

Research article

In the name of democracy: The value of democracy explains leniency towards wrongdoings as a function of group political organization

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Abstract

According to the “democracy-as-value” hypothesis, democracy has become an ideological belief system providing social value to democratic individuals, groups and institutions, granting legitimacy to their actions (even if dishonest or violent), and protecting them from consecutive punishments. The present research investigates the extent to which this legitimizing process is based on the individual endorsement of democratic principles. Across four experiments, following the misdeed of a (few) group member(s), respondents who valued democratic group organization and democracy in general expressed more lenient retributive justice judgments towards democratic (as compared with nondemocratic) offender groups. These findings shed light on the ways in which democratic ideology infuses justice judgments. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

While democracy is not yet universally practiced, nor indeed uniformly accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right. (Sen, 1999, p. 3)

Democracy [...] is often used as an elastic synonym for good government, stretching to include whatever is desirable in a state. (Post, 2006, p. 24)

In contemporary Western societies, democracy has acquired an ideological aura that goes well beyond its original significance in terms of the direct political participation of the members of a society. Democratic features such as every citizen's right to voice, freedom and equality are not simply descriptive characteristics but are perceived as the morally right way for a group to organize. Furthermore, there is also a consensus among scholars from different fields that democracy cannot be reduced to a set of procedures but implies the respect of certain values (Bonvin, 2005; Brettschneider, 2006; Post, 2006; Sen, 1999). As a result, “people are embracing democracy not only as a system of government, but also as a value” (McFaul, 2004, p. 152). As a consequence, it is likely that the value ascribed to the democratic political system infuses judgments related to actions carried out by democratic groups, leading to perceptions of a higher legitimacy of those actions (no matter their moral nature)—this is the general idea we tackle in this research.

Evidence for this reasoning comes from research based on the democracy-as-value hypothesis, which states that

democracy constitutes an ideological belief system providing in and by itself value to democratic actors and legitimacy to their actions (Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira, Staerklé, & Butera, 2012; Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Pereira, & Butera, 2012). A series of empirical studies has shown that intergroup aggressions and military interventions were perceived as less illegitimate when the offenders belong to a democratic group, rather than a nondemocratic one, specifically when the victim group was nondemocratic (Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Depuiset, & Butera, 2005; see also Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, et al., 2012). Furthermore, this pattern of findings was replicated on the support for the collective punishment of the offender group: the collective punishment of a democratic group whose victim was nondemocratic was less acceptable than all other combinations of aggressor and victim groups (Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, Depuiset, & Butera, 2007; see also Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira, et al., 2012). These results indicate that not only does democracy provide legitimacy to wrongful actions such as aggressive and belligerent acts, it also protects democratic offender groups from punishment. Furthermore, this effect was mediated by the offender group's perceived moral value (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2007), supporting the suggestion that democratic groups are more valued than nondemocratic ones and that this value provides legitimacy to their wrongful behaviors.

Although these findings provide consistent support for the democracy-as-value hypothesis, the crucial role of the value ascribed to democracy as a general principle remains largely unexplored. Specifically, in order to demonstrate that democracy acts as a value people strive to defend through their

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retributive judgments, it should be clearly established that such effects are driven by the individual's attribution of social and moral value to democracy. That said, to date, no study has demonstrated the central role of one's personal valorization of democracy per se in these effects. While previous findings showed that democratic offender groups were overall perceived as being endowed with greater moral value (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2007), the present research focuses on the individual-level antecedents of this positive valence. Thus, we want to demonstrate that when people think highly of a democratic offender group, they do so because they value democracy as a general principle that infuses perceptions and judgments of both democratic and nondemocratic groups. In sum, the present research aimed at testing the central idea that the effect of a group's political organization on retributive justice judgments is fueled by the value people ascribe to democracy as such.

DEMOCRACY AS A VALUE

In the present research, we argue that the protective and legitimizing power of democracy comes from its intrinsic value and that democracy is a value in itself. If democracy is a value, then the processes specific to the upholding of values should apply to the concept of democracy just as they apply to other values. For instance, it is to be expected that the endorsement of the value of democracy should shape judgments related to democratic actors and actions.

This expectation is rooted in research indicating that justice judgments are affected by the values observers endorse (e.g., Green, Staerklé, & Sears, 2006; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997). For instance, judgments of deservingness and punishments are shaped by the perception of the target's morality, which is inferred from the consistency between the target's behavior and the perceiver's values (Feather, 1996, 1999). Moreover, wrongdoings that do not clash with one's values are judged with leniency, whereas those that do are harshly judged. These effects are the result of a *judgmental value expression*, a process according to which values are able to serve as references in the normative evaluation of behaviors and outcomes (Henry & Reyna, 2007). Moreover, these effects are in line with the justice motive theory (Lerner, 1977) and the perceptual theory of legitimacy (Crandall & Beasley, 2001) according to which people attempt to establish balanced structures between the characteristics of a situation—such as perpetrators, victims and outcomes—and justice judgments. Hence, the value of democracy may serve as a benchmark in judgments related to democratic and nondemocratic groups: The former should be perceived as upholding the value of democracy, whereas the latter should be seen as violating it (Staerklé, 2009), and the subsequent judgments should be in line with these perceptions (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005, 2007). As a result, we should expect retributive judgments following the observation of a wrongdoing to be polarized such that democratic groups should be punished with leniency, while nondemocratic groups should be punished more severely.

That being said, research on expectancy-violation theory (Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987) and the subjective group

dynamics model (Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001) would lead to opposite expectations. Indeed, according to these theories, judgments regarding democratic perpetrator groups should actually be harsher than those of nondemocratic groups, because democratic offending groups would have violated the higher expectations to which they are held or because their misbehavior represents a greater threat to democratic norms. However, other studies have shown that harsher judgments towards valued perpetrators occur only when the circumstances of the misdeed do not allow perceivers to minimize its severity. For instance, it has been shown that more lenient judgments towards valued perpetrators are supported as long as it is possible to do so (van Prooijen, 2006, 2010), and in the case of (non)democratic offending groups, it appears that democratic groups are only inflicted harsher punishments when their collective responsibility is outlined and made clear (Pereira, Berent, Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé, & Butera, 2015). Given that the present research focuses on situations that allow for the minimization of the wrongdoing (following Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005, 2007), we expect the leniency rather than the expectancy-violation effect to emerge.

