CHOCOLATE AND POLITICS: A CROSSNATIONAL, SURVEY-BASED EXPERIMENT ON RECRUITMENT TO A BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN[*]

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Organizations spend millions of dollars to encourage citizens to participate in their campaigns; however, organizations' mobilization effectiveness has been under question. This report uses a survey-based experiment (n = 6,290) to examine the extent to which a friend's versus an organization's endorsement affects people's willingness to boycott chocolate because of the use of child labor. The survey data were gathered in autumn 2019 in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Canada. We find that organizational endorsements are ineffective in influencing a subject's willingness to participate in a boycott. Instead, prompts from friends increase the willingness to participate. Views about chocolate moderate the effectiveness of a friend's endorsement of the boycott. The findings provide insight into the roles of organizations and interpersonal ties in mobilizing citizens to engage in political activities.

People rarely participate in political activities. Many scholars explain this lack of participation in terms of "nobody asked" (Schlozman and Brady 2022; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This theory motivates hundreds of studies (and millions of dollars in campaign spending) related to door-to-door canvassing in elections (see Green, McGrath, and Aronow 2013). There is also a good deal of research on the role of "being asked" in relation to participation in marches and demonstrations (see Walgrave and Wouters 2014). Yet, we know little about the role of "being asked" to participate in everyday political activities, such as boycotting. Jennifer Earl, Lauren Copeland, and Bruce Bimber (2017) argue that boycotts and participation in marches and demonstrations are protest tactics used by social movement organizations, and thus, it makes sense to connect these scholarships. Within the protest scholarship are widespread debates about whether organizations or interpersonal networks are more important in the mobilization process (Earl, Copeland, and Bimber 2017).

This article uses a survey-based experiment to examine the effects of being asked to participate in a boycott. Experiments are advantageous in establishing causality (Mutz 2011) and moving scholarship beyond retrospective self-reports about being asked, which can have problems related to recall. Furthermore, this study examines the important question of whether interpersonal prompts are more effective than organizational prompts in the willingness to engage in boycotts, which is a key theoretical question related to political mobilization. This study is distinctive in considering whether crossnational differences exist concerning the effectiveness of interpersonal versus organizational prompts to participate in politics, offering insight into global patterns of political mobilization. Finally, we examine the nuances concerning the effectiveness of recruitment attempts. We consider a series of moderators of the relationship between being asked by a friend to participate and willingness to participate in a boycott: views about the targeted product, the perceived effectiveness of boycotts, or prior

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knowledge of this real-life boycott campaign. We also find that a friend's endorsement of the boycott campaign is more effective in recruitment for US and English-speaking Canadian subjects than other subjects, offering new insights about international differences in the effectiveness of political mobilization tactics.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROMPTS TO PARTICIPATE

Lisa Neilson and Pamela Paxton's (2010: 19) seminal piece documents the correlation between organizational memberships and political consumerism, explaining that organizations "are a potential source of information about social and environmental issues as well as a source of motivation to take action." A recent meta-analysis of research on political consumerism finds that being a member of an organization was a significant and positive predictor of political consumerism in nineteen studies (Copeland and Boulianne 2022), albeit the research is exclusively based on cross-sectional surveys that cannot establish causality.

To better understand political consumerism, we build on theories and research on protest participation and election campaigns. Alan Schussman and Sarah Soule (2005: 1083) find that being a member of an organization increases the likelihood of being asked to participate and that "being asked to protest is the strongest predictor of participating in protest." When both organizational membership and being asked are included in a model, being asked remains significant, whereas organizational memberships are no longer statistically significant (De Vydt and Ketelaars 2020; Schussman and Soule 2005). Jeroen Van Laer (2017) surveyed a sample of organizational members of four environmental groups in Belgium. In predicting the willingness to participate in a climate protest, he finds both informal (interpersonal ties) and formal (organizations) links matter. However, for actually showing up to the event, informal links are significant, while formal links are not. Eva Anduiza, Camilo Cristancho, and José M. Sabucedo (2014) studied protestors in Spain and found that organizations are less effective in recruitment to protest than personal networks. Dana Fisher and Marije Boekkooi's (2010) study of protestors in the United States suggests personal networks are slightly more important in hearing about demonstrations than organizations, although the most important channel for hearing about protest events is the Internet. The role of organizations merits a re-evaluation with a cross-national (and more representative) sample.

While the effectiveness of organizations' recruitment initiatives is debated within the protest scholarship, door-to-door canvassing is deemed one of the most effective methods of increasing electoral turnout. Donald Green, Mary McGrath, and Peter Aronow (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of these initiatives in the United States, offering conclusive evidence of their effectiveness. Yosef Bhatti et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the effectiveness of door-to-door canvassing in Europe. They find these organizational initiatives are effective, but less so than in the United States due to higher turnout in Europe, cultural differences, and differing political systems (e.g., first-past-the-post versus proportional representation). Again, the findings suggest crossnational differences in the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns.

