

# Who Possesses External Political Efficacy?: A Comparative Analysis of UK and Germany

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## 1 Introduction

Voting as a most prevalent form of participation is by no means considered sufficient to maintain a stable and participatory form of democratic governance. As Wright puts forward elegantly that “in the modern democratic society, citizens should feel that they have some power to influence the actions of their government” (Wright, 1981, p. 69). Even though modern democracies enable their citizens to get involved with policy processes through free and fair elections and the right to vote, to protest or join in politically active civic communities, the perception of a responsive government that citizens have might remain unsatisfactory. This ‘feeling’ or ‘perception’ that citizens possess toward the decisiveness of their political actions for governance or toward responsiveness of the government has a long-established (since the 1950s) conceptual name called ‘political efficacy’ in political behavior literature. In the large-scale analysis of voting behavior in *The Voter Decides*, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) introduced the construct of “sense of political efficacy” along with a set of survey items designed to assess that particular belief and to investigate its use in empirical political research (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954).

In their seminal work, these authors defined political efficacy as the “feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change” (1954, p. 187). Apart from conceptual as well as theoretical questions revolving around political efficacy as a distinct measure among various political constructs, identifying the factors influencing the efficacy is quite important as it has been considered as an important determinant of political participation (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982) and also as an outcome of participation (Finkel, 1985). This implies that significantly

high levels of political efficacy are considered as desirable for the stability of democracy in a society in which citizens demand some power to influence the actions of their elected government.

In this framework, the aim of this paper is mainly to focus on the neglected relationship between political partisanship and efficacy and to unravel demographic as well sociopolitical control factors affecting to it to a great extent in United Kingdom and Germany comparatively. Two reasons can be mentioned on rationale behind choosing these two countries in which round 9 (for year 2018) of European Social Survey (ESS) was conducted. First, though some divergences, literature on political behaviour have a consensus that in general party attachments on personal level or feeling closeness to particular parties occur in national contexts in which some well-rooted parties actively function for long years as this long existence enables to cultivate some emotional feelings toward them for individuals. In Western Europe, particularly in UK and Germany where democratic form of governance has well-anchored existence, age of many of the still surviving parties such as Conservative and Labor parties in UK and German Conservative and Christian Democratic Union parties (CDU) in Germany goes back to 1900s. In this respect, by assuming that longevity of parties substantially influences the extent to which partisan attachments form a rooted social base in individual level, I decided to focus on the question of partisanship and political efficacy through examining these two countries. Second, large scale empirical report of Pew Research Center titled "European Public Opinion Three Decades After the Fall of Communism" in 2019 demonstrates that political party favorability in Germany and UK remained intact with small exceptions. In this respect, the results of this report seemed complementary with the first aforementioned reason behind choosing UK and Germany that highlights the stability of party existence for emotional attachments. Hence, I decided to focus on the relationship between political partisanship and political efficacy particularly in UK and Germany in where several parties enjoy longevity and stability in being favorable for individuals.

In this study, first I focus on the literature in political behaviour on the concept of political efficacy through reflecting on how it was conceptualized as a distinct measure in surveys and in what framework it was studied extensively. Toward the end of this section I explain the main problematization that this study tackles with as a contribution to the existing literature. Secondly, I go into details regarding the method of the paper in that I show the peculiarities of the dataset this study uses. Besides, this section describes in detail and provides exploratory information about dependent variable (and how it was created

by PCA) and independent variables of the regression analysis. Third, results section assesses the results of regression analysis and go over every variable one by one via interpreting. Last section of conclusion, on the other hand, identifies the key findings of this study and intended to show directions for future work.

## 2 Literature Review

After the study of Campbell and his colleagues in 1954, one can see that two major strands of research were born in political behavior: while one side deals solely with an accurate measurement, validity, and reliability of political efficacy subscales taking part in major surveys, the other strand generally interested with how political efficacy measures interact with other political behavior variables such as public trust, political knowledge, and participation. Because the former strand focusing on establishing and validating the measures dominated this field mostly, the number of studies concentrating on the socioeconomic and political determinants of political efficacy is relatively less. However, some significant seminal works that examined the interaction between political efficacy and other variables of interest can be mentioned. Before going into details of this, it should be noted that the literature divided political efficacy into two: internal and external efficacy. While the former is defined as beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics; the latter generally refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands. Mendelson and Cutler, for instance, found that in the first weeks of referendum campaigns, people's external political efficacy shows an increase in overall picture (Matthew Mendelson and Fred Cutler 2000). In another study, Lassen and Serritzlew looked at how jurisdiction size influences internal political efficacy in Denmark and found that district sizes are negatively related to internal efficacy (Lassen and Serritzlew 2011).