May it be a leniency or a harshness effect, in order for a value to shape one's retributive judgments, it is necessary that one endorses this value *personally*. Indeed, even though they are likely to be widely shared, values are not absolute and are endorsed to different degrees by different people. For this reason, a relative leniency towards democratic groups and greater punitiveness towards nondemocratic groups should be observed mainly among people who personally endorse the value of democracy. Conversely, such effects should be reduced among people who attach less importance to democracy as a value, because this distinction based on the group's organization is less likely to emerge. By investigating this moderation for the first time, the present research provides a better understanding of the processes underlying the effect of the political organization of perpetrator groups on judgments of collective punishment, arguing that it is the valorization of democracy as a general value that infuses such judgments.

OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

If it is indeed the value of democracy that drives justice judgments, we can hypothesize that one's valorization of democracy should moderate the effect of an offender group's political organization on justice judgments. Specifically, when it comes to support for collective punishment, we predict that the judgmental bias in favor of democratic groups (or in disfavor of nondemocratic ones) should increase along with people's valorization of democracy.

Four studies were carried out in order to examine the nature of the processes underlying the legitimizing function of democracy by attempting to demonstrate the crucial role of the endorsement of democracy as a value. In all four studies, participants were presented with an offense committed by one (or a few) member(s) of a given group and subsequently had to indicate the extent to which they would support the punishment of the entire group. The political organization of the perpetrator group was manipulated in all studies. Following prior

research (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005; 2007), we chose to focus our conceptualization of democracy on two key procedural features of a democratic organization: free elections of group leaders and the collective deliberative process. The valorization of democracy was measured as an individual difference variable. Given that values reflect beliefs and preferences about desirable modes of conduct (Maio & Olson, 1994; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz, 1992), valorization of democracy should indeed lead to a preference for a democratic group organization over a nondemocratic one in actual intergroup contexts. Furthermore, in order to make valorization of democracy as concrete as possible for respondents and to restrict its measurement to the main dimension of concern here (namely group organization), it was assessed with a proximal measure of preference for (non)democratic group organization in Studies 1–3. In order to show that the effects under study were equally dependent on more abstract ideals, a distal and more traditional measure of valorization of democracy as a political system was used in Study 4.

In order to provide external validity to our findings, different offenses (i.e., vandalism and student plagiarism) and measures of the central constructs (valorization of democracy and support for collective punishment) were used throughout the experiments. Moreover, the offenses targeted a victim group whose political organization was either controlled (Study 1) or manipulated (Study 2), or the offense did not involve any identifiable victim (in Studies 3 and 4). Finally, we ran Study 5 in which we conducted aggregated analyses on the data from Studies 1 to 4 in order to test for the overall significance of the effect of valorization of democracy on the support for the collective punishment of democratic and nondemocratic offender groups.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, participants were presented with a vignette depicting an act of vandalism committed by some members of one (offender) group against members of another (victim) group. We manipulated the offender group political organization (democratic or nondemocratic) and measured respondents' preference for democratic group organizations in general (i.e., not towards any specific group) as well as their support for the collective punishment of that offender group. We expected the effect of the offender group political organization on support for collective punishment to be moderated by participants' preference for democratic group organization. More specifically, the collective punishment of the democratic group was expected to be less supported than that of the nondemocratic group, but only when preference for democratic organization is higher rather than lower.

Method

Participants

Participants were 45 young adults recruited by email in a Swiss Scout association. This population was chosen because their activity as scouts was likely to make them perceive the

scenario describing a summer camp as relevant to them. Furthermore, their organization is rather hierarchical as they deal with at least four levels of appointed (i.e., not elected) leaders. Their age ranged from 16 to 40 years ($M=22.18$, $SD=5.35$), and 17 of them were female. Participants voluntarily followed a link to an online questionnaire (sent by email, directly by the head of the association). At the end of the study, they were thanked, debriefed and asked to send in their data if they agreed that they be used for research purposes. In this study, as in the following ones, preliminary analyses showed that gender did not interact with the main independent variables and was therefore dropped from subsequent analyses.

Procedure

The procedure was adapted from Falomir-Pichastor and colleagues' studies (2005, 2007). The alleged purpose of the study was to examine participants' opinions, as members of a Scout association, about an incident that had allegedly taken place in a Scout camp. Before being informed about the incident, participants read that researchers had observed adolescents in summer camps in order to study patterns of group organizations and had identified two main types of group organization: *nondemocratic* and *democratic*. The nondemocratic organization (labeled *hierarchical*) was described as follows: a few members of the group proclaimed themselves as leaders, took important decisions for the group without consulting the other members and therefore had more power than other members. The description of democratic organization (labeled *egalitarian*) stated that group leaders were collectively chosen by all group members, decisions were taken in assemblies in which all members participated, and therefore the group leaders and other members had equal power.

Participants were then informed that an incident had occurred in one of those summer camps, where two Scout groups camped not far from each other: During an excursion, adolescents of one camp encountered participants from the other camp and made fun of them. A few days later, two members of the mocked camp (the offender group) went to the other camp (the victim group) and sprayed graffiti on their tents, damaged their installations, insulted a member of the camp and stole food from their stockroom. The culprits, hooded, could not be identified, but it was very clear that they belonged to the other camp. Participants were then asked to report the extent to which they supported the collective punishment of the entire offender group.

Independent Variables

Preference for democratic group organization. Participants' preference for democratic group organization was assessed after the description of each group organization type (i.e., right before the manipulation of the offender group organization and the description of the incident, such as their judgments were not influenced by what they were told about a specific group of scouts). On a bipolar scale (1 = *egalitarian*, 7 = *hierarchical*), they had to indicate which one of the two types of groups was (1) fairer, (2) more efficient, (3) the one whose members were happier and (4) the one they preferred themselves. After appropriate recoding, these four items

were averaged into a score of preference for democratic group organization ($M=4.77$, $SD=1.21$; $\alpha=.71$).

Offender group political organization. Offender group organization was manipulated at the moment the intergroup aggression was described. Participants were told that the offender group was either *egalitarian* or *hierarchical*, depending on the experimental condition. For the sake of simplicity, the organization of the victim group was opposed to that of the aggressor group in this study (i.e., when the aggressor group was egalitarian, the victim group was told to be hierarchical, and vice versa).

