efficacy,' but we will refer to as interparental conflict efficacy, in order to avoid any confusion with the concept of coping styles. Research indicates that efficacy beliefs regarding particular contexts or activities can generalize to other contexts (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977; Brody, Hatfield, & Spalding, 1988; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989; Weitlauf, Cervone, Smith, & Wright, 2001). Thus, people who learn that they are efficacious in one area can start to feel efficacious in other areas, as well. However, both contexts must demand the same or similar skills; otherwise the

generalization will not occur. We argue that efficacy related schemata formed in the course of interparental conflict can affect adolescents' political efficacy since family and political environments share certain similar features. Foremost, both environments are characterized by hierarchy, occasional conflicts and a somewhat subordinate position for a young person. Gniewosz, Noack and Buhl (2009) found, in their research on political trust, that family experiences generalize to politics. According to them, rigorous authorities in close family relationships undermine the development of trust in the institutions of society and in the representatives of the political system. According to additional research that is not explicitly related to politics, adolescents with negative family perceptions develop general negative feelings about contexts controlled by the authority, which makes them less willing to spend time in authority-controlled places and organizations (Kerr, Stattin, Biesecker, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2003; Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007). Therefore, we expect that the development of interparental conflict efficacy will be shown to be associated with enhanced political efficacy.

In addition, interparental conflict efficacy can be undermined by extreme and permanent hostility between parents, as adolescents learn that they cannot do anything to positively influence parental conflicts (Buehler, Lange, & Franck, 2007). Thus, we expect that interparental conflict efficacy can be yet another link between perceived frequency of interparental conflicts and political efficacy.

When assessing the association between interparental conflict perceptions and political efficacy, personality traits need to be considered. Personality traits influence how adolescents perceive their parents; especially, higher levels of neuroticism can cause a negative distortion of adolescents' parental perceptions (Millikan, Wamboldt, & Bihun, 2002). Additionally, personality traits are known to influence various political

perceptions (Mondak & Halperin 2008), whereas political efficacy is associated mainly with high extraversion and openness (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). Therefore, it is possible that adolescents endowed with certain personality dispositions perceive themselves to be efficacious both in parental conflict and in politics, although there may be no real association between these two perceptions.

To sum up, we ask whether the way in which adolescents perceive interparental conflicts predicts how they perceive political efficacy in their communities. Specifically, we expect that perceived interparental conflict frequency and interparental conflict efficacy will matter. Concerning perceived conflict frequency, we hypothesize that its association with political efficacy is negative and indirect, due to: (1) more depressive mood; (2) more avoidant coping style; and (3) lower interparental conflict efficacy. Next, interparental conflict efficacy is hypothesized to have a direct positive association with political efficacy. In our analysis, we will control for the personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness, since they are expected to determine both conflict perceptions and political efficacy.

Method

Participants and procedure

Our data came from the psychological branch of the broader European Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood (ELSPAC), examining the risks posed to healthy and optimum development. Initial sample consisted of almost all families (5,549) with a child born between March 1, 1991 and June 30, 1992 in medical institutions in the Czech city Brno (400,000 inhabitants). The psychological examinations started at the child's age of eight with a subsample of 883 families that were randomly drawn from the original sample (Ježek, Lacinová, Širůček, &

Michalčáková, 2008). Data used in the present analysis were drawn from the biennial 2006/07 (age 15 = T1; N = 554) and 2008/09 (age 17 = T2; N = 480) examinations. Present analyses were conducted on 444 participants (52.5 % girls) who had valid values for dependent variable. Adolescents who remained in the sample did not differ from those who left in their adjustment (depressive mood and risk behavior), as measured in previous waves. Regarding family configuration at T1, 74.3 % participants reported that they were living with both parents, 15.4 % with one parent, and 10.3 % with one parent and a stepparent.

Participants came to the research institute to complete self-report questionnaires. All measures were computer-based, except for personality and interparental conflict measures at T1 that were paper-based. Informed consent was obtained from all adolescents and their parents; collected data were treated in accordance with the respective national law.

Measures

Political efficacy. Adolescents' beliefs that they can achieve any change or stop the negative development in their communities (town districts, villages) were assessed. We used the scale that was piloted and used among late adolescents in our previous studies (Šerek & Macek, 2010). Participants were instructed that people may disagree, if they are able to influence decisions taken in their municipalities (introductory example of such an issue was added – planned construction of a highway in a neighborhood). Then they expressed their agreement with six general statements, on a four-point response scale that ranged from “completely disagree” to “completely agree.” Sample item: “The effort to change something in my surroundings is usually condemned to failure.” All items can be found in the Appendix. Alpha reliability in the present study

was .77.