Outside of election campaigns, political participation may not rely heavily on organizational recruitment. Instead, digital media enable communication through online networks, replacing the need for organizations to coordinate protest events (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; Bennett 2013; Earl, Copeland, and Bimber 2017). In a sample of American respondents, of those who participated in political consumerism, people largely reported participating in self-directed boycotts (72 percent) and *buycotts* (77 percent) instead of organizationally directed campaigns (Earl, Copeland, and Bimber 2017). The authors suggest this could be due to the shift toward self-directed political activism, especially when engaging in political consumerism in the United States. Newer studies suggest that the United States is distinctive in terms of political consumerism and the role of groups and organizations. Shelley Boulianne, Lauren Copeland, and Karolina Koc-Michalska (2024) find that group ties are more

strongly predictive of political consumerism in France and the United Kingdom than in the United States. As such, the effectiveness of organizational prompts in political consumerism may be country specific.

In a systematic review of more than 300 studies on political consumerism, Dawn Yi Lin Chow, Ga-Eun (Grace) Oh, and Amitabh Anand (2022) document the overrepresentation of North America in the existing scholarship and suggest further research consider external factors affecting political consumerism, such as macroeconomic, social, cultural, historical, religious and environmental factors. We offer a modest contribution to this research gap with some insights using a four-country sample with two language groups represented.

INTERPERSONAL PROMPTS TO PARTICIPATE

Using a sample from Sweden, Carolin Zorell and Thomas Denk (2021) find that self-reported "influence from others" is a significant predictor of participating in any type of political consumption activity. Yet, these self-reports are far from conclusive. Drawing on the large body of research on protest, we borrow some of the theoretical claims explaining this correlation. Stefaan Walgrave and Ruud Wouters (2014) offer an extensive review of the literature about being asked to participate in protest and subsequent participation, building on Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) model of protest participation. In particular, the decision to participate is based on (1) agreement with the movement goals, (2) perceptions that participation will be effective, and (3) network influences, such as being asked to participate (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). In a reent iteration of the model, Klandermans and van Stekelenburg (2022: 174) argue that "social networks are indispensable in the processes of mobilization. Individual grievances and feelings are transformed into group-based grievances and feelings within social networks."

Contemporary research affirms the importance of being asked. For example, Michiel de Vydt and Pauline Ketelaars (2020: 13) find "being asked is by far the strongest variable in the model" that predicted intentions to participate in the Grand Parade in Brussels. While they initially offered distinctions about who asked (partner, family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, other students, or members of an organization), they do not analyze these distinctions and instead assess whether anyone asked the respondent to participate. They report that 69 percent of their sample was asked to participate in the protest. In contrast, María Inclán and Paul Almeida's (2017) work finds only twenty-eight percent of their sample of protestors in Mexico City were asked to participate in a demonstration (56 percent were not asked, and sixteen percent could not remember). The probability of being asked and the effectiveness of this recruitment attempt may depend on one's culture.

In relation to protest participation, studies show that strong ties to the person asking one to participate are more effective at recruitment than weak ties to the person (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). In other words, friends would be more effective at recruitment than acquaintances, albeit research is split (see Walgrave and Wouters 2014). Concerning protest, Walgrave and Wouters (2014) argue that being asked to participate is important, not only for one's own mobilization but also because the recipient of the invitation is more likely to extend the invitation to others. Being asked has a direct effect on an individual's participation and an indirect effect within one's personal network as the person spreads the invitation to participate amongst their friends, further expanding participation within the social network. Asking others is important in creating a known other who is also participating in the event. Studies show that people attend marches and demonstrations with others (Doherty and Schraeder 2018; Fisher and Boekkooi 2010). Our primary research question is about the effectiveness of these prompts, and our secondary question is about the robustness of these findings across national contexts:

RQ1: Are prompts from friends more effective than prompts from organizations in increasing the willingness to boycott?

RQ2: Are there crossnational differences in the effectiveness of these prompts in increasing the willingness to boycott?

MODERATED EFFECTS ON THE WILLINGNESS TO BOYCOTT

The perceived effectiveness of an activity is a major factor when deciding to incur the costs (time, resources) associated with participation (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti's (2005) classic work on political consumerism documents a positive correlation between engaging in this political activity and viewing it as effective. This finding is replicated in contemporary work (Kelm and Dohle 2018). We consider whether the perceived efficacy of boycotting influences the willingness to boycott and the effectiveness of prompts to participate.

Several recent experimental studies have been conducted on the willingness to boycott. One study examines the willingness to boycott a tea shop depending on whether the shop supports or does not support same-sex marriage legalization (Wang, Chang, and Chen 2021). The key moderator was one's views about same-sex marriage legalization. If the respondents support the legalization and the tea shop does not, the respondents (n = 177) are, on average, more willing to boycott the tea shop. In another study included in this report (Wang, Chang, and Chen 2021), they altered the information about whether friends and relatives liked/disliked the brand being boycotted to determine how one's social network influences the willingness to boycott. They find that the effectiveness of their manipulation depends on social comparison information. People who do not care about comparing themselves to others will follow their own ideological beliefs when deciding whether to boycott rather than follow the direction of their friends and relatives. In sum, the experiments suggest the effectiveness of boycott pleas will depend on one's views about the target of the boycott, the reason for the boycott (alignment with one's views), and social networks. In other words, the mobilization model replicates two of three elements of Klandermans Dirk Oegema's (1987) model, excluding the efficacy of participation.