Dependent Variable

Support for collective punishment. Participants were told that because the culprits could not be identified, the camp organizers considered the possibility of a collective punishment in order to restore justice. Support for collective punishment was measured with five items after the description of the aggression: All members should (1) repair the inflicted damages (e.g., give back all stolen food or do some work to repair the damages in the victim camp), (2) publicly apologize, (3) be expelled from the camp before it ends, (4) be woken up earlier in the morning and (5) be deprived of pleasant activities (1 = *entirely disagree*; 7 = *entirely agree*). These five items were aggregated in a score of *support for collective punishment* ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.09$; $\alpha=.58$).

Results

Scores of collective punishment were regressed on the offender group organization (conditions coded as follows: democratic = -1 and nondemocratic = $+1$), preference for democratic group organization (standardized continuous score) and the two-way interaction term. The overall model was marginally significant, $F(3, 41)=2.84$, $p=.05$, $R^2=.17$, and the predicted two-way interaction was significant, $\beta^1=.36$, $t(41)=2.54$, $p=.015$ (see Figure 1). At low scores of preference for democratic group organization (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean), participants punished democratic and nondemocratic groups to the same extent, $\beta=-.21$, $t(41)=-0.99$, $p=.33$, whereas at high scores of preference for democratic group organization (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean), participants punished the nondemocratic group significantly more than the democratic group, $\beta=.61$, $t(41)=2.73$, $p=.009$. Although no hypothesis was made about this effect, it should be also noted that as preference for democratic group organization increased, support for the punishment of the nondemocratic group increased, $\beta=.55$, $t(41)=2.55$, $p=.015$. No other effect reached significance.

Discussion

The interaction effect between participants' preference for democracy and offender group political organization provides empirical support for our reasoning. Respondents with a

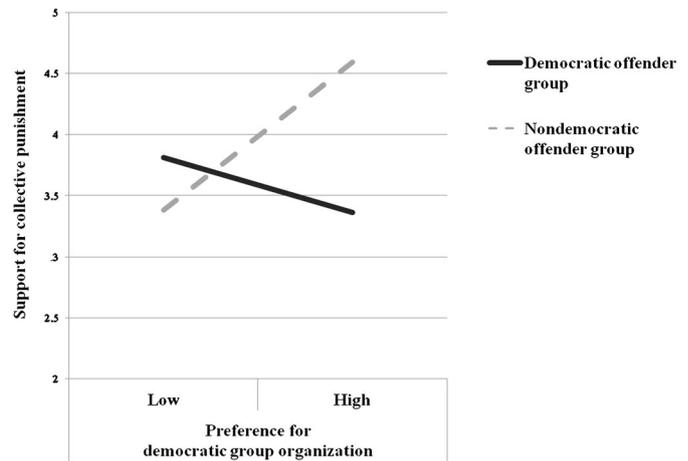


Figure 1. Support for collective punishment as a function of offender group organization and respondents' preference for democratic group organization ($+/-1SD$) (Study 1, summer camp paradigm)

relatively high preference for democratic group organization supported the punishment of the nondemocratic group significantly more than that of the democratic one, while support for collective punishment among respondents with a lower preference for democratic group organization did not vary as a function of the political organization of the offender group.

Interestingly, these findings were evidenced with members of a scout association, that is, a hierarchical organization. This suggests that even after being reminded of one's belonging to a hierarchical structure, one might still value democratic procedures. Hence, membership in democratic or nondemocratic structures does not seem to exert a great influence on the ascription of value to democracy, which illustrates just how widely democracy is valued. In order to generalize these findings, Study 2 focuses on a different population where the same, if not a higher, valorization of democracy is expected: university students.

Moreover, it should be mentioned that findings from Study 1 were observed in a scenario where the political organization of the victim group was always opposite to that of the offender group. This is a methodological limitation, given that the offender and victim group organization co-vary and might therefore be confounded. Furthermore, past research showed that the effect of the offender political organization appeared specifically in antagonistic intergroup contexts where the victim group was nondemocratic (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005, 2007), suggesting that no leniency towards democratic offender groups should appear when the victim is another democratic group. Thus, Study 2 aimed at replicating and extending these findings by showing that one's preference for democracy moderates the effect of the offender political organization and that this pattern should specifically appear when the victim group is nondemocratic rather than democratic.

STUDY 2

In order to address the limitations of Study 1 and increase the external validity of these findings, Study 2 used a different paradigm involving a case of plagiarism allegedly occurring in a

¹ β s refer to standardized coefficients throughout all experiments.

university class. The experimental design comprised a manipulation of the offender group political organization (democratic, nondemocratic), of the victim group political organization (democratic, nondemocratic) and a measure of preference for democratic group organization. The main dependent measure was again support for collective punishment. We predicted a three-way interaction effect, whereby preference for democratic group organization would moderate the effect of group organization: When preference for democratic groups is high rather than low, collective punishment of the democratic perpetrator group should be more lenient than punishment of the nondemocratic group, in particular when the victim group is nondemocratic rather than democratic.

Method

Participants

Eighty-six undergraduate students in social sciences or psychology of a large Swiss University volunteered in this study, among which 60 were female. Their age ranged from 17 to 41 years ($M=20.85$, $SD=3.13$). Participants were invited to answer a written questionnaire at the beginning of a class and were thereafter thanked and debriefed.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to the one described in Study 1 but was adapted to a case of plagiarism that was likely to be more relevant to a student population. The alleged purpose of the study was to examine students' opinions about a case of plagiarism that supposedly took place during a university class. Before describing the plagiarism, participants were anecdotally informed that the professor of this seminar was interested in the way students organize their workgroups in order to accomplish their tasks and that scientific studies had identified two main types of group organization. The *nondemocratic* organization (labeled *hierarchical*) was described as follows: One of the students is a self-proclaimed leader who assigns tasks to the other members, coordinates the work of the group and takes the decisions when members disagree. The description of *democratic* organization (labeled *egalitarian*) stated that students discuss over the best ways to accomplish the tasks; one of the students is collectively chosen to lead the group and guide the discussion when members disagree.

Participants were then informed about the plagiarism case. It allegedly occurred during a class in which students worked in groups to write up a collective assignment. As the end of the term approached, a group member, in charge of the assignment's finalization, tried to enhance his group's chances of success. He stole a USB key from a member of another group and copied important sections of the other group's work. Thereafter, all students turned their assignment in.