Perceived frequency of interparental conflicts. Perceived amount of interparental conflicts was measured. We used the combination of complete subscales “Frequency” and “Intensity” from the Czech adaptation of the Children’s Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych et al., 1992; Lacinová, Michalčáková, & Ježek, 2008). Adolescents were asked 10 items with three response alternatives: “true,” “sort of true” and “false.” Sample item: “I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.” Alpha reliabilities were .91 at both T1 and T2.

Perceived interparental conflict efficacy. We captured participants’ perceived chance to interfere in the interparental conflict and affect it. All five questions from the “Coping Efficacy” subscale of the Czech adaptation of the Children’s Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale were used. A response scale was: “true,” “sort of true” and “false.” Sample item: “When my parents argue or disagree, I can usually help make things better.” All items can be found in the Appendix. Alphas were .75 at T1 and .74 at T2.

Depressive mood. Adolescents’ depressive feelings were assessed by the Czech adaptation of the Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (Masopustová, Michalčáková, Lacinová, & Ježek, 2008; Sund, Larsson, & Wichstrøm, 2001). Participants were instructed: “Following questions ask how did you feel in the last 14 days.” They were offered 15 items with a response scale of “true,” “sometimes true” and “false.” Sample item: “I thought there was nothing good for me in the future.” Alpha reliabilities were .88 at T1 and .92 at T2.

Avoidant coping style. We measured participants’ diversion from the problems, and purposeful evasion of the problems. Five items (out of 11) with the best

psychometric properties were drawn from the “Deflection” subscale of the Coping Style Inventory (Kohoutek, Mareš, & Ježek, 2008; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995). Participants were instructed to assess how they usually responded to difficult situations, using a four-point response scale that ranged from “not true” to “completely true.” Sample item: “I try to do something that helps me to forget the problem.” Alphas were .66 at T1 and .70 at T2.

Personality traits. Three complete subscales from the Czech standardization of the Big Five NEO-FFI (Hřebíčková & Urbánek, 2001) were used to assess adolescents’ neuroticism (12 items, alpha .85), extraversion (12 items, alpha .79), and openness (12 items, alpha .58).

Data analysis

A structural equation modeling approach (Mplus 6.1 software) was used. All models were estimated by the full information maximum likelihood estimator in order to make use of all available information, including cases with some missing data (covariance coverage of the data ranged from 66 % to 100 %). Model fit was measured by the χ^2 statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). To assure that non-normality did not affect our results, we reestimated standard errors of the coefficients also by bootstrapping (5,000 random samples with replacement). Likewise, indirect effects were assessed by bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

Measured constructs were treated as fully latent or single-indicator latent variables. First of all, we checked whether the scales were one-dimensional, whether the items had sufficient factor loadings ($> .40$), and whether these factor loadings remained stable over time (measurement invariance), using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Three constructs measured by scales that are not as widely used and which

consist of lower numbers of items (political efficacy, interparental conflict efficacy, and avoidant coping style) were treated as fully latent, with respective items as their indicators. By contrast, five constructs measured by well-established scales with 10 or more items (perceived frequency of interparental conflicts, depressive mood, and three personality traits) were treated as single-indicator latent variables. The single indicators were computed by averaging the scale items, and their error terms were set to account for 1 minus alpha reliability of the variance (Kline, 2005). For depressive mood and perceived frequency of interparental conflicts, we set the alphas to be .90, which was in accordance with our results as well as with previous studies. Alphas for the Big Five personality traits were set according to the national standardization (Hřebíčková & Urbánek, 2001), hence .80 for neuroticism, .80 for extraversion, and .70 for openness.

To test our hypotheses, we estimated a structural model having political efficacy as the dependent variable. The model contained four predictors: perceived frequency of interparental conflicts, interparental conflict efficacy, avoidant coping style, and depressive mood. All predictors were measured at two time points – T1 (age 15) and T2 (age 17) – while political efficacy was measured only at T2. In the first step, we estimated a full model where every predictor at T1 predicted every predictor at T2, every predictor at T2 predicted political efficacy, all predictors at T1 were allowed to intercorrelate, and all error terms of predictors at T2 were allowed to intercorrelate. Then we removed all irrelevant paths and compared the restricted model with the full one by a χ^2 -difference test. By scrutinizing the restricted model, we found out whether paths representing our hypotheses were significant and relevant.