Marc Jungblut and Marius Johnen (2021) argue that social network effects are different for boycotting than buycotting campaigns because boycotting is more collective in nature and has a negativity bias (punishing companies). In their experiments, they suggest differential effects when the dependent variable is boycotting versus buycotting intentions. They find people's reactions to corporations taking a political stand will depend on their views about the product targeted by the boycott/buycott campaign. The results of their experiments support these moderated effects. As such, views about the products should be considered when understanding reactions to calls to boycott, adding yet another element to understanding mobilization.

Finally, Cheng Hong and Cong Li (2021) conducted an experiment related to Ben and Jerry's (an ice cream company) position on gun control and people's willingness to boycott or buycott this company. The study is distinctive in using a factual situation and a real brand, which enables them to account for brand loyalty in determining the effectiveness of their stimuli. Hong and Li repeat the approaches of other experiments with respect to considering the effects of one's own views on gun control (support/do not support) as a predictor of willingness to boycott or buycott. Continuing on the theme of social networks, they consider whether or not participants thought most Americans favored (or not) gun control as a moderator of the effect of their manipulation.

Considering this line of research, we also study prior views about the product, prior awareness of a real-life boycott campaign, and perceptions about the efficacy of boycotting as moderators of the effects of recruitment attempts on willingness to boycott. Our third research question is:

RQ3: To what extent does the effectiveness of prompts depend on other factors (efficacy of boycotting, views about the product, prior awareness of the campaign)?

METHODS

This survey-based experiment was administered to an online panel in the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Canada from September to November 2019. The experiment received human-subjects ethics approval prior to data collection (File No. 101662). The survey was funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Grant No. 435-2019-04-94). Given the funding source, the choice of countries is based on Canada being the focal point. The US was chosen as Canada's only neighbor, with the UK and France being founding nations, leaving institutional and cultural legacies. We use a similar case design (Seawright and Gerring 2008) in that we choose countries with similar scores for the macro-indicators that have been often considered in this field of research, such as income inequality and democracy score (see Boulianne, Copeland, and Koc-Michalska 2024; Chow, Oh, and Anand 2022). Freedom House (2021) scores are based on political rights and civil liberties. These scores are consistently high for the four countries: the US (83), the UK (93), France (90), and Canada (98). In terms of income inequality (World Bank 2021), the Gini coefficients for these countries are as follows: the U.S. (41.4 based on 2018 data), the UK (35.1 based on 2017 data), France (32.4 based on 2018 data), and Canada (33.3 based on 2017 data). Considering the global variation in these indicators, these countries are considered similar. However, it is worth noting that the US and Canada are at opposite ends with these values. The US has the lowest democracy scores, Canada has the highest; the US has the highest income inequality, and Canada (and France) have the lowest income inequality.

Kantar was hired to administer the survey to their online panel. Respondents are recruited into the online panel through mobile apps and online spaces. Kantar (2024) uses "a mix of curated partners, media, social channels and loyalty schemes . . . which leads to respondents from dif-ferent cultures, backgrounds, education levels, ages, genders and sexualities." Their online panel has more than 100 million respondents who have agreed to complete surveys. Kantar has been used in other published crossnational surveys (e.g., Kaun, Larsson, and Masso 2024) as well as in survey-based experiments in political communication (e.g., Haugsgjerd, Karlsen, and Steen-Johnsen 2023). Both studies have been published in top journals in the field of sociology and political science.

Kantar uses incentives and rewards for participants, but these incentives and rewards are not attached to this specific project. Per ethics requirements, respondents sign a project-specific consent form affirming that participation is voluntary. Prior to providing the survey data file to a client, Kantar (2024) uses "identity validation, machine AI learning, Honesty Detector, digital fingerprinting technology and in-survey quality controls." For this specific project, they re-moved speedsters and poor-quality respondents prior to sending the data file to the researchers.

Quotas were used to ensure representation of the population in terms of age, education, and sex. Table 1 in the online appendix (see Boulianne and Houle 2024 in the reference section for the link) presents a side-by-side comparison of sample and population statistics. According to the 2016 Canadian census, twenty-three percent of Canadians speak French as their first official language (Canadian Heritage 2019). As such, we included a quota to ensure a similar portion of our sample (374 of 1539 Canadians) completed the survey in French. The data and replication files are available online at the *Figshare* site (see Boulianne 2024 in the references for the link).

Table 1 outlines the different experimental conditions. Table 2 offers a robustness check, demonstrating that the random assignment process produced three groups/samples with similar characteristics for the three conditions. The random assignment process helps rule out spuriousness in the relationship (Mutz 2011) between recruitment prompts and willingness to participate in a boycott.