Independent Variables

Preference for democratic group organization. Participants' preference for democratic group organization was assessed immediately after the description of the group organizations (i.e., before learning about the plagiarism case). For

egalitarian and hierarchical groups, participants were separately asked the extent to which the group functioning was (1) fair, (2) efficient and (3) satisfied its members (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*). The order in which the two group organizations were evaluated was counterbalanced. A score of preference for democratic group organization was computed by averaging the scores for the six items after reversing those for the hierarchical items ($M=4.63$, $SD=0.61$; $\alpha=.49$).²

Political organization of the offender and the victim group. At the moment the plagiarism case was described, participants read that the plagiarist group was either *egalitarian* or *hierarchical* and that the victim group was either *egalitarian* or *hierarchical*.

Dependent Variable

Support for collective punishment. Support for collective punishment was assessed through a single item: "Beyond the punishment applied to the plagiarist, to what extent should the entire group be punished?" ranging from 1 (*not punished at all*) to 7 (*harshly punished*; $M=3.08$, $SD=1.46$).

Results

Scores for collective punishment were regressed on offender group political organization (-1 = democratic and $+1$ = nondemocratic), victim group political organization (-1 = democratic and $+1$ = nondemocratic), preference for democratic group organization (standardized continuous score), the three two-way interaction terms and the three-way interaction term as predictor variables. The overall model for support for collective punishment was significant, $F(7, 85)=2.39$, $p=.029$, $R^2=.18$. As expected, the three-way interaction was significant, $\beta=.28$, $t(85)=2.73$, $p=.008$ (see Figure 2). The offender group organization by preference for democratic group organization interaction was not significant when the victim was democratic, $\beta=-.08$, $t(85)=-0.81$, $p=.42$, but this interaction was significant when the victim was nondemocratic, $\beta=.31$, $t(85)=3.00$, $p=.004$. In this latter case, the effect of offender group political organization was non-significant at low levels of preference for democratic group organization ($-1SD$), $\beta=.25$, $t(85)=1.09$, $p=.28$, but at high levels of preference ($+1SD$), the democratic offender group was punished significantly less severely than the nondemocratic group, $\beta=-.68$, $t(85)=3.38$, $p=.001$. Furthermore, as preference for democratic organization increased, support for collective punishment of the nondemocratic group increased as well ($\beta=.68$, $t(85)=3.03$, $p=.003$). No other effects reached significance.

²In this study, we changed the way we computed preference for democratic group organization to show that our effect was not measure dependent. The weak reliability is due to the independent assessment of preference for egalitarian and hierarchical groups. Because separate analyses using either egalitarian or hierarchical items showed a similar pattern of findings, we decided to describe results for the overall score. Although the results were perfectly replicated with this measure, we returned in Study 3 to the previous measure that yielded higher reliability. The fourth item assessing which group organization type participants themselves preferred was not included in this study because of the independent measurement of each item replacing the bipolar one used in Study 1.

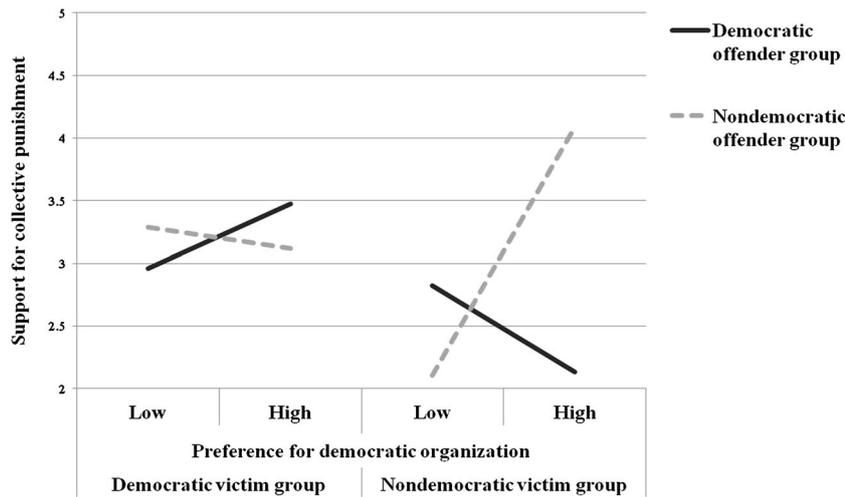


Figure 2. Support for collective punishment as a function of offender group organization, victim group organization and respondents' preference for democratic group organization (+/−1SD) (Study 2, plagiarism paradigm)

Discussion

Results support the predicted moderation: Collective punishment was lower when the offender group was democratic rather than nondemocratic. Further, this effect only emerged when the victim group was nondemocratic and among participants whose preference for democratic group organization was relatively high. These findings both replicate and extend those of Study 1. Contributing to the external validity of the findings, this study used a different wrongdoing (i.e., an act of plagiarism) and different measures of preference for democratic group organization and of collective punishment. Overall, the results from Studies 1 and 2 support our hypothesis that preference for democracy is a key moderator of the effect of political group organization on judgments of collective punishment following an offense.

Yet, there is still the possibility that the hypothesized effect is conditional on the victim political organization: Democratic groups were only protected from punishment when they victimized a nondemocratic group, that is, in the case of an opposition between the offender (valued) and victim (devalued) groups. However, it is also plausible that it is the presence of a democratic victim group that precludes a democratic offender's misdeed from being condoned rather than the presence of a nondemocratic victim group. In order to rule out the possibility that a nondemocratic victim group is necessary for a democratic offender group to be punished with more leniency than a nondemocratic offender group, Study 3 presented participants with an offense that was not perpetrated at the expense of any victim group.

STUDY 3

This study used a simplified version of the plagiarism paradigm that did not involve any victim group, allowing a simpler and more direct test of the effect of the offender group organization. As in Study 2, participants were informed about a plagiarism committed by a student belonging to a working group in a university seminar. However, they were this time told that

the plagiarizer copied an article found on the Internet (rather than stolen from another group; see Study 2), and we merely manipulated the offender group organization (democratic, nondemocratic). As in previous studies, preference for democratic group organization was measured and used as a moderator. Support for collective punishment was again our dependent measure.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 44 students approached on the campus of a large Swiss university, asked to volunteer in completing a written questionnaire, and thereafter thanked and debriefed. Twenty of them were female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years ($M=21.98$, $SD=2.22$). The procedure was similar to that of Study 2, with the exception that there was no victim group (the plagiarizer copied an article found on the Internet).