Finally, we tested whether the paths implied by our hypotheses remained significant and relevant after we controlled for personality traits. Since Big Five

personality traits become relatively stable in late adolescence (Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; De Fruyt et al., 2006), we used their measurement at T1 only. Variables representing personality traits were added to the restricted model and were set to predict all predictors at T1 and political efficacy. Then we checked whether adding personality traits changed investigated path coefficients.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Factor analysis confirmed that all measures except for openness had good properties (see Tab. 1). Six items measuring political efficacy formed a one-dimensional scale. Only one factor with an eigenvalue higher than one was extracted by exploratory factor analysis. Moreover, a confirmatory model assuming one latent factor and uncorrelated residuals reached good fit and estimated high factor loadings. The scales measuring interparental conflict efficacy and avoidant coping style proved to be one-dimensional (having uncorrelated residuals), and they retained full measurement invariance over time. The perceived frequency of conflicts scale also appeared to be one-dimensional (some residuals at both times had to be allowed to correlate), and having full measurement invariance. Regarding depressive mood, the scale was one-dimensional (some residuals had to be allowed to correlate) with almost full measurement invariance because intercepts of three items (out of 15) could not be constrained to be the same over time. The neuroticism scale was one-dimensional, having some residuals correlated, and the same was true for extraversion. The latter scale had one item with relatively low factor loading. Openness appeared to be the most problematic scale, having only five items with factor loading above .40, which was reflected in its poor reliability (see the Measures section). Although we used the

nationally standardized measure, all results concerning this scale must be taken very cautiously.

Descriptive statistics

Correlation analysis of summary scales showed that political efficacy was weakly but significantly associated with interparental conflict efficacy, while its association with the perceived frequency of conflicts was even weaker and barely significant. Depressive mood was significantly associated with both interparental conflict perceptions and political efficacy, suggesting that depressive mood is a possible mediator of their relation. This was not true for avoidant coping style, since it correlated with political efficacy but not with interparental conflict frequency or efficacy (see Tab. 2).

Interparental conflict efficacy and political efficacy

The relations between interparental conflict perceptions and political efficacy were tested as a structural model. The full model, containing paths from every T1 predictor to every T2 predictor, and from all T2 predictors to political efficacy, reached an acceptable fit ($\chi^2_{387} = 626.915$; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .04). However, several paths appeared to be weak and non-significant; removal of these paths did not significantly worsen model fit ($\Delta\chi^2_{14} = 10.22$; $p = .75$). Fig. 1 presents this final restricted model ($\chi^2_{401} = 637.131$; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .04). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples brought very similar results. With one exception (see Fig. 1), all paths remained significant at the .05 level when bootstrapped standard errors were employed.

Results suggested that there was significant direct association between interparental conflict efficacy and political efficacy ($\beta = .14$, $p = .03$), controlling for conflict frequency, avoidant coping style, and depressive mood. Moreover, this path

could not be fixed to zero without a significant drop in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2_1 = 4.91$; $p = .03$). Political efficacy was also significantly predicted by depressive mood and avoidant coping style, but not by perceived frequency of interparental conflicts.

Indirect effects of perceived conflict frequency on political efficacy

Perceived conflict frequency at T1 predicted an increase in depressive mood at T2 ($\beta = .12$; $p = .02$), which was significantly associated with political efficacy ($\beta = -.19$; $p < .01$). In other words, people perceiving more interparental conflicts at the age of 15 came to feel more depressive two years later, which was associated with a less efficacious view on community issues. However, the indirect effect was tiny and on the edge of significance. Using bootstrap estimates of 95% bias-corrected standardized confidence intervals, the indirect effect ranged from slightly above .00 to .05.

We found no association between avoidant coping style and perceived frequency of interparental conflict since all paths between them could be removed. In other words, people reporting more interparental conflict did not tend to respond to problems by avoiding them. Therefore, no indirect effect of perceived conflict frequency on political efficacy via avoidant coping style was possible.