There are also other studies of political efficacy in which scholars focused on the relationship between feelings of efficacy and various phenomena. In 2011, Beaumont tested the relationship between political learning and political efficacy beliefs via multilevel model with a sample size of nearly 1,000 undergraduates within three years. She found that race, socioeconomic status and gender of the individual has no significant effect on political efficacy achievements (Beaumont 2011). Her study interestingly demonstrates that sociopolitical learning and political knowledge contribute to political efficacy in positive way. In one study conducted in 1990s, Niemi and Craig illustrated that there is a quite close relationship between political efficacy and trust in government (Niemi, Craig, and

Mattei 1991). Besides, Morrell has shown in his experimental study that there is no evidence demonstrating that deliberation or voting on an issue improved citizens' general feelings of internal political efficacy (Morrell 2003).

In an interesting work, Lassen and Serritzlew (2011) tested the influence of jurisdiction size on internal political efficacy by examining the change in level of political efficacy of Danish citizens after the consolidation of municipal districts. They found that high levels of efficacy do not guarantee political participation because citizens may simply be uninterested in the ballot issues or too busy to participate in meetings or vote. Their key finding was to show negative relationship between municipality size and political efficacy of citizens as larger jurisdictions mean a reduced share of power among citizens. In 2002, Bowler and Donovan used OLS regression to examine the effect of varying participation models on indexed measures of internal and external political efficacy and they found that participatory models of democratic practice such as ballots and referendum encourage a greater sense of internal and external political efficacy (Bowler and Donovan 2002). There are also other studies of political efficacy in which scholars focused on the relationship between feelings of efficacy and identity as well as class gaps (Rennwald and Pontusson 2022).

Generally speaking, many of the studies above find that education has a consistently positive influence on political participation and both internal and external political efficacy. Besides, the literature has a somewhat consensus that political efficacy is an important mechanism by which some typically and historically marginalized populations engage with political systems through various forms of political participation. Nonetheless, even though the diversity and depth of studies investigating the concept of efficacy in various ways, the literature on political efficacy relatively overlooks socioeconomic and partisanship factors affecting significantly to the construct of efficacy. Besides, it is hard to show any comprehensive study that dealt with the question of the extent to which political partisanship and political efficacy are related to and influence each other.

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding concerning the sociodemographic factors significantly influencing the level of the political efficacy of citizens and to focus on how feeling close to any party (i.e., partisanship) affects to the external efficacy referring to the perception of citizens that they have say in governance and the political system is responsive to them. Hence, mainly I am going to address the following research questions: What roles demographic, socioeconomic, and political factors loom large in determining how citizens of the United Kingdom and Germany feel externally 'efficacious' toward the polit-

ical system in their country? To what extent political partisanship and external political efficacy are related to each other upon controlling for other variables of interest and comparing Germany with UK?

## **3 Method**

### **3.1 Dataset**

This study takes United Kingdom and Germany as case study focusing on the year 2018 (round 9) and conducts a regression analysis by using the dataset provided by The European Social Survey (ESS). ESS is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducting across Europe to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior patterns of diverse populations in Europe and it was initiated by the European Science Foundation. Starting in 2002 the survey has been held every two years in many European countries, with round 6 and 9 (2012) covering 30 nations. Sampling procedure in ESS is guided by idea that in each country samples must be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language. In this respect, individuals are selected by strict random probability methods at every stage. In producing this sample design, some members of ESS Sampling Expert Panel were assigned to each National Coordination team who are responsible for data collection processes.

### **3.2 Dependent Variable**

In 2018, ESS added to their survey design new core items, one of which is political efficacy. By considering the two dimensions of political efficacy as internal and external, ESS included two items for each. For measurement, this study uses a dimension reduction technique of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for two items that are supposed to measure external political efficacy: the first item is “How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?” and the second one is “how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?”. Hence, this study assumes that the answers given for these two items from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“very much”) by participants in UK and Germany represent external political efficacy i.e., as the individual’s belief in the responsiveness of the political system. Without further

manipulation on variable levels, these two variables were combined to create an index of external political efficacy as the higher values are associated with higher level of political efficacy.