Independent Variables

Preference for democratic group organization. Participants' preference for democratic group organization was assessed directly after the descriptions of the two types of groups with the same four bipolar items used in Study 1 (i.e., they indicated which group is fairer, more efficient, has happier members and the one they prefer) averaged into a score of preference for democratic group organization ($M=4.96$, $SD=1.15$; $\alpha=.67$; 1 = egalitarian, 7 = hierarchical).

Offender group political organization. The manipulation of the offender group organization was similar to the one used in the two previous studies.

Dependent Variable

Support for collective punishment was measured as in Study 2 ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.77$).

Results

Support for collective punishment was regressed on offender group organization (-1=democratic and +1=nondemocratic), preference for democratic organization (standardized continuous scores) and the two-way interaction term. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 40)=3.02, p=.041, R^2=.19$. The predicted two-way interaction was significant, $\beta=-.34, t(40)=-2.10, p=.042$, indicating that preference for democratic group organization moderated the effect of the offender group organization (see Figure 3). The effect of group organization was not significant at low conditional levels of preference for democratic group organization (-1SD), $\beta=-.10, t(40)=-0.47, p=.64$, whereas the democratic group was significantly less punished than the nondemocratic group at high conditional levels of preference for democratic organization (+1SD), $\beta=-.58, t(40)=-2.65, p=.012$. Additionally, as preference for democratic organization increased, so did the support for collective punishment of the nondemocratic group, $\beta=.36, t(40)=2.14, p=.038$. No other effect reached significance.

Discussion

Study 3 tested and confirmed the moderating effect of respondents' preference for democracy on the effect of offender group political organization on support for collective punishment. Given that this effect was observed following a wrongdoing that did not involve any victim group, one should conclude that the moderating effect of the victim group's organization observed in Study 2 as well as in previous research (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005; 2007) is not simply due to the opposition in political organizations of the offender and the victim groups. Put in other words, the leniency effect towards democratic groups does not require a nondemocratic victim to emerge; rather, it is inhibited when the victim group is democratic. More importantly, these effects support our reasoning according to which democratic groups trigger less severe retributive judgments than nondemocratic groups, because these groups uphold the value

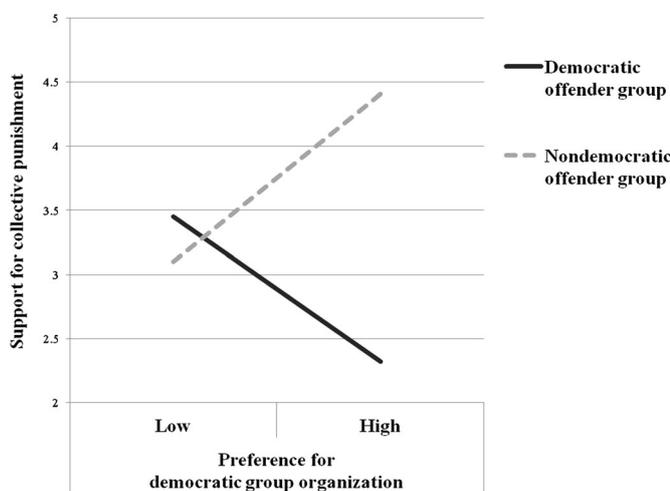


Figure 3. Support for collective punishment as a function of offender group organization and respondents' preference for democratic group organization (+/-1SD) (Study 3, plagiarism paradigm)

of democracy that people are motivated to protect. As a matter of fact, Studies 1 to 3 indicate that this protection process occurs specifically for people with a strong preference for democratic group organization.

STUDY 4

Study 4 essentially aimed at addressing various methodological and theoretical issues that might still weaken the conclusions that could be drawn from Studies 1 to 3. First, it should be noted that the measure of preference for democracy used in Studies 1 through 3 was designed to specifically assess the dimension of democracy that is at the heart of our hypothesis, namely democratic or nondemocratic "group organization". Nevertheless, in order to ascertain that it is valorization of democracy as a general concept that is driving our results, it appears necessary to replicate the findings with a different dimension of democracy. Thus, Study 4 aimed at replicating findings of Study 3 with another measure of valorization of democracy that would assess participants' attitudes towards democracy as a political system rather than as group organization, targeting a more general dimension of democracy.

Second, Study 4 was run to make sure there was no reliability issue with the measures of collective punishment used in Studies 2 and 3. Indeed, in those studies, we used a 1-item measure of support for collective punishment, whereas we used a multi-item scale in Study 1. Even though single-item measures have proven to provide sufficient validity and reliability in other studies on punishment (Strelan & van Prooijen, 2013), Study 4 contained both a 1-item and a multi-item measure of support for collective punishment adapted to the present paradigm to address this potential issue.

Finally, Study 4 was also designed to rule out the possibility that the effects of group organization were driven by the fact that within both types of groups, individuals have (a) symmetric power relations. Indeed, on comparison with nondemocratic types of organization, a democratic organization necessarily implies a more egalitarian distribution of power. Moreover, and despite the existence of several forms of democracy and the complexity of the concept, a minimal operational definition of democracy can be a form of governance in which political power is held by the people under a free participative system (e.g., Dahl, Shapiro, & Cheibub, 2003; Tyler & Mitchell, 1994). Thus, one might argue that the greater power from which democratic group members benefit is partly responsible for the higher valorization of democracy and that the results observed previously could be explained by this single characteristic of democracy. In order to test this alternative explanation and to rule this issue out, Study 4 included a measure of the perception of the power held by group members as a possible mediator of the moderation effect.

Method

Participants

Participants were 137 registered students from a large Swiss university recruited through email and invited to follow a link to an online study (3000 emails were sent to university student

email addresses, and 315 people followed the link, among which 137 completed the study, resulting in a 4.5% response rate). At the end of the study, they were thanked, debriefed and asked to send in their data if they agreed that they be used for research purposes. Their age ranged from 17 to 53 years ($M=23.75$, $SD=5.66$), and 105 of them were female.