Table 1. English and French Versions of Different Conditions

Condition 1: Friend Endorsement

Votre meilleur ami vous a demandé de boycotter le chocolat en raison de l'utilisation du travail des enfants par l'industrie chocolatière.	Your best friend asked you to boycott chocolate, because of the industry's use of child labor.
Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous susceptible de participer à un boycott du chocolat en raison du recours au travail des enfants par la filière du cacao ?	How likely are you to participate in a boycott of chocolate because of the cocoa industry's use of child labor?

Condition 2: Organizational Endorsement

L'organisation Ethical Consumer vous a demandé de boycotter le chocolat, en raison de l'utilisation du travail des enfants par l'industrie chocolatière.	Ethical Consumer organization asked you to boycott chocolate, because of the industry's use of child labor.
Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous susceptible de participer à un boycott du chocolat en raison du recours au travail des enfants par la filière du cacao ?	How likely are you to participate in a boycott of chocolate because of the cocoa industry's use of child labor?

Condition 3: No Endorsement

Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous susceptible de participer à un boycott du chocolat en raison du recours au travail des enfants par la filière du cacao?	How likely are you to participate in a boycott of chocolate because of the cocoa industry's use of child labor?

Scale

Pas du tout probable	Not at all likely
Pas vraiment probable	Not very likely
Assez probable	Somewhat likely
Très probable	Very likely
Extrêmement probable	Extremely likely

Table 2. Random Assignment Check

	No Endorsement n = 2098	*Friend Endorsement n = 2097*	*Organizational Endorsement n = 2096*	p-*value*
Like chocolate (Responses: 1 to 5)	3.82 (SD = 1.09)	3.79 (SD = 1.11)	3.79 (SD = 1.12)	.446
Efficacy of boycotts (Responses: 1 to 5)	2.20 (SD = 1.16)	2.23 (SD = 1.18)	2.25 (SD = 1.16)	.393
Awareness of boycott of cocoa industry for the use of child labor (Responses: 0,1)	15%	16%	14%	.337
Females (Responses: males, females)	51%	51%	52%	.666
Age in years (Responses: 18 to 91)	48.42 (SD = 17.30)	48.38 (SD = 17.32)	48.54 (SD = 17.34)	.950
Education (Responses: high school or less, some college, bachelor's degree, more than bachelor's degree)	1.92 (SD = 1.05)	1.99 (SD = 1.06)	1.93 (SD = 1.05)	.088

Experiments are widely criticized for being artificial, particularly those in lab settings. Most survey-based experiments employ fictitious vignettes to examine attitude differences (Mutz 2011). We designed a realistic intervention involving a real organization and political issue. For these reasons, this project has a stronger claim to validity than other types of survey-based experiments using fictitious scenarios. Diana Mutz (2011: 87) argues that "the single most important factor in implementing effective manipulations is probably the length of the experimental treatment . . . keep manipulations short and to the point." Our manipulation is a single sentence.

We chose to examine chocolate given the longstanding call to boycott the cocoa industry's use of child labor for cocoa production in West Africa (Balch 2021; Onishi 2001; Owens 2023; Whoriskey and Siegel 2019). The call to participate in a boycott or buycott may arrive from various groups and organizations, including labor unions, environmental groups, animal rights groups, religious groups, political parties, or consumer organizations. We chose to focus on Ethical Consumer as an organization because this organization has been involved in and advocated for boycott campaigns against the cocoa industry. Furthermore, it is a media company (printed magazine with a supporting digital and social media presence) that promotes sustainable consumption. Their website includes a guide to the ethical consumption of chocolate, which involves avoiding products from companies with unethical practices or environmentally damaging production lines (Wexler 2018). As such, the experimental manipulation is plausible; the organization exists and does advocate for boycotts of certain chocolate brands. This organization is based in the United Kingdom but targets an international and English-speaking audience.

We split the sample into three conditions: being asked to participate by the Ethical Consumer organization, being asked to participate by a friend, and not being asked to participate (see table 1). Our survey question is, "How likely are you to participate in a boycott of chocolate because of the cocoa industry's use of child labor?" We offered the following response categories: not at all likely (1), not very likely (2), somewhat likely (3), very likely (4), and extremely likely (5).

We focus on child labor, a simplistic issue compared to other rationales for political consumerism. For example, Chih-Chien Wang, Shu-Chen Chang, and Pei-Yeng Chen (2021) consider same-sex marriage legalization in Taiwan, which is an issue with two sides. Jungblut and Johnen (2021) consider gun control (also Hong and Li 2021) and the border wall in the United States, which are also issues with two competing sides. In contrast, our issue concerns child labor, which is far less contentious. We focus on boycotting instead of buycotting, following Jungblut and Johnen's claim that social networks matter more for boycott campaigns than buycott campaigns.