<b>Table 1: Results of PCA for Efficacy Index</b>		
<b>Importance of Components</b>		
	<b>PC1</b>	<b>PC2</b>
<b>Standard deviation</b>	1.2721	0.6179
<b>Proportion of Variance</b>	0.8091	0.1909
<b>Cumulative Proportion</b>	0.8091	1

Table 1 presents the results of PCA for the two items of efficacy. Each of PC1 and PC2 explain a percentage of the total variation in the dataset. Results suggest that PC1 explains 80% of the total variance which means that most of the variation in the dataset (in terms of these 2 variables) can be encapsulated by just that one principal component. Besides, Cronbach's Alpha score for the two items is 0.764 which is quite decent for inferring the reliability of combining these two items. This newly created index variable (as named efficacy) similarly ranges from 1 to 5 but takes unique values of 1.5 or 3.5 as well due to combination of the two items.

### 3.3 Independent Variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables						
Variable	Category	%	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd
Sex	Women	51.56	-	-	-	-
	Men	48.44	-	-	-	-
Education	primary	19.81				
	secondary	51.84				
	tertiary	27.27				
	Other	1.08				
Income Level	low income	28.55	-	-	-	-
	middle income	38.72				
	high income	32.73	-	-	-	-
Placement on left right scale	Left	37.94				
	Middle	37.47				
	Right	24.59				
How interested in politics?	Not at all interested	9.88	-	-	-	-
	Hardly interested	28.1				
	Quite interested	41.67				
	Very interested	20.324	-	-	-	-
Feel closer to a particular party than all other parties?	Yes	55.45	-	-	-	-
	No	44.55	-	-	-	-
Discriminated against in this country?	Yes	11.03	-	-	-	-
	No	88.97	-	-	-	-
How emotionally attached to [country]?		-	0	10	7.22	2.4
Age		-	15	90	50.98	18.74
Sample Size: 4562						

To determine the socio-political and economic determinants of political efficacy at the individual level, various explanatory variables have been added to the OLS regression model. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of all independent variables in this study. As it can be seen, sample size is composed of 4562 different individual respondents of which 51,5% are men and 48.4% constitute the percentage of women. Besides, the best education measure in dataset was “highest level of education, ES-ISCED” which was inspired by ISCED being the reference international classification for organizing education programs and related qualifications by levels and fields. In this variable ranging from 1-7, “1” was coded less than lower secondary and “7” as more than M.A. level. Thus, for analytical purposes, I created a new variable of education with three group levels based on the guidelines in official website of ESS: primary (1,2), secondary (3,4) and tertiary (5,6,7). According to this new slice, 19.8% of the respondents have primary, 51.8% have secondary, 27.7% have tertiary level of education. 1% of respondent’s education level has been noted as not possible to harmonize into ISCED levels. In the analysis, low education level group was determined as reference group.

For determining the income level, the question asking about household’s total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources was utilized. ESS has a decile approach (from 1 to 10 as weekly or monthly or yearly) in measuring income for household level. The categories in this income variable are national (i.e. taken from official representative statistic) and based on deciles of the actual household income range in the given country. After checking for financial year ending in 2018 for UK and Germany (Office for National Statistics, 2019), new household income variable was created: those belonging to lower three (1-3) deciles in national context were coded as low income, whereas those belonging to fourth, fifth, and sixth deciles (4-6) were labelled as middle income. Besides, those people who reported that they have total household income corresponding from 7 to 10 were coded as high income. Table 2 shows that regardless of the country, 28% of respondents are counted as belonging to low-income group. The largest group in terms of total household income is middle income as composed of approximately 39%, whereas 31% of respondents were labelled as high income which is quite high proportion. The baseline in regression analysis was determined to be low income group for comparison.

Lastly, age was added as an important indicator of socio-demographic information without any transformation. Table 2 shows that age variable ranges between 15 and 90 with mean 50.9.