Finally, the change in interparental conflict efficacy between T1 and T2 was not predicted by conflict frequency. It means that perceived higher level of interparental conflicts did not cause a drop in interparental conflict efficacy. Thus, there could be no indirect effect between conflict frequency and political efficacy via interparental conflict efficacy.

Personality traits

Finally, we tested whether or not the association between interparental conflict perceptions and political efficacy is spurious, given various personality traits. We

extended the model in Fig. 1 by adding exogenous variables representing three personality traits (measured at T1). In order to retain a reasonable ratio between free parameters and sample size, (1) we removed avoidant coping style, which had no relation to interparental conflict, from the model, and (2) we added personality traits to the model separately; hence we estimated three structural models.

All associations remained unchanged when were controlled for the personality traits. The path from interparental conflict efficacy to political efficacy, and the paths from perceived conflict frequency to depressive mood and from depressive mood to political efficacy, remained significant even when we controlled for personality traits. Neuroticism and extraversion were significantly associated with predictors, but not with political efficacy. On the other hand, openness was significantly associated with political efficacy but not with its predictors (see Tab. 3). These results allow stronger interpretation of discovered predictions of political efficacy.

Discussion

Our study identifies two pathways linking interparental conflict perceptions with political efficacy. First, perceived interparental conflict efficacy is positively associated with political efficacy. Young people who perceive themselves as able to achieve something positive with arguing parents perceive that they have more influence in their communities, as well. One possible explanation is that perceptions of efficacy within the family generalize to perceptions of efficacy in politics, because of similarities between these two contexts arising from the common presence of hierarchy, conflict, and subordinate position of adolescents/citizens. When adolescents think about politics and their roles in that context, their family schemata are activated (similar to the findings on political trust by Gniewosz et al., 2009). However, more in-depth analysis is needed to

uncover the mechanisms and conditions of that possible generalization. Specific perceptions associated with political efficacy should be identified. For example, do adolescents' perceptions that they are not taken seriously by parents/authorities matter? Or do their assessments of their own capabilities, such as negotiating and voicing one's own opinion, play a role? The former perception would be associated with the external aspect of political efficacy, while the latter perception would be associated with the internal aspect. Next, interparental conflict efficacy can be a part of a broader set of adolescents' family perceptions that affect political efficacy as a whole. For instance, further studies should consider so-called 'filial efficacy', understood as adolescents' perceived capacity to communicate and manage difficult situations in parent-child relationships, overreaching the area of interparental conflict (Caprara, Regalia, Scabini, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2004). Moreover, the described effect might be transient and specific for a given age. As adolescents acquire an increasing volume of political information and personal political experience on their way to adulthood, their political efficacy may start to mirror those explicitly political lessons, and become less reliant on nonpolitical schemata.

Another possible explanation for the association between interparental conflict efficacy and political efficacy is that both beliefs are related to some more general personality trait that is already formed at the age of 15 and that makes young people feel effective in managing their environments. We controlled for Big Five personality traits, but other characteristics should be considered (note also that our measure of openness had poor quality). For example, some studies have found that generalized belief in control over person's life, that may be responsible for high conflict efficacy, correlates also with a belief in control over community events (Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, &

Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman, 1990; 1995). Similarly, life optimism is expected to boost both coping with interparental conflict (Robinson, 2009) and political efficacy (Beaumont, 2010). Finally, attachment theory suggests that internal working models, representing young people's general expectations about social relationships, are formed in childhood (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). These models are relatively stable (Hamilton, 2000), and might drive adolescent's efficacy perceptions in both contexts. The examples suggest that greater number of personality variables must be controlled in future studies in order to bring conclusive evidence about the relation between interparental conflict efficacy and political efficacy.

A second pathway concerns the finding that adolescents who perceived frequent conflicts between their parents became more depressed during late adolescence, which in turn was associated with a lower level of political efficacy. The association between depression and low political efficacy makes intuitive sense because depressive mood is characterized by persons' pervasive feelings that negative events are uncontrollable (Abela & Hankin, 2008). Recent studies have found that people with depression are somewhat alienated from the political system: they have lower voter turnout in local election (Lofors & Sundquist, 2007) and trust less in political institutions (Lindstrom & Mohseni, 2009; authors refer to "mental health" that is measured by questions similar to our measurement of depressive mood). Our study helps to explain these findings by revealing that low political efficacy, known to predict low political participation (Zimmerman, 1990; Zukin et al., 2006), may play a role here. Moreover, the results suggest that the developmental origins of increased depressive mood, which affects political efficacy, may be partially found in the negative family events. Specifically, frequent interparental conflicts seem to matter, which is consistent with previous