Moving scholarship forward, we sought to examine whether the effectiveness of organizations and interpersonal prompts depends on various factors (RQ3). First, we examine whether prior awareness of the campaign impacts the effectiveness of these prompts. We asked respondents whether they had heard of the campaign to boycott the cocoa industry for the use of child labor. This question is important because prior knowledge of the campaign could impact the effectiveness of the various manipulations. Second, we consider whether the effectiveness of the prompts depends on views about the target—chocolate. We stated, "We would like to know how much you like chocolate." The response options were 1 (not at all), 2 (a little), 3 (a moderate amount), 4 (a lot), and 5 (a great deal). Third, we account for the perceived efficacy of boycotting. We asked, "For each activity, could you tell me whether or not you think this activity is effective for influencing political leaders? d) Joining in boycotts." Respondents were given a response scale as follows: 1 (not at all), 2 (a little), 3 (a moderate amount), 4 (a lot), and 5 (a great deal). As described above, we examine whether perceptions about the efficacy of this activity influence willingness to engage in boycotts, and whether these perceptions moderate the effects of the prompts.

Based on reviewer feedback, we also tested an alternative measure of efficacy, which focuses on influencing businesses. We asked, "In general, how much of an effect do you believe your buying decisions have on changing the behavior of businesses?" The response options are

the same as the measures listed above. This measure does not mention boycotting per se, but a reviewer asked that the results be presented for readers to consider. As such, all of the analyses were repeated using the alternative measure of efficacy (Boulianne and Houle 2024). This alternative measure of efficacy (which does not mention boycotting) produces the same results as the measure that asks explicitly about the efficacy of boycotting.

RESULTS

Table 3 displays the average scores on the willingness to participate in a boycott of chocolate. Pooling results across the various samples, we find those prompted with a friend's endorsement of the campaign are more willing to participate in the boycott (M = 2.76) compared to those who did not receive an endorsement (M = 2.62) or received an endorsement from an organization (M = 2.67). We conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the three averages and report on the statistical significance of the F-test. The difference between the three averages is statistically significant (p = .001). However, the largest difference is clearly in relation to being asked by a friend (2.76 vs. 2.62/2.67), which increased the willingness to boycott chocolate (see the regression analysis for further clarity about this point).

We also find crossnational differences in the effectiveness of the endorsements (RQ2). Again, we conducted an ANOVA within each country. The results show significant effects of endorsements for the American sample (p = .004) and English-speaking Canadian sample (p < .001), but not the sample from France (p = .301) or French-speaking Canadian sample (p = .623). The ANOVA F-test considers differences in the three averages: the control group, the organizational-endorsement group, and the friend-endorsement group. Using this analytical approach, the United Kingdom sample does not show significant effects (p = .074); however, looking specifically at the friend-endorsement group, we find that the experiment increases the willingness to participate (see regression analysis). The control group and the organizational endorsement condition do not differ in the United Kingdom sample. In sum, the experiment's effects are strongest in English-speaking Canada and the United States.

Table 3. Willingness to Boycott Chocolate

	No endorsement	Friend endorsement	Organizational endorsement	p-*value*
All countries n = 6290	2.62 (SD = 1.20)	2.76 (SD = 1.20)	2.67 (SD = 1.23)	.001
United States n = 1700	2.43 (SD = 1.18)	2.66 (SD = 1.21)	2.60 (SD = 1.30)	.004
United Kingdom n = 1542	2.60 (SD = 1.21)	2.75 (SD = 1.22)	2.61 (SD = 1.14)	.074
France n = 1509	2.91 (SD = 1.16)	2.80 (SD = 1.20)	2.83 (SD = 1.26)	.301
Canada (English) n = 1165	2.59 (SD = 1.23)	2.91 (SD = 1.15)	2.66 (SD = 1.15)	<.001
Canada (French) n = 374	2.57 (SD = 1.08)	2.71 (SD = 1.19)	2.62 (SD = 1.25)	.623

Table 4 summarizes the results from an ordinary least squares (OLS) multivariate regression on the willingness to participate in a chocolate boycott. The table displays the effects of the treatments (friend endorsement and organizational endorsement) compared to no-endorsement (reference category). The coefficients indicate the change in the averages when compared to the no-endorsement condition. As model 1 indicates, compared to no-endorsement,

subjects receiving the friend endorsement treatment express a greater willingness to participate in a chocolate boycott (b = 0.139, p < .001). In contrast, the organizational endorsement condition does not have a significant effect compared to receiving no endorsement (b = 0.046, p = .220). The findings replicate the results in table 3 (bivariate analysis).

The same pattern of treatment effects remains after controlling for country and moderators (table 4, model 2). Adding country and moderators significantly increases the explained variance of the model from .002 to .149. Compared to the United States (reference group), subjects in other countries are more willing to boycott chocolate. French speakers in Canada are the exception, as they do not significantly differ from American respondents' willingness to boycott chocolate (b = 0.119, p = .066).

As for the moderators, the three variables are significant predictors of willingness to boycott chocolate after controlling for the experimental conditions and country. Liking chocolate, being aware of the campaign, and the perceived efficacy of boycotting increase people's willingness to participate in a boycott of chocolate.