Self-placement of ideological orientation is a significant item as it is still asked occasionally in various surveys. In ESS, participants were asked to place themselves in left-right scale of ideology with 1 being strong leftist and 10 being strong rightist. Accordingly, this analysis divided the responses into three distinct groups as those who placed themselves between 1 and 4 were labeled leftists, 5 as middle position, and 6-10 were labeled as rightist inclusively. Adding these categorical variables enables us to see whether these groups differ in terms of their level of political efficacy. Table 2 demonstrates that 37.9%, 37.4%, and 24.5% of respondents positioned themselves in left, middle and right respectively. The reference category for this variable was determined to be those people who placed themselves in the middle of ideological scale. Another independent variable is the item asking to participants how interested they are about politics. Descriptive table shows that almost 60% of participants stated that they are quite or very interested with politics. In analysis, this variable was treated as numeric and interpreted accordingly.

What is more, the main explanatory variable of this study is to look at the effects of partisanship on the level of political efficacy. To operationalize partisanship, the item that asked participants about whether they feel closer to a particular party than all other parties with answers of yes (“1”) and no (“0”) has been chosen. Table 2 shows that while 55.45% of people say that they are closer to one party, 44.55% of respondents state that they do not have close feeling toward any party in their country. Another independent variable that presumably have an important influence on the level of political efficacy is the binary item asking people whether they feel discriminated against in their countries. The results are quite imbalanced in the sense that while 88.9% replies negatively, only 11% says that they feel discriminated in their countries. Lastly, the variable on patriotism measured by the item asking to respondents on how emotionally attached they are to their countries was added to the model. This item was asked with 1-10 (1 as not at all and 10 as extremely) scale and was added to the model without any manipulation. The mean of 7 shows that in general majority of people in UK and Germany feel attached to their countries.

## 4 Results

Table 3 demonstrates the results of two OLS regression analysis for UK and Germany that focus on the socio-demographic and political determinants of political efficacy. P-value of F-statistic seems to be significant in both of the models and R-squared score is 0.13 for UK and 0.17 for Germany.

Table 3:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	efficacy	
	(UK)	(Germany)
Partisanship	0.047 (0.037)	0.206*** (0.036)
Midway(left-right)	-0.018 (0.042)	-0.105*** (0.039)
Rightist	0.116*** (0.044)	-0.135*** (0.047)
Age	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.011*** (0.001)
Women	0.035 (0.034)	-0.040 (0.035)
HHincome (middle)	0.079** (0.033)	0.127*** (0.034)
HHincome (high)	-0.005 (0.029)	0.018 (0.029)
Middle Education	0.119*** (0.045)	0.020 (0.060)
High Education	0.269*** (0.052)	0.331*** (0.067)
Other Education	0.257** (0.128)	
Discrimination	-0.218*** (0.047)	-0.213*** (0.071)
Polinterest	0.129*** (0.021)	0.168*** (0.024)
Attached	0.041*** (0.007)	0.037*** (0.008)
Constant	1.835*** (0.088)	2.189*** (0.095)
Observations	1,662	1,998
R <sup>2</sup>	0.134	0.174
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.127	0.169
Residual Std. Error	0.684 (df = 1648)	0.753 (df = 1985)
F Statistic	19.633*** (df = 13; 1648)	34.957*** (df = 12; 1985)

Note:

\*p&lt;0.1; \*\*p&lt;0.05; \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Figure 1: Coefficient Plot for OLS: UK