findings that depressogenic schemata about deficiency of the self and uncontrollability of the world are established in adolescents during such conflicts (Rudolph, Kurlakowsky, & Conley, 2001). It should be noted that the indirect effect from conflict frequency to political efficacy via depressive mood was rather inconclusive in our data. One probable reason is that considerable part of the effect of conflict frequency on depressive mood happens before the age of 15 (O'Donnell et al., 2010). Also, more nuanced measures of depression, focusing solely on its cognitive control-related aspect, could bring more convincing results.

Some of our expectations have not been confirmed. Adolescents who tend to solve problems by avoiding them feel less efficacious in their communities, but their avoidant coping style has not been shown to have a relation to their interparental conflict perceptions. The finding that adolescents from families with frequent interparental conflicts do not acquire an avoidant coping style contradicts some previous studies (e.g., Michael et al., 2007). However, it can be explained by the fact that avoidant coping is not directly influenced by perceived conflict frequency, but depends instead on the adolescent's perception of threat, which does not have to be the same as perceived frequency (Shelton & Harold, 2008). Another unsupported expectation is that adolescents who perceive a high number of interparental conflicts come to feel less efficacious in this area. Although young people who perceive frequent conflicts feel considerably less efficacious, their interparental conflict efficacy is already stable and does not change because of conflict frequency in late adolescence. It is possible that the interparental conflict efficacy is established earlier in adolescence, similarly to some other interparental conflict perceptions, such as perceived self-blame (Richmond & Stocker, 2007).

One remark should be made concerning the political efficacy scale that we employed. As mentioned above, political efficacy is usually understood to be composed of two interrelated beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Although our scale contains items assessing perceptions both of individuals and of the political system, it does not ask explicitly about perceived personal capabilities and resources. Therefore, political efficacy captured by this scale differs from what studies refer to as ‘political self-efficacy’ (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, 2009) or ‘internal political efficacy’ (Beaumont, 2010). Rather, it captures so-called ‘external political efficacy’ (Beaumont, 2010), because it assesses the belief that a person can influence the social system in terms of system responsiveness and opportunities. A more fine-tuned analysis, using various political efficacy scales, is needed.

Our study had several limitations, beyond those already mentioned. First, tested models were not fully longitudinal, as they did not meet all criteria suggested by Cole and Maxwell (2003). Specifically, we did not control for the initial level of political efficacy since it was not measured at T1. Methodologically speaking, presented predictions of political efficacy should be understood in terms of association, rather than causality. Instead of concluding that specific interparental conflict perceptions cause changes in political efficacy, we should conclude that those perceptions are associated with a certain level of political efficacy. Second, our data came from a longitudinal study with considerable dropout (see the Method section); therefore, it is possible that children from families with serious problems systematically dropped the study and thus were not included in the sample (Magnusson, Bergman, Rudinger, & Torestad, 1994). Thus, we should take into account the risk that our study was conducted mostly on adolescents from families with a rather low frequency of interparental conflict, which

would have an impact on the generalizability of the results. Studied effects might be underestimated because of low variance in interparental conflict perceptions. Third, all the effects we found were small; hence they should be taken cautiously until they are confirmed by other studies. Finally, our results cannot be simply related to political behavior since other factors such as perceived norms or behavioral skills come to play along with political efficacy (Glasford, 2008).

The main contribution of the present study is that it offers a broader view of the relation between family and political efficacy. Existing research on the role of parents in political socialization usually focuses on parental political beliefs, values, and political behavior (Jennings, 2004; Zukin et al., 2006). We have broadened this perspective by focusing on adolescents' family experiences that have no explicit political content but can be linked to politics indirectly. If certain family perceptions served as a model for political efficacy, it would give a new meaning to the well-known feminist saying that "the personal is political." The political development of adolescents would not be separate from their family experiences, and private interactions between adolescents and their parents would have more far-reaching consequences than might previously have been expected. Such findings would put more pressure on parents who want to bring up responsible citizens, since not only political discussions, joint civic activities, or political persuasion (Beaumont, 2011), but also seemingly nonpolitical experiences may help to form adolescents' views on politics. It must be noted that our study is only a starting point, and that further in-depth research needs to be conducted. However, it shows a previously unexplored way to better understand adolescents' political development.