Table 4. Multivariate Analysis of Experimental Effects on Willingness to Boycott Chocolate

	Model 1			*Model 2*		
	b	*SE*	p-*value*	*b*	*SE*	p-*value*
Model 1: Experiment (Reference: no endorsement)						
Friend endorsement	0.139	0.037	<.001	0.150	0.035	<.001
Organization	0.046	0.037	.220	0.043	0.035	.216
R-square, sample size		.002	6291			
Model 2: Experiment + Moderators (Reference: United States)						
United Kingdom				0.126	0.040	.002
France				0.271	0.040	<.001
Canada (English)				0.146	0.043	.001
Canada (French)				0.119	0.065	.066
Like chocolate				0.036	0.013	.005
Awareness of boycott				0.418	0.041	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts				0.336	0.013	<.001
R-square, sample size					.149	6092

Table 5 includes a country-specific analysis to help understand the crossnational differences in the effectiveness of recruitment attempts. In a multivariate analysis by country, we do not find that the organizational prompt significantly increases willingness to participate in the boycott (except in the United States; b = 0.185, p = .006). As observed in other results, the friend endorsement condition is most effective in influencing English-speaking Canadians (b = 0.342, p < .001) and respondents from the United States (b = 0.231, p = .001). In these models, the effect of the interpersonal prompt is statistically significant (b = 0.158, p = .026) in the United Kingdom (in contrast to the ANOVA analysis in table 3). Finally, these country-specific results show France and French-speaking Canada are distinctive groups. In France, the endorsement from a friend decreases willingness to participate in the boycott (b = -0.097, p = .182), which is in sharp contrast to other countries where a friend's endorsement of the campaign increases willingness to participate. However, the difference does not reach statistical significance. We noted this identical pattern in table 3 (ANOVA analysis). In the case of French-speaking Canadians, a friend's endorsement does not significantly affect willingness to boycott (b = 0.186, p = .189).

Table 5. Multivariate Analysis of Experimental Effects on Willingness to Boycott Chocolate by Country

United States	*b*	*SE*	*p*-value
Friend endorsement	0.231	0.067	.001
Organization endorsement	0.185	0.067	.006
Like chocolate	0.065	0.023	.006
Awareness of boycott	0.474	0.087	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts	0.396	0.024	<.001
R-square, sample size		.199	1646
United Kingdom	*b*	*SE*	*p*-value
Friend endorsement	0.158	0.071	.026
Organization endorsement	-0.003	0.070	.970
Like chocolate	-0.010	0.026	.698
Awareness of boycott	0.429	0.087	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts	0.350	0.026	<.001
R-square, sample size		.143	1479
France	*b*	*SE*	*p*-value
Friend endorsement	-0.097	0.072	.182
Organization endorsement	-0.087	0.072	.229
Like chocolate	0.038	0.029	.196
Awareness of boycott	0.445	0.077	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts	0.271	0.024	<.001
R-square, sample size		.112	1480
Canada (English)	*b*	*SE*	*p*-value
Friend endorsement	0.342	0.082	<.001
Organization endorsement	0.077	0.080	.337
Like chocolate	0.057	0.029	.048
Awareness of boycott	0.391	0.092	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts	0.316	0.031	<.001
R-square, sample size		.138	1124
Canada (French)	*b*	*SE*	*p*-value
Friend endorsement	0.186	0.141	.189
Organization endorsement	0.010	0.147	.944
Like chocolate	-0.009	0.058	.878
Awareness of boycott	0.077	0.184	.674
Efficacy of boycotts	0.353	0.051	<.001
R-square, sample size		.131	363

To identify the extent to which the endorsements depend on other factors, we introduced a series of interaction terms composed of friend-endorsement treatment with, respectively, liking chocolate, the perceived efficacy of boycotting, prior knowledge about the campaign, and country (table 6). As model 1 (table 6) shows, the interaction between the friend-endorsement and liking chocolate is significant and negative (b = -0.059, p = .030), meaning that, for the people who love chocolate, a friend's endorsement of boycotting chocolate is slightly less effective. Prior awareness of the campaign (model 2, b = -0.163, p = .056) and perceived effectiveness of boycotting (model 3, b = 0.024, p = .346) do not significantly alter the effects of a friend's endorsement on willingness to boycott (the main effects are significant as noted above in relation to table 4). Finally, as observed in tables 3 and 5, the friend-condition is more persuasive for English-speaking Canadians (model 4, b = 0.211, p = .008) than for other subjects included in the experiment.