Procedure

The procedure was the same as in Study 3, with the exception that participants were first invited to answer a general scale of valorization of democracy before being presented with the case of plagiarism.

Independent Variables

Valorization of democracy. Four items measured participants' valorization of democracy on a 1 to 7 scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*): (1) I prefer democracy over other forms of government; (2) the parliamentary system is my favorite political system; (3) I value democracy as a political system; and (4) I ascribe value to democracy as a political system ($M=5.75$, $SD=0.87$; $\alpha=.77$).

Offender group political organization. The manipulation of the offender group organization was similar to the one used in previous studies.

Dependent Variables

Support for collective punishment. Support for collective punishment was measured in two ways: A first general item, identical to the one used in Studies 2 and 3, asked the extent to which the entire group should be punished one way or another regardless of the plagiarist's punishment ($M=3.28$, $SD=1.81$; 1 = *not punished at all*, 7 = *harshly punished*). A 9-item scale then asked to what extent different types of punishment should be inflicted upon the group: (1) apologize to

the professor; (2) assist the professor with different administrative tasks; (3) help first-year students with their assignments; (4) pay a financial compensation to the university; (5) rewrite the assignment; (6) write an additional assignment; (7) fail the seminar; (8) fail all exams from that exam session; and (9) be expelled from the university ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.99$; $\alpha=.74$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*). The two measures correlated at $r(135)=.72$, $p<.001$.

Perceived group member power. Perceived group member power was assessed with three items: To what extent do you consider that the members of this group (1) had power over the group's actions, (2) could influence the group's decisions and (3) had power over the group's decisions ($M=4.75$, $SD=1.49$; $\alpha=.91$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*).

Results

Single-item and multiple-item scores for collective punishment, as well as perceived group member power, were all three and separately regressed on offender group political organization (-1 = democratic and $+1$ = nondemocratic), valorization of democracy (standardized continuous score) and the two-way interaction terms.

On the single-item measure, the overall model for support for collective punishment was significant, $F(3, 133)=5.36$, $p=.002$, $R^2=.11$. The offender group organization showed no significant main effect ($p=.44$), but the valorization of democracy did: The more participants valued democracy, the less they supported collective punishment, $\beta=-.23$, $t(133)=-2.80$, $p=.006$. This effect was qualified by the predicted interaction with the offender group organization, $\beta=.25$, $t(133)=3.08$, $p=.003$ (see Figure 4a): At low scores of valorization of democracy ($-1SD$), democratic and nondemocratic groups were punished to the same extent, $\beta=-.19$, $t(133)=-1.64$, $p=.103$, but at high scores of valorization of democracy ($+1SD$), democratic groups were less punished than nondemocratic groups, $\beta=.32$,

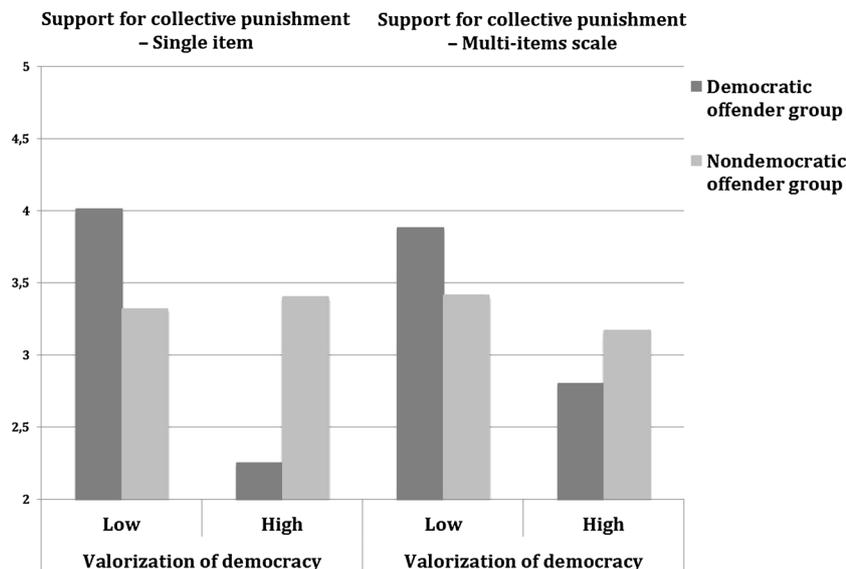


Figure 4. (a and b) Support for collective punishment (single-item measure and multi-items scale) as a function of offender group organization and respondents' valorization of democracy ($\pm 1SD$) (Study 4, plagiarism paradigm)

$t(133)=2.73, p=.007$. Additionally, support for collective punishment of democratic groups decreased as valorization of democracy increased, $\beta = -.49, t(133)=-3.08, p < .001$.

These results are consistent with those observed on the 9-item measure of collective punishment. Indeed, the overall model was significant, $F(3, 133)=7.22, p < .001, R^2=.14$, no main effect of the group political organization was found ($p=.76$), and valorization of democracy decreased support for collective punishment, $\beta = -.33, t(133)=-4.08, p < .001$. The two-way interaction was also significant, $\beta = .21, t(133)=2.6, p=.010$ (see Figure 4b): At low scores of valorization of democracy ($-1SD$), democratic groups were more punished than nondemocratic groups, $\beta = -.24, t(133)=-2.07, p=.041$, but at high scores of valorization of democracy ($+1SD$), democratic groups were less punished than nondemocratic groups, although the effect did not reach the conventional level of significance, $\beta = .19, t(133)=1.63, p=.106$. In addition, as valorization of democracy increased, support for collective punishment of democratic groups decreased, $\beta = -.54, t(133)=-4.49, p < .001$.

Regarding perceived group member power, the overall model was significant, $F(3, 133)=5.34, p=.002, R^2=.11$. Both main effects were significant: Members of democratic groups were perceived as having more power within the group as compared with nondemocratic group members, $\beta = -.30, t(133)=-3.52, p=.001$, and the perception of group members' power increased along with participants' valorization of democracy, $\beta = .16, t(133)=-1.98, p=.049$. However, the interaction between offender group organization and valorization of democracy was non-significant ($p=.69$), which precludes the test of the mediator role of this variable in the interaction observed on collective punishment (e.g., Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005).