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Table 1

Confirmatory factor analysis of the measures.

Measure	N of items	Fit indices			Std. factor loadings		
		χ^2 (df)	CFI	RMSEA	Min	Med	Max
Political efficacy	6	26.80 (9)	.97	.07	.54	.61	.65
Frequency of conflicts*	10 + 10	405.15 (172)	.95	.06	.61	.70	.81
Interpar. con. Efficacy*	5 + 5	83.83 (39)	.95	.05	.51	.60	.75
Depressive mood*	15 + 15	832.19 (406)	.91	.05	.52	.63	.80
Avoidant coping style*	5 + 5	55.38 (39)	.97	.03	.44	.57	.63
Neuroticism	12	97.08 (49)	.95	.06	.43	.53	.71
Extraversion	12	92.79 (49)	.95	.05	.23	.49	.74
Openness	12	98.73 (50)	.85	.06	.05	.31	.62

Note. Min = the lowest standardized factor loading; Med = median standardized factor loading; Max = the highest standardized factor loading.

* Confirmatory models with two correlated latent factors (T1 and T2), and constraining every item to have the same factor loading and intercept at both times were estimated for these measures. Residuals of the same items at different times were allowed to correlate.

Table 2

Summary of intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations for summary scores of political efficacy, perceived interparental conflict frequency, interparental conflict efficacy, depressive mood, and avoidant coping style.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Political efficacy (T2)												
2. Frequency of conflicts (T1)	-.10											
3. Frequency of conflicts (T2)	-.12*	.72**										
4. Interpar. con. Efficacy (T1)	.20**	-.29**	-.29**									
5. Interpar. con. Efficacy (T2)	.16**	-.20**	-.33**	.53**								
6. Depressive mood (T1)	-.17**	.26**	.17**	-.23**	-.19**							
7. Depressive mood (T2)	-.22**	.26**	.23**	-.16**	-.22**	.56**						
8. Avoidant coping style (T1)	-.14*	.03	-.02	-.08	-.10	.18**	.00					
9. Avoidant coping style (T2)	-.15**	.08	.04	-.08	-.12*	.26**	.24**	.55**				
10. Neuroticism (T1)	-.14*	.25**	.20**	-.24**	-.27**	.65**	.48**	.21**	.26**			
11. Extraversion (T1)	.08	-.04	-.06	.22**	.21**	-.26**	-.26**	-.15*	-.15**	-.44**		
12. Openness (T1)	.21**	-.02	.02	.08	.04	.03	.04	-.19**	-.13*	.08	.05	
<i>M</i>	2.63	1.67	1.70	1.94	2.05	1.44	1.58	2.30	2.30	1.67	2.73	2.21
<i>SD</i>	.50	.51	.53	.50	.48	.37	.45	.61	.63	.68	.59	.47

Note. For all scales, higher scores mean more extreme answers in the direction of the construct.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Selected path coefficients and fit statistics of three structural models predicting political efficacy and controlling for neuroticism, extraversion, or openness.

Path	Personality trait added to the model		
	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness
	β	β	β
PT (T1) \rightarrow Dep (T1)	.77**	-.32**	.03
PT (T1) \rightarrow Frq (T1)	.30**	-.06	-.02
PT (T1) \rightarrow ICE (T1)	-.38**	.34**	.12
PT (T1) \rightarrow PE (T2)	.06	.01	.28**
ICE T2 \rightarrow PE (T2)	.14*	.15*	.13*
Frq (T1) \rightarrow Dep (T2)	.13**	.13**	.14**
Dep (T2) \rightarrow PE (T2)	-.20**	-.23**	-.25**
χ^2 (df)	339.09 (183)	345.48 (183)	348.50 (183)
CFI	.93	.92	.92
RMSEA	.04	.05	.05

Note. Completely standardized full information maximum likelihood parameter estimates are reported. PT = Personality trait added to the model; Dep = Depressive mood; Frq = Perceived frequency of interparental conflicts; ICE = Interparental conflict efficacy; PE = Political efficacy.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Structural model predicting political efficacy at T2 from three predictors measured at two time points. Completely standardized full information maximum likelihood parameter estimates are reported. For the sake of clarity, only latent variables and their relations are shown.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

† Path became significant only at the .06 level when bootstrapped standard errors were used.