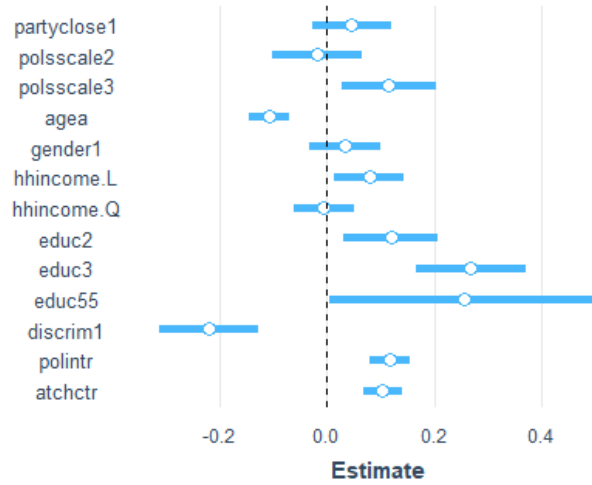


Figure 2: Coefficient Plot for OLS: Germany

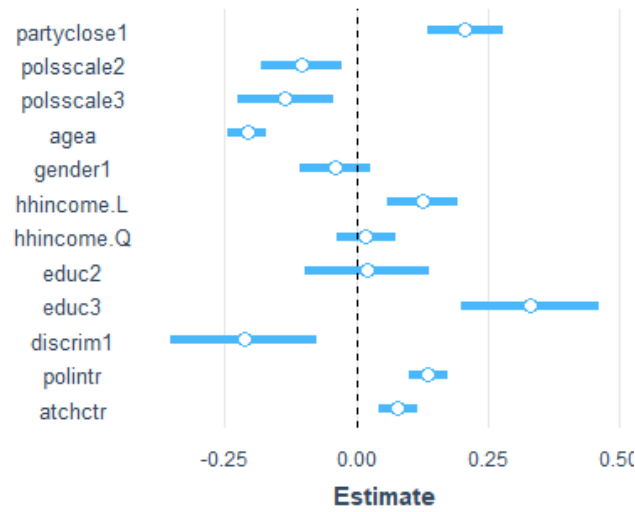


Figure 1 and 2 show coefficient plot of the regression models in this study. Note that the intercept is omitted from the plot because it often distorts the scale and generally isn't of theoretical interest. Also, the names of variable are in their row format but still their names are telling for their content and easy to guess. This plot scatter plot of the estimates for each effect in the model, with lines that indicate the width of 95% confidence interval for the parameters. As

it can be understood, variables whose confidence intervals intersect the reference line at 0 are not significant. This plot is helpful in showing what is significant (the confidence intervals do not cover zero) and the degree of uncertainty (the width of the intervals).

The results of this analysis provide interesting insights toward comprehending what factors loom large in influencing the external political efficacy in contexts of Germany and UK. To start with demographic ones, analysis shows that there is a negative and statistically significant relationship between age and external political efficacy in both of the countries. In this respect, as age goes up by one unit, the level of political efficacy decreases by 0.009 holding other variables at constant. This is interesting in the sense that literature on political behaviour shows that in general younger people are much more likely to be alienated toward politics for various reasons like being interested more with career building. Besides, results suggest that there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of level of political efficacy as both groups tend to have similar perceptions in UK and Germany.

In total household income groups, the analysis illustrates that there is a statistically significant difference between middle income and low income group which is baseline in both UK and Germany. Accordingly, holding other variables of interest at constant, middle income groups tend to have more political efficacy compared to low income group. In other words, those having middle household income are prone to think that the political system is responsive to them as they have a say in what the government does in contrast with low income group. However, the analysis somehow shows that there is no significant difference between high income and low income group in both countries. What is more, as Table 3 shows, education is another significant factor that influences external political efficacy to a great extent. In this respect, holding other variables at constant, there is a statistically meaningful difference between highly educated and low educated groups as the former tend to have more strong feelings of political efficacy compared to latter in UK and Germany. This suggests that those people having tertiary (B.A. level or more) education are inclined to have more positive thoughts in their ability to influence what the government does and responsiveness of the system in comparison with those having merely primary education. In addition, while there is no evidence to talk about any difference between secondary and primary education group in level of political efficacy for Germany, the difference between the two groups is significant in UK. This shows how the effect of education on efficacy is even more powerful in UK.

Being discriminated, having an interest in politics, and feelings of attach-

ment to country were added as control variables to the regression models and results suggest that all of them have statistically meaningful and similar relationship between political efficacy in both of the countries. For one thing, those people of UK and Germany who stated that they feel they are discriminated in their countries tend to have lower level of political efficacy on average compared to those not feeling in similar manner through holding other variables at constant. This reasonably shows that there is a strong relationship between feeling discriminated and perception regarding responsiveness of the political system. Besides, there is a positive and significant relationship between being interested with politics and external political efficacy. This relationship tells that as having interest in following political events and advances increases, the perception that one has a significant influence on political processes and in policy-making tend to be more positive. Lastly, final analysis shows significant and positive relationship between feelings of attachment toward country in question and external political efficacy. This suggests that as the emotional feelings to one's country become stronger, the perception that one has toward responsiveness of the political system in enabling to have a say in what the government does increases accordingly.

Self placement of ideological orientation in left to right spectrum has interesting results but not in the manner that I expected. First of all, those saying that they feel closer to left wing have been determined as baseline group to be able to compare it with rightists in both of the countries. The results suggest that on average those who position themselves at the center (midway) in left and right spectrum tend to possess less level of political efficacy compared to leftists in Germany, but not in UK. Thus, leftists have more political efficacy than those in the middle position in Germany.

