

## **Do it yourself or do it together? Investigating various factors behind individual and collective action preferences for combating climate change**

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The purpose of this research was to investigate factors influencing the preferences for reducing the negative effects of climate change by engagement in different types of actions: volunteerism and environmental activism. Different forms of environmentally significant behavior have been empirically distinguished in the literature and these forms can range from individual private-sphere behaviors to the support for collective movements (e.g., Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalot, 1999). Fostering changes in people's private-sphere behaviors (e.g., separate waste collection) has been primarily in the focus of research, however, more and more works draw attention to the structural and institutional obstacles in changing pro-environmental behavior at the individual level (Alisat & Riemer, 2015). Indeed, some scholars suggest that environmental civic activism is the most efficient way for reducing harmful ecological impacts (Rouser-Renouf, Maibach, Leiserowitz, & Zhao, 2014). Thus, there is a growing importance of identifying and differentiating factors behind individual and collective action preferences for battling with climate change.

In an online questionnaire study data from 295 Hungarian students were collected. Respondents were asked to express their preferences for supporting organizations that either foster people's lifestyle change (focusing on individual actions) or urge civic/political actions (focusing on collective actions) in curbing climate change. These preferences could be indicated on bipolar scales for four volunteer activities (e.g., volunteering or donating money for that organization) and for four activist actions (e.g., petitioning or protesting). An example item for the latter was as follows: *I would participate in a street protest organized by an association that addresses climate change by encouraging people to change their lifestyles (consume and travel less, recycle, etc.)* (1) ... *putting political pressure on leaders to set policies that guarantee environmental sustainability* (6). Preferences for fighting against climate change by encouraging either individual or collective actions served as our dependent variables, computed separately for volunteerism and activism. Respondents also indicated the followings:

- their personal inclinations for changing their own lifestyles as well as for engaging in civic/political actions to address climate change (i.e., personal change and civic action intention, respectively);
- the extent of considering efficacy as well as moral aspects behind their expressed preferences (i.e., perceived successfulness and ethical appropriateness of options);
- their emotions regarding climate change (i.e., empathy with those affected, hope for change, and negative emotions, such as worry);
- the importance of being an environmentally conscious person as well as being a supporter of collective actions in respondents' own identity (i.e., private-sphere and activist identity, respectively);
- their agreement with the statements of Consideration of Future Consequences scale.

The responses for these measures were used as predictors for individual and collective action preferences (please note that for these outcomes – based on the bipolar scales mentioned above – higher means refer to stronger preferences for collective actions). Regression analyses indicated that in case of volunteerism, preferences for either individual or collective actions were predicted by activist identity ( $\beta = .26, p < .001$ ), civic action intention ( $\beta = .17, p = .01$ ), and moral considerations in choosing different options for supporting either individual or collective actions ( $\beta = -.25, p < .001$ ),  $R^2 = .21, F(11, 280) = 6.68, p < .001$ . In case of activism, preferences for either individual or collective actions were again predicted by activist identity ( $\beta = .18, p = .02$ ), civic action intention ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ), and moral considerations in choosing different options for supporting either individual or collective actions ( $\beta = -.24, p < .001$ ). In addition, in case of activism, preferences were also predicted by perceived efficacy ( $\beta = .12, p = .04$ ),  $R^2 = .20, F(11, 280) = 6.38, p < .001$ . No other predictors had a significant effect on the preferences measured in the study.

These findings suggest that the higher one's personal strength of activist identity and the civic action intention in combating climate change were, the stronger the preference for collective actions aimed to curb climate change was in case of both types of the examined behavior (i.e., volunteering and environmental activism). However, the application of moral aspects in choosing different options for supporting either individual or collective actions to combat climate change weakened the preferences for social change collective action regarding both volunteerism and activism. That is, applying moral aspects seemed to set the focus on the appropriateness of individuals' lifestyles and strengthened the preference for encouraging individual actions aimed to address climate change. In addition, efficacy was a predictor only for environmental activism (and not for volunteerism): applying efficacy aspects in choosing different options for supporting either individual or collective actions to combat climate change was positively related to the preference for collective actions. Results imply that in various campaigns emphasizing moral aspects of the climate crisis can promote individual actions, while strengthening activist identity and civic action intentions can promote collective actions in fighting against climate change in both volunteer and civic activities. Moreover, emphasizing also the efficacy aspects of activism can mobilize people for acting collectively in combating the negative effects of climate change, and by doing so the efficacy of environmental civic activism can be increased.

*Keywords:* pro-environmental behavior; climate change; environmental activist identity; individual and collective actions; efficacy; morality.

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