Table 6. Differing Effectiveness of Friend Endorsement

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*
Friend endorsement	0.376	0.110	.001	0.175	0.037	<.001	0.096	0.067	.151	0.113	0.038	.003
Organization endorsement	0.044	0.035	.208	0.044	0.035	.213	0.044	0.035	.212	0.043	0.035	.217
United Kingdom	0.126	0.040	.002	0.125	0.040	.002	0.126	0.040	.002	0.126	0.040	.002
France	0.270	0.040	<.001	0.271	0.040	<.001	0.271	0.040	<.001	0.271	0.040	<.001
Canada (English)	0.145	0.043	.001	0.144	0.043	.001	0.146	0.043	.001	0.080	0.050	.111
Canada (French)	0.121	0.065	.061	0.120	0.065	.065	0.120	0.065	.063	0.121	0.065	.062
Like chocolate	0.056	0.016	<.001	0.036	0.013	.006	0.036	0.013	.005	0.036	0.013	.005
Boycott awareness	0.417	0.041	<.001	0.474	0.051	<.001	0.417	0.041	<.001	0.420	0.041	<.001
Efficacy of boycotts	0.336	0.013	<.001	0.337	0.013	<.001	0.328	0.015	<.001	0.336	0.013	<.001
Interaction Effects												
Friend × Like chocolate	-0.059	0.027	.030									
Friend × Boycott awareness				-0.163	0.085	0.056						
Friend × Efficacy							0.024	0.026	0.346			
Friend × Canada (English)										0.211	0.079	0.008
R-square, sample size		.150	6093		.150	6093		.149	6093		.150	6093

DISCUSSION

Neilson and Paxton (2010) examine the role of social networks in political consumerism, explaining the importance of social ties for increasing awareness and motivation to participate in efforts towards social change. We offer insights into the role of social networks in political behavior using a survey-based experiment to examine whether friends or organizations are more effective in increasing the willingness to participate in political consumerism. Overall, people who receive a prompt from a friend to boycott are more willing to participate than those who receive a prompt from an organization (RQ1), albeit the effect sizes are small.

Organizations effectively influence subjects in the United States (table 5) but not in other countries. In contrast, correlational analysis suggests following social groups (on social media) predicts political consumerism in the United States, United Kingdom, and France (Boulianne, Copeland, and Koc-Michalska 2024). This study also suggested groups may be less effective in mobilizing citizens to participate in political consumerism in the United States compared to the United Kingdom and France (versus the current study suggesting the opposite). The cross-national variations in the effectiveness of organizations merit additional attention. Earl, Copeland, and Bimber (2017: 142) report that only eight percent of their sample boycotted because of organizationally directed campaigns; they suggest this is because today's political consumer is entrepreneurial, may distrust the government and organizations, and can use digital media to make their own self-directed consumer choices. While organizational prompts may be effective in the United States (see table 5), citizens rarely report engaging in boycotts led by an organization.

As noted, Boulianne, Copeland, and Koc-Michalska (2024) use a three-country sample (United States, United Kingdom, France) to explore the role of social groups in political consumerism. The present experiment adds a fourth country (Canada), which helps to untangle crossnational variations related to the effectiveness of interpersonal versus organizational prompts to participate. The English-speaking Canadian sample reacts similarly to the American sample, meaning interpersonal prompts are more effective than organizational prompts.

While the United Kingdom sample is also English speaking, this sample did not respond to the organizational prompt. In particular, the averages are identical for the no-endorsement control condition and for the organizational endorsement. This finding is surprising, considering the organization in this experiment (Ethical Consumer) is based in the United Kingdom. Further research should investigate whether this organization has low credibility in the United Kingdom, which would explain the null effects in that country.

In the United Kingdom, United States, and English-speaking Canada, interpersonal prompts effectively increase willingness to participate (table 5, RQ2). France and French-speaking Canada offer some unusual findings. In all countries, a friend's endorsement of the campaign increases willingness to participate compared to the control (no endorsement) condition. However, for France, being exposed to the prompt from a friend decreases, on average, the willingness to participate. This set of findings implies that social network effects may operate differently in these four countries and across language groups in the different countries.

We consider several explanations to explain the distinct effects in France and French-speaking Canada. First, one could argue that respondents in France feel quite passionate about French chocolate, making them impervious to attempts to manipulate the consumption of chocolate. However, this explanation is not plausible given the high averages for willingness to boycott (table 3, M = 2.91) for respondents from France compared to other countries. In the absence of recruitment attempts, respondents from France are more willing, on average, to boycott chocolate. A second possible explanation could be an error in the translation, which also seems unlikely because the French-speaking groups react differently to the experiment. Being prompted by a friend to boycott decreases willingness to participate in a boycott among respondents in France yet slightly increases willingness to participate in a boycott among Canadians respondents who are French speaking (albeit neither effect reaches statistical significance). French-speaking respondents in Canada demonstrate a similar pattern to other countries, but perhaps due to the smaller sample size (n = 374), the effect is not statistically significant. A third and most plausible explanation relates to a combination of culture (aside from language) and country differences. Perhaps people in French-speaking cultures are more resistant to social influence. As noted, Wang, Chang, and Chen (2021) found that the effectiveness of their manipulation depended on social comparison information; perhaps French-speaking cultures care less about following the direction of their friends and relatives. In France, this resistance to social influence may decrease willingness to participate, whereas, in French-speaking Canada, it merely reduces the effect size of social influence.

Existing scholarship suggests that income inequality and democracy scores are positive predictors of participation in political consumerism (Boulianne, Copeland, and Koc-Michalska 2024; Chow, Oh, and Anand 2022). Based on these macrolevel indicators, we would expect the US respondents to report lower levels of political consumerism than other groups of respondents. Aside from French-speaking Canadians, the other groups express greater willingness to boycott than US respondents. However, in terms of our experiment, these contextual factors do not explain the pattern of effects. While the U.S. and Canada differ in income inequality and democracy scores, they respond similarly to the experiment. The effects are similar in the U.S. and English-speaking Canada (RQ2). Instead, the key distinctions seem to relate to language, as noted in the prior paragraph.