Discussion

Results of Study 4 reliably replicated findings from previous studies, showing that democratic perpetrator groups are judged with more leniency than nondemocratic groups by evaluators who highly value democracy. This difference no longer emerges for those who attach less importance to democracy. Moreover, this was shown to be the case while using a different measure of valorization of democracy (targeting the concept more directly than was done in previous studies), as well as two different measures of collective punishment (single-item and multi-item scales). Indeed, valorization of democracy was again found to moderate the effect of group organization on collective punishment, and even though one of the effects we expected was just short of significance on

the multi-item scale of collective punishment, the pattern of findings of previous studies was nevertheless confirmed on both measures. All in all, these results add to the reliability and replicability of the difference consistently observed in Studies 1 to 3 (Cohen, 1994).

Furthermore, in order to exclude an alternative explanation of the present results in terms of asymmetric power relations within egalitarian-democratic and hierarchical-nondemocratic groups, Study 4 included a measure of the perception of power relations within the perpetrator group. Although members of the democratic group were considered as having more power than members of nondemocratic groups, this effect was not qualified by an interaction with respondents' valorization of democracy, indicating that this perceived differential did not vary as a function of the extent to which one values democracy, contrary to retributive justice judgments (i.e., collective punishment). As a result, perceived group member power within the group did not qualify as a mediator of the effect evidenced through Studies 1 to 4 according to which democratic groups are protected from collective punishment specifically among people who value democracy. We therefore conclude that the value of democracy relies on more than perceived power relations within the group.

STUDY 5

Study 5 was run in order to test a corollary of our general hypothesis one might advocate for. Indeed, while Studies 1–4 tested and confirmed that people who value democracy and democratic groups would show more lenient retributive justice judgments towards democratic groups (as compared with non-democratic ones), another expectation we could have had is that collective punishment of democratic groups should be reduced by valorization of democracy on the one hand (in order to protect democratic values) and that collective punishment of nondemocratic groups should be increased by valorization of democracy on the other hand (because these groups transgress important values). Interestingly, we found in the four previous studies that the more people value democracy, the less they support collective punishment of democratic offender groups, and the more they support collective punishment of nondemocratic offender groups.

Unfortunately, these simple effects do not reach significant levels in all studies, and Study 5 was run to provide further evidence of this corollary. Because p -values are likely to vary greatly around a true effect (Lai, Fidler, & Cumming, 2012), it

Table 1. Effect sizes and inverse variance weights of the effect of valorization of democracy for democratic and nondemocratic offender groups, Studies 1 through 4 (Study 5)

	Offender group			
	Democratic		Nondemocratic	
	Effect size	Inverse variance weight	Effect size	Inverse variance weight
Study 1	.21	22	.54	19
Study 2	.21	40	.46	40
Study 3	.29	14	.42	24
Study 4—single item	.48	63	.03	68
Studies 4–9—item scale	.53	63	.13	68

is possible that these effects really do exist, although they do not emerge every time they are tested. Thus, instead of running a supplementary study aimed at replicating these findings, we conducted two meta-analyses (testing for these two simple effects). Should both of these simple effects generally prove to be significant, this would again illustrate the central role of democracy valorization in the effect of groups' organization on collective punishment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We followed the procedure recommended by Lipsey and Wilson (2001) and Hedges and Olkin (1985), using a fixed-effects model and weighting studies according to sample size. We calculated each study's effect size and inverse variance weight (see Table 1), and the average effect size and the associated statistics across all studies. Results show that for democratic offender groups, the effect of valorization of democracy was *negative*, reliable and of medium size ($r = -.45$, 95% confidence interval [CI] lower limit [LL] = $-.67$, upper limit [UL] = $-.23$, $SE = 0.11$, $z = -4.03$, $p < .001$). On the opposite, for nondemocratic offender groups, the analysis revealed a *positive*, reliable and medium size effect of valorization of democracy ($r = .39$, 95% CI LL = $.11$, UL = $.67$, $SE = 0.14$, $z = 2.76$, $p = .006$). These results clearly support the idea that valorization of democracy polarizes retributive judgments of democratic and nondemocratic offender groups, such that it decreases the support for collective punishment of democratic offender groups while increasing support for punishment of nondemocratic groups. As indicated, these findings are in line with our rationale according to which the valorization of democracy shapes retributive responses towards democratic and nondemocratic groups, increasing both one's leniency towards groups who uphold such value and one's severity towards groups who violate it.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Democracy has become an ideological belief system that grants legitimacy to actions carried out by democratic groups, whatever the moral nature of these actions may be (Falomir-Pichastor, Staerklé et al., 2012; Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira et al., 2012). The goal of the present research was to show that wrongful actions perpetrated by democratic groups (as compared with those of nondemocratic groups) are legitimized through the upholding of democracy as a value, thereby providing an understanding of the underlying processes of this relative leniency towards democratic wrongdoings in retributive justice judgments.

The results of four studies consistently showed that observers who highly valued democracy were more clement in retributive judgments directed at democratic offender groups as compared with nondemocratic offender groups. No such difference was evidenced among people whose valorization of democracy was lower. This finding was consistent across two research paradigms, including a nondemocratic victim group or no victim at all, and using different measures of support for collective punishment and of valorization of

democracy. Taken together, these results provide consistent support to our contention that democracy is a value that infuses retributive justice judgments directed at democratic and nondemocratic groups, granting legitimacy to wrongdoings perpetrated by value-respecting, i.e., democratic, groups.

Wrongdoing Legitimization

One of the earliest sociological insights on social justice was that transgressions of norms and values represent a threat to the existing social order (Durkheim, 1893). Social psychological research has empirically tested this proposition, showing that people are motivated to restore order through the ascription of punishments (Rucker, Polifroni, Tetlock, & Scott, 2004; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997) because punishments symbolically reaffirm the consensus regarding group values that have been violated by the offense (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2009). Hence, we understand that the perception of legitimacy of a punishment, or the support for a punishment, reflects the extent to which the offense is considered a violation of those values (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Vidmar & Miller, 1980). The present research focused on collective punishment, defined as a negative treatment inflicted upon an entire group for the misdeed of some of its members (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2007). This choice of a group-level punishment is due to the fact that this research investigated the upholding of democracy as a value and that democracy is necessarily a feature of groups. This is not to say that we assume our findings to be restricted to collective punishment judgments. We rather suggest that the value of democracy infuses any justice judgment in relation with democratic and nondemocratic groups. In support for this argument, other studies have found that support for the punishment of the group leader closely followed the pattern of support for the collective punishment of the group (Pereira et al., 2015). In order to provide a clear answer to this question, future research should compare different justice judgments, such as support for the offender punishment and perceived wrongdoing legitimacy within the same experiment to test whether the same dynamics emerge.