Another interesting result is that the direction of statistically significant difference between rightists and leftists in terms of level of external political efficacy is different in UK and Germany. To start with UK, the results show that those who positioned themselves in right wing have significantly more level of political efficacy than leftists. This is important as it possibly demonstrates that because Conservative Party led by Theresa May enjoyed ascendancy in elections and got majority of seats, as a consequence rightists in UK tend to think that the political system is responsive to them and they have an influence on the government.

In the case of Germany, we see however that those positioned themselves at right wing have significantly less level of political efficacy compared to leftists. This is striking because in Germany a center-right wing party enjoyed ascen-

dancy in parliament (Christian Democratic Union of Germany led by Angela Merkel) in year 2018 that this survey was conducted. Arguably, one would rightfully expect that prevailing of conservative parties in political arena of the country might possibly increase the perception of rightists that they have an influence on the government and the system is responsive toward them compared to leftists because the government in charge is on their (rightists) "side". However, results show on the contrary that leftists in Germany perceive the government as more responsive toward them on average compared to rightists.

The main explanatory variable of these models and the factor that this paper focuses on as it is generally overlooked in the literature on political efficacy is political partisanship. The analysis shows that the effect of partisanship is different in UK and Germany. In Germany, we see that there is a statistically significant difference, with a high magnitude of estimate, between those who feel closer to a particular party and those not having any close sentimental association or closeness with any party. In this regard, it seems that on average partisans in Germany more tend to perceive positively the responsiveness of the political system and the opportunity of influencing the government compared to non-partisans upon holding other variables at constant. In UK, nevertheless, feeling close to any party does not make any difference in the level of external political efficacy compared to not feeling closeness to any particular political party. This is crucial insight in the sense that it shows how the relationship between political partisanship and feelings of responsiveness of the political system in relevant country is quite contextual.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

Since long time, political efficacy has been taken into account as a necessary psychological precondition for political participation and it has been consistently found in the literature that there is a positive correlation between efficacy and participatory behaviour (Aberbach 1969; Morrell 2003; Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991; Pollock 1983). In addition, Almond and Verba conceptualizes political efficacy as a must for psychological commitment to democratic values (Almond and Verba 1963). Taking such an important aspects of this concept into account, the aim of this study was to examine the determinants of external political efficacy and to look at its relation with partisanship in comparative perspective of UK and Germany.

Results of the two OLS models suggest that irrespective of country, sociodemographic factors such as age, household income and education have been found

to have a meaningful relationship with external political efficacy. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that the perception of discrimination, being interested in politics, and feelings of attachment to country are significant factors that loom large in determining the level of political efficacy of a particular individual living in both UK and Germany. The finding of this study that there is a positive relationship between being interested in politics and political efficacy is inline with Beaumont's aforementioned study that found the similar relationship. Besides, it is interesting to see that those espousing patriotic values (i.e. feeling attached to country) have higher level of political efficacy and this needs to be examined more closely in an another study.

Another interesting finding of this study pertains to different correlation between self ideological positioning in left-right spectrum and efficacy in UK and Germany. Intuitively, because Conservative Party enjoyed ascendancy and was held in charge of government in UK, those feeling closer to right wing expressed high levels of political efficacy. Though there might be different reasons for this fact, one salient thought is that since rightists see the ruling political elite as their allies because ideological intersection to a large extent, they have high levels of political efficacy. In Germany, however, even though the government was formed by CDU considered widely as centre-right party, rightists expressed significantly low level of external efficacy compared to leftists. This might be because of incompatibility between attributed ideology of CDU and its policies in Germany during 2018. If this is the case, then rightists would have been confused to identify themselves with the ruling party; thereby, causing low level of external efficacy. Another reason might be that because leftists in Germany has well-structured formal or interest groups to express their political demands, they demonstrated high level of political efficacy irrespective of ideology that the ruling party espouse.

Finally, it has been shown that the influence of partisanship on external efficacy is conditional to country context. While partisans of Germany expressed high level of efficacy, partisans living in UK stated low efficacy compared to non-partisans. It can be inferred that being a supporter of any party does not influence external political efficacy or it does not guarantee high level of efficacy under any circumstances. However, the relationship between the two phenomenon definitely needs to be addressed in more comprehensive study in which different countries in various years must be analyzed via panel data. This might provide more insights about this relationship and be helpful in unravelling the peculiarities of political efficacy.

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