In a study of social influence on political behavior, Bruce Bimber and Homero Gil de Zúñiga (2022) measured whether the respondents were aware of others' political activities (for related experiments, see Bond et al. 2017 and Haenschen 2016). These studies fall under the domain of social network effects on political behavior. They note that the literature in this field

is based "on experimental studies of single behaviors in one country" (Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga 2022: 135; e.g., Bond et al. 2017). Using a crossnational survey, they find that "social influence on political behavior has a high degree of context independence, despite falling somewhat short of being thoroughly universal" (136). Our study includes one country from their list of countries demonstrating large effects of social influence on political consumerism (United Kingdom) and one from their list of countries showing null effects (United States). In other words, in their nineteen countries, the United Kingdom exhibited a large social influence on political consumerism, and the United States was among the countries with the lowest effects related to political consumerism. Neither Canada nor France is included in their survey. We find both the United States and the United Kingdom exhibit social network effects (i.e., interpersonal prompts increase participation). In contrast to self-reports, this experiment finds strong differences in the role of social networks on political behavior across samples.

Studies of interpersonal influence on political consumerism have rarely been conducted. Zorell and Denk (2021) find people are more likely to report being influenced by others to participate in political consumerism in their sample of Swedish citizens. However, the finding is correlational and relies on self-reports about the motivation to participate. As noted in relation to Earl, Copeland, and Bimber (2017) versus the current study versus Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga (2022), self-reports offer different findings than experiments. Yet, the role of "being asked" to participate in political participation is well-supported in studies of protest (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; De Vydt and Ketelaars 2020; Schussman and Soule 2005; Walgrave and Wouters 2014) and elections (Bhatti et al. 2016; Green, McGrath, and Aronow 2013). We contribute towards understanding the conditions under which being asked to participate has a greater impact on citizens' participation.

These findings have implications for mobilization practices of social and political campaigns. In particular, friends and interpersonal social networks are important for mobilization. Social media help create and sustain these interpersonal networks, and, as such, can be critical tools for mobilization. People can use social media to mobilize their friends to participate in political consumerism, as illustrated in a cross-sectional survey of Canadians (Boulianne 2022). Also, social media communication can span borders, and thus, campaigns need to consider what type of messaging might influence people in different parts of the world. In particular, there may be more effective methods to mobilize participants in France than friends and interpersonal ties. Campaigns need to consider alternative messaging to persuade respondents in France to join a boycott campaign. While our study is limited to only four countries and two language groups, we suggest that further research consider more languages and countries to understand mobilization strategies for global campaigns.

Finally, the small effect sizes are based on a single sentence presented to respondents. While we find a significant effect, it is likely temporary. Instead, mobilization campaigns should consider findings from advertising research. A meta-analysis of advertising research suggests that respondents are persuaded by at least eight exposures (Schmidt and Eisend 2015). In the context of this experiment, we would need to expose respondents to the prompts at least eight times to effectively change boycotting in the long term.

We examine how opinions about the target of activism (chocolate) interact with a recruitment attempt (RQ3). Those who like chocolate are less affected by a friend's prompt to boycott chocolate (see table 6). We might extend this finding to other forms of activism. Requests to participate in protests directed at corporations or governments will depend on how the protest is framed. For example, if a protest or election campaign is framed in terms of environmental issues, a person will be more responsive to the recruitment attempt if they care about the environment. The recruitment attempt will be less effective if they do not care about the environment. As mentioned, previous research identifies pre-existing attitudes as a factor that can affect people's willingness to engage in political consumerism (Hong and Li 2021; Jungblut and Johnen 2021; Wang, Chang, and Chen 2021). This implies that, even with a friend's encouragement, people will participate if their views align with the cause, as noted by Klandermans and Oegema (1987).

Being aware of the boycott campaign and one's perception of the efficacy of boycotts have a significant impact on people's willingness to boycott. Still, these variables do not impact the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation (RQ3). In other words, being aware of the campaign increases the likelihood of participating but does not influence the effectiveness of recruitment attempts. People are more willing to boycott if they think boycotting is an effective way to influence the government (Kelm and Dohle 2018; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005), but views about the efficacy of this activity do not alter the effects of recruitment attempts.

In sum, this experiment contributes to scholarship about the role of social networks in political behavior, engaging debates about whether organizations still matter. In particular, the effectiveness of organizational recruitment efforts pale compared to interpersonal influences. However, organizational prompts cannot be completely dismissed; their effectiveness may depend on social context (country). In particular, further crossnational research will help examine how organizations matter and for what types of political activities. Our results suggest interpersonal networks will matter more for recruitment than organizational efforts, particularly related to noninstitutionalized forms of political participation. The findings from this experiment on political consumerism align with the results from self-reported data coming from surveys of protestors (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; Van Laer 2017).

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