A boundary condition to this legitimization process was also evidenced in the present research. Indeed, and consistent with prior research (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2007), our findings show that democratic offender groups were less collectively punished than nondemocratic ones when their misdeeds targeted a nondemocratic victim group or when no victim was involved. Yet, such leniency was no longer observed when the victim group was democratic as well. This reinforces the contention that democratic groups can only benefit from relatively lenient justice judgments as long as their misdeeds do not involve another group that is similarly valued: Because democratic groups are perceived as upholding the value of democracy, no offense perpetrated at their expense should be tolerated, even if the perpetrator is also a democratic group.

The fact that people are less willing to tolerate victimization of democratic groups compared with nondemocratic groups (see also Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira, et al., 2012) could illustrate a dehumanization process. Indeed, moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 1999) states that depriving a person or a group of human qualities is an effective strategy to make its mistreatment more acceptable. Given "the power of dehumanization to promote human punitiveness" (Bandura, 1999, p.

200), it is possible that the perception of value violations by nondemocratic group members not only leads to their devaluation but also contributes to their dehumanization. This would be consistent with perceptions of nondemocratic groups as being endowed with a lower moral value (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2007) and lacking essential qualities attributed to democratic individuals such as self-control, autonomy, self-sufficiency and individual responsibility (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007; Staerklé, 2005). Future research should investigate whether this theoretical framework is relevant to account for the observed effects in addition to the *democracy-as-value* hypothesis (Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira, et al., 2012).

In the Name of Democracy

The present research also contributes to the understanding of the influence of personal values on justice judgments. While such values have already been shown to bias procedural and distributive justice judgments (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009; Skitka & Mullen, 2002, 2008; Skitka, 2002), the present research demonstrates that retributive intergroup judgments are also affected by the perceiver's values, in line with previous work (e.g., Feather, 1999). It would be interesting to further investigate the different ways in which the motivation to uphold democratic values can be expressed and how these value protection strategies are related to specific threats to these values. For example, according to the value protection model (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000), besides the chastisement of the transgressors, one can also react to values transgression with a heightened willingness to engage in behaviors allowing a restoration of the threatened value. We can imagine such reactions following a threat to the democratic values resulting in an increased motivation to engage in democratic behaviors, such as voting or signing petitions on a completely unrelated issue. Future research should address this proposition.

Interestingly, only respondents with high levels of valorization of democracy differentiated retributive judgments as a function of the offender group's political organization. Given that our scale was bipolar, people with low levels of valorization of democracy have a relatively more positive attitude towards nondemocratic-hierarchical organizations. Yet, these people did not protect nondemocratic offender groups in their punishment judgments. Why is it the case? One possibility is that individuals who have a high opinion of democracy are more motivated to reaffirm and protect this value compared with individuals who value autocratic organizations. This asymmetry might be due to the fact that nondemocratic values are socially disapproved and devalued compared with democratic values, and that, therefore, people with positive attitudes towards nondemocratic organizations lack sufficient normative support to affirm their values. Finally, another way to look at this asymmetry is to consider the absolute level on the response scale of respondents with low levels of valorization of democracy: They fall in the middle of the bipolar scale, suggesting that they simply may not prefer one group organization over another, explaining why they do not favor nondemocratic groups in their legitimacy judgments. Future research is needed to better understand the reasons why people with

a lower level of valorization of democracy do not display more lenient judgments towards nondemocratic groups.

Another way to look at the present findings is that respondents could have perceived the democratic offender group as an ingroup and the nondemocratic one as an outgroup, and that their leniency towards the former would merely reflect an ingroup favoritism effect (according to the social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Although political organization can be a categorization criterion at the international level, in our studies, the democratic organization was a feature of specific social groups, teenagers in Study 1 and student groups in Studies 2, 3 and 4. Previous research has furthermore shown that respondents' identification with the perpetrator or with the victim group was not a mediator of the effect of political organization on legitimacy judgments (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2005). We hence believe that offender groups' political organizations shape justice judgments because of people's valorization of, rather than identification with, democracy.

Some limitations of the present research must nevertheless be acknowledged. Indeed, the way democracy was considered in these studies can be seen as somewhat limited, and our manipulation of the political organization of groups was purposefully based on the two central procedural features of democracy (namely the right to participate in the democratic decision-making process and free leader elections). Yet, democracy cannot be reduced to this procedural definition, as representations of democracy are more complex and encompass potentially contradictory notions such as individual freedom, social justice, minority rights or the market economy. In this sense, representations of democracy might not even match a single dimension (ranging from nondemocracy to democracy) but could be more complex than that. Future research should extend these results by using other potential dimensions of democracy.

Practical Implications

To conclude, we want to underline some implications of the present research with respect to social and international issues. The present studies help to understand how endorsement of democratic principles can affect and bias people's judgments in the context of conflict-ridden intergroup relations between democratic and nondemocratic groups (see, e.g., Healy, Hoffman, Beer & Bourne, 2002; Herrmann, Tetlock, & Visser, 1999; Mintz & Geva, 1993). In particular, our findings suggest that armed interventions would be more easily accepted when committed by democratic rather than nondemocratic societies (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2012; Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2012), especially by people with a strongly positive and possibly idealized attitude towards democracy.

Collective punishment represents a rather extreme form of retribution because it is inflicted upon potentially innocent group members. It is therefore intrinsically unfair. Still, examples of such treatment abound in social life: in schools, in the army, in sport teams or, at the level of international relations, in the case of embargos or military campaigns. Thus, our research illustrates how the endorsement of democracy can—ironically—lead people to legitimize unfair (and anti-democratic) actions. Indeed, endorsing

democratic principles had positive effects in the sense of lowering support for collective punishment, but only for democratic groups and not for nondemocratic ones who, on the contrary, saw their punishment increase. Accordingly, this research suggests that if people are willing to support anti-democratic actions such as collective punishment with the intention of defending democratic values, it is possible that democracy might be strategically used as a legitimizing tool in order to mobilize public support for illegitimate actions.

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